

Assessment of Christian Understanding, Practices, and Affections (CUPA) ILO

In 2013-2014, the college focused its assessment efforts on the ILOs that “graduates of Westmont College will *demonstrate literacy in biblical and orthodox Christian faith* (Christian understanding) and *demonstrate faithfulness in Christian service* (Christian practices and affections)” which are well aligned with the GE SLO that reads “*Westmont students will demonstrate literacy in Christian scripture and Christian doctrine.*”

Indirect Assessment: Local Survey

Methods and tools

- In April 2013, Westmont administered Local Instant Survey focused on all three components of CUPA at the assessment event, where graduating seniors had the opportunity to respond to survey questions. Of the 305 graduating seniors, 76 participated, for a 25% response rate. Following the survey, 25 of these seniors attended one of five focus groups hosted by faculty or Student Life staff. They wrote brief responses to any one of several theological questions and then answered several questions orally. This was not a random selection of students, but a representative sample from our senior class. All recruitment efforts were targeted towards them specifically. The survey and focus group results were assessed by the Proficiency Evaluation rubric.

Indirect Assessment: Externally Normed Survey

Methods and tools

- In 2012-2013, Christian Life Survey coordinated through Taylor University’s Center for Scripture Engagement was selected by Westmont to assess student learning in relation to the Christian Practices/Affections outcome. Of our population size of 1262, 502 students participated from across the classes of 2013 for a 40% response rate. The Christian Life survey results were discussed and compared to the Local Instant Survey results.

Results

1. The local survey results suggest that students demonstrated low to middling overall biblical literacy. Students are somewhat familiar with Christian scripture, especially those bits that circulate most widely in churches and popular cultural consciousness. Some students attain higher biblical proficiency; however, there is a widespread and apparently well-founded sense that students are much less biblically literate than evangelicals were two generations or even one generation ago.
2. The survey results also suggest that our students demonstrated low to middling hermeneutical and theological proficiency, again concentrated on those theological claims and biblical interpretations that are most prominent in evangelical and wider culture. Some students attain a much higher level of sophistication, while at the other

end of the spectrum others show a worrisome lack of sound theological judgment and knowledge.

An academic curriculum has to build on what students have already gained from church, family, and personal experiences. Our students are required to take Old Testament, New Testament, and Christian Doctrine courses. An additional Religious Studies course is not feasible in the current General Education curriculum. Campus-wide effort and strong collaboration between Academic Affairs and Student Life are required to support students' growth in biblical and theological literacy.

3. Our seniors demonstrated advances in knowledge and commitment, and nearly all of them credit Westmont as contributing to that growth. Nevertheless, they lack the confidence that would best encourage them to grow through practice. Some feel frustrated by disorientation through exposure to critical issues and multiple perspectives, and this frustration can discourage them pursuing further explorations along this line.
4. According to the local survey and Taylor University Christian Life Survey results Westmont students show high and widespread Christian commitment. Roughly nine-tenths of students can appeal to credible visible evidence of their inward commitment, and nearly all see the same in their fellow students. Students understand and express their faithfulness in largely relational and service-oriented ways.
5. Westmont Christian Life Survey results are similar to those of other schools in the Taylor survey in all of these ways. However, Westmont students do differ from the thirteen-school average in some minor but consistent and important aspects, such as slightly lower focus on others or on the Bible.

Recommendations

1. Religious Studies G.E. courses need to be sequenced to reduce disparity of student preparedness.
2. The Bible and theology might be more deeply (yet naturally) integrated into more of the curriculum and co-curriculum, beyond just Religious Studies courses and campus ministries. The ways this would be accomplished would be discipline-, department-, and course-specific, and department- and instructor-initiated.
3. Staff and faculty might benefit from efforts to grow their proficiency and confidence in fielding questions on biblical and theological matters.
4. Student Life might consider the prospect of student 'spiritual formulation coordinators' to supplement RAs. Student leaders could be trained to lead substantive Bible studies by RS faculty, the Campus Pastor's office, Student Life, and the Dallas Willard Center.
5. The Provost will explore with Senate ways that we can continue to monitor students' growth in Christian understanding and affections by embedding some survey or exam in a first-year course. He would like it to become integrated as part of the course requirements.

Closing-the-Loop Activities

1. Religious Studies G.E. courses will be sequenced from Fall 2015.
2. In 2014-2015, nine Brown Bag Conversations on Biblical and Theological issues for faculty and co-curricular specialists interested in enhancing their biblical literacy and theological understanding were facilitated by the Religious Studies faculty.
3. In 2014-2015, Student Life piloted the Spiritual Formation Coordinators (SFC) program, which involves two upperclassmen living in a first year residence hall and connecting students to the various events on campus that would help them grow in their biblical literacy and theological understanding.