

WESTMINSTER CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

Mission

Westminster Christian Academy honors Jesus Christ by providing an excellent education, rooted in biblical truth as interpreted by the Westminster Confession of Faith, for the children of Christian parents. Faculty and staff enable students to discover and embrace a biblical view of the world and integrate that view into every area of life.

Philosophy of Education

Westminster is an independent, co-educational 7-12th grade college preparatory school founded on the following:

- We believe that God is the creator and sustainer of all things and that Jesus Christ is the only redeemer of our fallen world. As a covenantal school, we are committed, in partnership with home and church, to a quality education based on these truths.
- We believe that our curriculum provides an academically diverse student body with knowledge in the traditional liberal arts and the skills and wisdom to apply that knowledge. Teachers are committed to designing and employing creative teaching strategies to meet this goal.
- We believe that a complete education transforms knowledge into practical action. The development and application of Christian character, through leadership, training, community service, co-curricular programs, and the building of relationships, are essential outgrowths of our educational perspective.
- We believe that trust, respect, and open communication are the foundation for the school program and the community atmosphere. We expect staff and students to exemplify biblical standards in their attitude and lifestyles and to take personal responsibility for the growth and development of others.

Educational Objectives

A Westminster Christian Academy education will encourage students to:

- Respond personally to the gift of salvation;
- Develop a biblical value system that guides decision making;
- Develop individuality and self-acceptance based on God's grace and truth alone;
- Accept and appreciate all people as God's image bearers;
- Recognize, embrace, and participate in the interpersonal relationships within the community;
- Develop basic competencies and applicable skills in theology, sciences, physical

education, humanities, foreign languages, and practical and fine arts;

- Become lifelong learners;
- Participate in co-curricular activities with tenacity, poise and perspective;
- Participate in interdisciplinary activities, recognize the interrelatedness of the disciplines, and synthesize the disciplines for themselves;
- Seek God's plan for their lives and follow God's leading in educational choices, career choices and lifestyle;
- Demonstrate responsible stewardship of time, talents, and resources;
- Respect and enjoy God's creation;
- Influence our culture, as redemptive agents in a fallen world, by applying God's standard of truth and grace.

Philosophy of Curriculum

All schools hope to produce students familiar with a wide range of information from broadly based fields of study. All schools hope to produce students of good character with a finely tuned sense of social responsibility. But as outlined in the mission statement above, the purpose of education at Westminster Christian Academy is much larger: as a school shaped by the Reformed tradition, Westminster's commitment is to prepare students to uncover and to use their God-given gifts so that they may offer hope and healing to a world badly in need of both. It is not enough that students know the intricacies of mathematics or science or music; they must grasp how these disciplines—and every other discipline as well—have been created by God to help us understand the beauty of His creation, the tragedy of the Fall, and the importance of commitment to restoration and reconciliation in whatever sphere of influence God places them.

Teachers who embrace that task must recognize three fundamental principles immediately. The first is that whatever their aptitudes or talents, all students have been created in God's image and must not only be treated with the dignity that is inherently theirs but be given the chance to exercise their unique gifts as well. Therefore, Westminster must honor the divinely ordained abilities of all students and offer a program that provides students with diverse skills and interest an opportunity to thrive. The second is that education must be far more than the dissemination of information. Information is important, for students must grasp the Who? and When? and What? and Where? if they are to discover their place in God's world. But that information must be a springboard to a personal understanding of how that information connects to them and how they can use that information to make a difference in this world. Finally, students must recognize that though all knowledge and wisdom comes from God, Christians do not have a monopoly on truth. Therefore, it is appropriate and fitting that students explore

how God has used Christians and non-Christians alike to reveal how He has shaped the world and has acted to influence the lives of men and women throughout the ages.

Epistemology

Principle #1 - All knowledge originates from God and is related to God

Scriptural support: John 14:6, Colossians 1:16-17, John 1:1-2, Psalm 36:9

Principle #2 - Knowledge in all of its diversity is unified in Christ

Scriptural support: Psalm 24:1, Colossians 1:16-17, 1 Timothy 4:4, Colossians 2:3
Revelation 1:8, 5:12, Colossians 2:3

Principle #3 - Knowledge elicits action

Scriptural support: Romans 12:1-2, James 1:22-25, Micah 6:8, Matthew 7:24,
Matthew 13:23

Principles of Anthropology

Principle #1: The Learner is an image bearer

Therefore, the Learner is...

Creative: Genesis 2:19, Genesis 1:25-26, The Book of Ezekiel, The plan of redemption

Social: 1 Corinthians 12, Genesis 1:26, Psalm 133, Philippians 3:10

Rational: Genesis 8:22, Proverbs 20:18, John 1:1-4, I Corinthians 2:6-16,
Genesis 2:2, Romans 12:2

Emotive: Psalm 45:1, Zephaniah 3:17, John 11:35, Genesis 6:6, The life of Jesus

Aesthetic: Genesis 1:10, Genesis 1:18, Philippians 4:8

Loving: 1 Corinthians 13, John 3:16-17, Romans 5:8, Jesus' life

Free/Responsible: Genesis 2:16, Deuteronomy 30:19-20, Joshua 24:15, Proverbs
8:10, Proverbs 16:16, John 7:17

Dominion-bearing: Psalm 8, Genesis 1:28

Principle #2: The Learner is an organic whole created by God

Therefore, the Learner is...

Unique: 1 Corinthians 7:2, Matthew 25:15, 1 Corinthians 12

Dependent: Acts 17:28, Psalm 145:15-16

Religious/Moral: Psalm 119:30, Mark 7:21-23, Micah 6:8, Ephesians 4:24

Physical: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, 1 Timothy 4:8, Genesis 1:26-27, See Song of Solomon

Finite: See Ecclesiastes

Principle #3: The Learner is fallen

Therefore, the Learner is...

Alienated from God, others, himself, and creation: Genesis 3:7, Colossians 1:21, Romans 3:23, Romans 8:19-20

Prone to idolatry: Romans 1:23-25

Self-referenced: Galatians 5:19-21, 1 Corinthians 13:12

Enslaved by sin: Ephesians 2:1, Romans 6:16-17

Broken: See Jesus' encounters with people in need

Security-seeking: See Ecclesiastes and the quest of Israel for national identity

Principle #4: The Learner is redeemable by God

Therefore, the Learner is...

Forgiven: Ephesians 1:17, Colossians 1:13-14, Matthew 18:34

Reconciled: 2 Corinthians 5:17ff, Romans 5:1 & 10, Ephesians 2:1

Made alive in Christ: Galatians 5:22-23, Philippians 1:6, 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, Colossians 1:10

Growing in Christ: Galatians 5:22-23, Philippians 1:6, 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, Colossians 1:10

Hopeful and secure: John 6:37, Romans 8, John 10:27ff

Delivered: Galatians 5:1 & 13, John 8:31-36, 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Adopted: Romans 8

Principles of Motivation

Since all of the principles that guide the work of a Christian school must, by definition, be run through the prism of scripture, it is instructive to see how Jesus motivated those with whom he came in contact throughout his ministry. To test our principles, we will examine them in light of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman that is detailed in John 4. Though we will limit our supporting evidence to this single episode, we could arguably use any experience from Jesus' ministry (or indeed from many Old Testament incidents) as a test for the validity of those principles.

Principle #1 - Humans are always motivated

It is our contention that all humans are motivated all the time. The problem in education is that too often students are motivated by factors - fear of failure, anxiety over family problems, anticipation of Friday's basketball game, guilt over the fight that occurred after first hour - that are counter-productive to their success in the classroom. The teacher's job, accordingly, is to refocus the student's attention to the immediate task at hand.

In John 4 three "constituencies" apart from Jesus are represented: the Samaritan woman, the disciples, and the villagers. Each has a different agenda; in each case Jesus is able to channel the discussion to the issue of eternal life. As the story opens, the woman wants nothing more than to draw water. When the disciples appear, their concern is that Jesus is talking to a Samaritan woman and, past that, they are hungry. The villagers come to see Jesus curious that the Messiah would come to such an unlikely place. Jesus' motivation is quite different. He sees each encounter as an opportunity to teach about himself and his kingdom. But because he recognizes that no one in any of his three audiences is thinking about the work of the kingdom when he/she arrives on the scene, Jesus first must re-focus their attention.

Principle #2 - All motivation springs from the heart to meet specific needs, goals, and/or interests

Water is the woman's most obvious need. She has come to the well at mid-day with that end in mind. Jesus realizes, however, that she suffers from a greater need and uses her interest in water as a springboard to the soul. He moves from the concrete ("Will you give me a drink?") to a discussion of living water almost seamlessly. Recognizing her emptiness, he shifts the discussion to her real need, but by tying the discussion to the concrete, he has violated her expectations and awakened her curiosity.

He follows much the same pattern with his disciples. Using their comments about food as a starting place, Jesus makes a series of incongruous comments about "food...you

know nothing about" that stimulate his followers' curiosity and appeals to their desire for a meaningful life.

His methods with the villagers are less clear. But it is surely consistent with the text to conclude that Jesus played upon the natural curiosity about him stirred by the woman's report to invite their belief. So because in each case Jesus recognizes the real needs of his audience, he is able to move the discussion from the immediate to the eternal and impact their lives far more than they could ever have anticipated.

Principle #3 - The unrest caused by our fallen nature leads to a constant search for wholeness

Principle #4 - While relying on the work of the Holy Spirit, teaching must be aimed at students' hearts

What is perhaps most striking about this incident is the degree of response Jesus elicits with each group simply by re-focusing the discussion to serve his purposes. That he is so immediately successful is a tribute to his awareness of the emptiness of his listeners and their corresponding search for meaning. The woman obviously is stirred by Jesus' overtures to her, but she tries to shift the discussion away from the personal by focusing on details like the depth of the well and Jesus' lack of a bucket to draw water. He bores in, however, explicitly raising the issue of eternal life, and when she is quick to deflect his overture as if it is no more than an offer of a never-ending supply of water, he startles her by raising the issue of her marital status. When she tries to reduce their discussion to a debate over proper worship forms, he turns that query on its head and ultimately reveals that he is the Messiah. It is obvious, then, that throughout the discussion Jesus parries her attempts to evade his penetrating comments by returning again and again to her real need. The Samaritan woman - she of the five husbands - has tried to find wholeness through sensuality; Jesus points her to the real answer to her brokenness. His supernatural insight into her sinful condition has given him the wherewithal to help her achieve genuine wholeness.

In much the same way, Jesus uses the disciples' desire to eat to turn the discussion to their role in reaping the harvest of the kingdom of God. The disciples, like all of us, seek to do something meaningful with their lives, and Jesus transforms their interest in the physical to a discussion of the eternal. Their sense of purposelessness has drawn them to him in the first place; now he has given them a glimpse of the role they will play in the kingdom after he is gone. Part of personal wholeness, Jesus seems to be saying, comes through service in God's work as believers play a part in bringing others into wholeness.

The villagers come expecting to see something magical - "He told me everything I ever did!" - but Jesus uses their curiosity as a springboard into a discussion of eternal life. The townspeople were focused on the wrong need; Jesus, recognizing their real need, offers the solution to their brokenness. They suspect Jesus is connected to the supernatural, little dreaming they are more right than they know.

Principle #5 - There is no such thing as extrinsic motivation; rewards, however, are a useful if limited tool

It is important to be explicit here. People respond to all kinds of extrinsic factors, but only if and when they personally value the reward being offered. If a teacher offers a student tickets to a Rams' game for successfully completing a project, those tickets are a motivator only if the student cares about football. The student must internalize the value of the incentive for that incentive to have any positive effect; once the value is internalized, it has become an intrinsic motivation. A reward can motivate for the short-haul only if the student values that reward. Intrinsic motivation prompts long-term response because the student is driven by his/her internal quest for wholeness.

Let's look at Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman to see if this principle applies. The prospect of an endless supply of water (in verse 15) excites the woman because she values water. Had Jesus offered an endless supply of cactus, she presumably would have been disinterested. The offer of water is effective, however, because it presents a practical solution to an immediate problem. Such water would not provide any long-lasting satisfaction, however, and Jesus quickly turns the discussion to her real need. An endless supply of water is appealing, and Jesus uses the offer of that reward to get to the real issue - Living Water. The woman's physical thirst is trumped by her intrinsic need for spiritual wholeness, and because she values that which Jesus offers, she is motivated to respond to him.

Principle #6 - The ultimate task of Christian teaching is to channel student motivation toward Biblical wholeness

This principle is fundamental. Jesus' entire life is devoted to channeling people toward Biblical wholeness. With the Samaritan woman, with the disciples, with the villagers, the end result of his presence is wholeness. Take any gospel encounter and the intent is the same. Jesus is single-minded; that is one of the many reasons he is such a compelling figure.

Principles of Pedagogy

The Role of the Teacher

Principle #1: Teacher as Prophet - The teacher must know God through His Word and creation

Scriptural support: Psalm 78:2-7, Ephesians 4:11-13, 2 Chronicles 17:6-10

Principle #2 - Teacher as Priest: The teacher is God's agent in broken lives and a broken world

Scriptural support: 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, 2 Corinthians 5:18-21, 1 Peter 2:9-10, James 5:19

Principle #3 - Teacher as King: the teacher is to wisely exercise God-given authority on behalf of the student

Scriptural support: Psalm 8:5-6, Titus 2:15

Relationships

Principle #1 - Because as image bearers we have objective value, teachers must love their students as they do themselves

Scriptural support: Matthew 22:37-40, John 13:34-35, Philippians 2:5-11

Principle #2 - Teachers must establish lines of authority with benevolent, humble leadership

Scriptural support

See the example of Jesus' relationship with his disciples

Principle #3 - Teachers must walk alongside their students while teaching, realizing that students are children of God, not empty vessels to be filled with information

Scriptural support: Genesis 1:26, 1 Timothy 4:12, Philippians 2:4-5

Content

Principle #1 - Content includes the breadth of God's creation, human ideas, and experiences viewed from the perspective of scriptural truth

Scriptural support: 1 Timothy 4:4

Principle #2 - Content must recognize the benefits and limitations of traditional disciplines in light of the unity of all knowledge

Scriptural support: Colossians 1:17

Principle #3 - The choice of content is determined by the needs of the student and the mission of the school

Scriptural support: Psalm 116:7-11, Acts 17:22-23, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Romans 12:1-2
The teachings of Christ

Physical Environment

Principle #1 - The environment must allow for and encourage flexibility in teaching methodology

Principle #2 - The environment must provide outlets for various learning styles and subject matter

Principle #3 - The environment must be aesthetically pleasing to reflect the richness, beauty and orderliness of God's creation

Scriptural support: Creation story, 1 Kings 8:13, Philippians 4:8

Principle #4 - The environment must be a secure, safe arena of learning

Principle #5 - The environment must provide a wide variety of possibilities in structure and scheduling

Principle #6 - The environment must physically meet the needs of all types of children

Scriptural support: Matthew 25:31-46, 1 Timothy 5:8

Assessment

Principle #1 - Assessment must be consistent with the teacher's methodology and goals

Scriptural support: Matthew 13:24-30, Matthew 19:16-30, Luke 10:1-24, John 21:15ff

Principle #2 - Any number of forms of assessment are valid

Scriptural support: See Epistemology

Principle #3 - Central to the process of assessment is an understanding of the unity of knowledge

Scriptural support: See Epistemology

Principle #4 - Assessment should gauge whether or not a student's knowledge is making a difference in his life

Scriptural support: Luke 10:1-24, John 21:15ff, Luke 10:38-42

Principle #5 - Assessment should compel students to wrestle with the demands of scriptural truth

Scriptural support: Matthew 17:5

Materials/Techniques

Principle #1 - Because students learn in a variety of ways and because classrooms contain a variety of students, teachers must utilize a variety of teaching methods

Scriptural support: Matthew 5-7 compared with John 3:1-21; Acts 17:22-31 compared with Acts 20:22-35

Principle #2 - Because teachers and students are free and responsible, teachers should consider individual needs of the student, corporate needs of the class, and teacher giftedness in determining the most appropriate materials and techniques

Scriptural support: See Anthropology section, principle 1G

The Steps of Learning

Central to the Philosophy of Curriculum at Westminster Christian Academy is that the learner must progress through a series of steps in the learning process for the information to be ultimately meaningful. As the school's Mission Statement suggests, "Faculty and staff enable students to discover and embrace a biblical view of the world and integrate that view into every area of life." So learning, as we define it here, means that students first "discover" new ideas, "embrace" those ideas in the context of their own lives through the prism of a biblical worldview and then "integrate" them into their daily lives by using that new information or new idea in the world beyond the classroom.

Education that centers on ideas or disparate facts alone, then, is incomplete. The teacher's job is to move the discussion of abstract ideas into the world of the students so that they can incorporate those ideas to understand and shape their role as ambassadors of the Kingdom of God for the rest of their life.

As shorthand for the learning process, we use the terms **What? So What?** and **Now What?** to explain what we do here at Westminster.

The What?

In every discipline students must master a basic body of knowledge to serve as a foundation for further learning in that area. Algebra students must understand the distributive property; chemistry students must know how to read the Periodic Chart of the Elements; history students must know what caused the Civil War; Spanish students must know how to conjugate verbs in the preterit. Basic vocabulary and ideas, dates, important people, theorems and principles are all included in the study of the What? To say it simply, teachers must give students the context and concepts necessary to master any discipline. That is the starting point for education; that is the What?

The So What?

While it is important for students to understand basic terminology and concepts central to any discipline, it is also important that they understand the relevance of what they study. Teachers whose instruction provides only factual data are missing the mark; instead,

teachers must build upon that base of essential information by demonstrating to students that the facts under consideration in some way connect to their own lives. So students need to know not just that World War I lasted from 1914-1918 and a few random facts about Wilson's Fourteen Points; they need to know that promises made in the wake of the war have led directly and indirectly to many of the unresolved problems in the Middle East today that touch students' lives every time they turn on the evening news or fill up their car with a tank of gas. They need to know not just that *The Great Gatsby* is a book about a doomed love affair but is also a critique of the emptiness of materialism and the vanity of pursuing ill-chosen dreams, a critique as timely today as it was in 1925. And they need to know that learning how to chemically alter the structure of molecules can impact American foreign policy as we transform one compound – corn -- into another -- ethanol -- in an effort to end our dependence on Middle Eastern oil and address alternative energy sources. So a foundation of essential information is important, but the relevance of that information – the So What? – matters as well.

The Now What?

The final stage of the learning process – and the most misunderstood – is the process by which students take the knowledge they have wrestled with in the classroom and actually make it part of their lives both in and beyond academia. To some degree, the Now What? happens naturally in any course. All classes, for instance, require students to make use of new information as it accrues throughout the school year; knowledge in each class builds upon itself so that ideas and skills that are at first theoretical become part of a student's way of thinking and doing as the year unfolds so that the What? of the first semester becomes the Now What? of the second as students put to use what they have learned. Math students use the problem-solving skills learned in September to address new types of problems in February; foreign language students use the vocabulary and grammar of Spanish I to succeed in Spanish II; Worldviews students use their understanding of logic acquired in the first unit of the year to evaluate competing worldviews as the year unfolds. At its most basic level, then, the Now What? simply means that students understand and utilize the logical, deliberate sequence of information and skills necessary to become proficient in a specific discipline. Ideally, however, the Now What? lessons of a Westminster education extend beyond graduation day. The Westminster graduate who travels to Paris and uses her French skills to buy a train ticket to Lyon demonstrates that she has integrated her four years in French class into her daily life. The graduate who works in magazine design after serving on the yearbook staff, the accountant who accurately audits a company's books after taking Accounting, the CEO who writes crisply and concisely in communicating a business plan to the Board of Directors after completing Advanced Expository Writing, and the sculptor who designs a well-crafted piece of artwork for the city park after completing 3-D Design are all making use of the skills they learned at Westminster. But seeking to integrate knowledge into students' lives means more than preparing them for a career, especially in a school that seeks to inculcate a biblical worldview in its students. And for teachers whose classes are more theoretical than skill-based, measuring the Now What? can be difficult. Ethics teachers who challenge their students to explore the implications of the Ten Commandments or English teachers who ask their students to write about their views on serious social issues can't really measure if those experiences have any lasting influence on the students. The

Holy Spirit transforms lives, not class discussions or essay assignments, so the teacher's responsibility and expectations must be more modest, and the truth is that the most meaningful Now What? moments may be invisible: A teacher's casual comment or well-timed question may resonate in a student's heart forever. Really, the task of the teacher is to create experiences, craft assignments, ask tough questions that will force students to examine their beliefs, look beyond their narrow world, recoil in outrage, or delight in a sense of wonder. Students need to discover God's truth and see its connection to their lives, but in the end the process of learning is complete only when they take what they have learned and, prompted by the Holy Spirit, make it part of who they are, what they believe, and how they conduct their lives at work, in the church, at home and in the community. That is when the Now What? becomes real in the world beyond school.