

## **BREAKTHROUGH**

## **A NEW GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM**



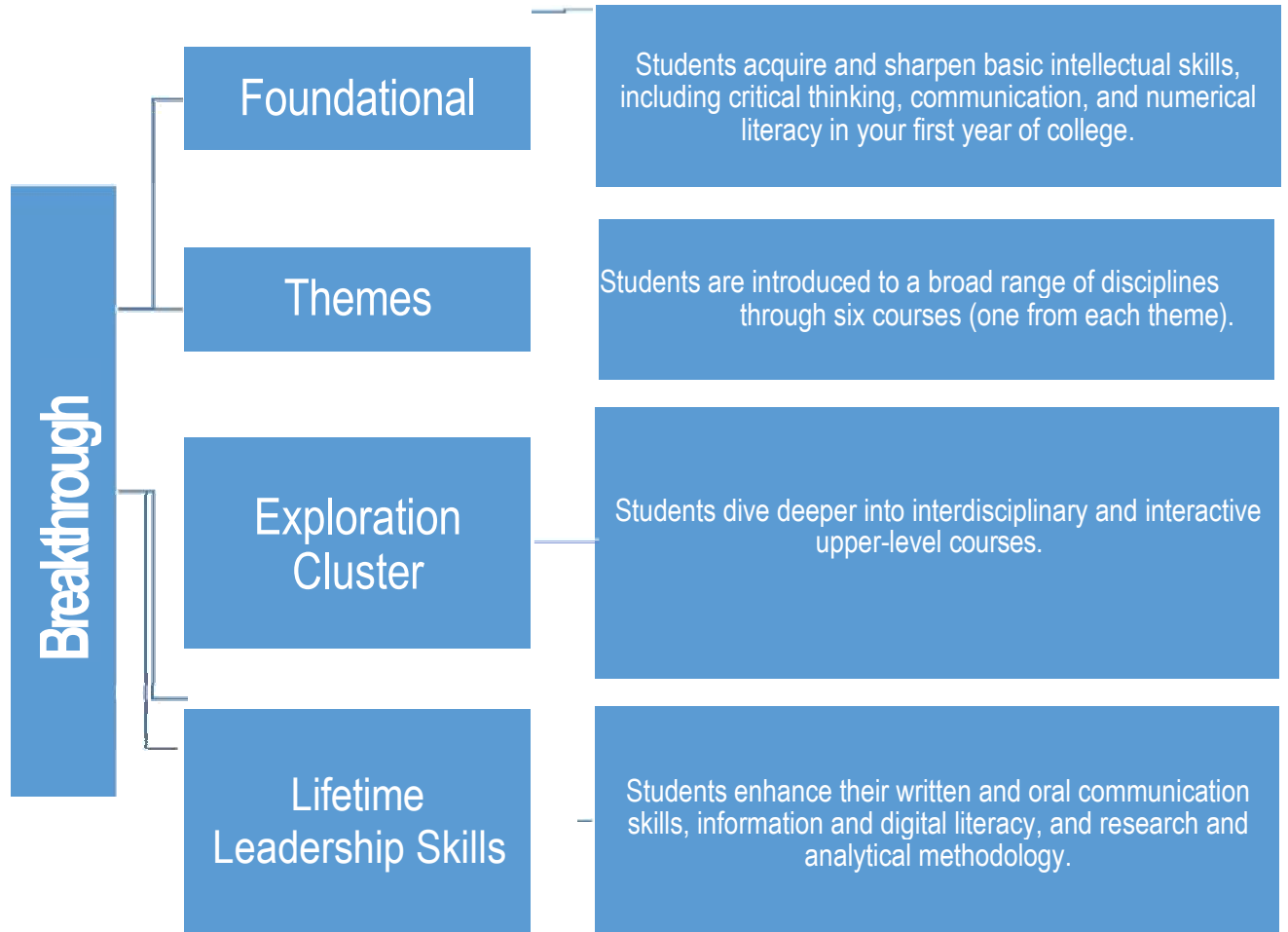
Edwina Sandys' sculpture, *Breakthrough*, stands prominently at the center of Westminster's campus. The piece consists of two figures, one male and one female, cut out of the largest segment of the Berlin Wall in North America. As a piece of art, *Breakthrough*, celebrates the liberation of Eastern Europe in 1989, reminding the viewer of the dramatic end of the Cold War, which had been so eloquently introduced by Sandys's grandfather, Winston Churchill, in 1946. "*Breakthrough*" symbolizes societal and cultural liberation, but by focusing on the anonymous figures, also suggests the eminence of individual transformation.

The new *Breakthrough* curriculum aspires to provide an education that is equally transformative for each student and that will also prepare our students to take up the cause of individual freedom. Our student will become leaders in a global society, capable of reconciling local and global issues.

The *Breakthrough* curriculum focuses on education with a purpose. This program maintains the breadth of study that is the heart of the liberal arts education, but contextualizes it in an innovative way. Instead of viewing core courses as simply fulfilling academic categories such as Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences, students will internalize the role of the core courses in addressing the key issues that they will face for the rest of their professional lives.

By locating the core courses in six themes—Aesthetics, Human Development, Global Perspectives, Values and Diversity, Institutions and Society, and Natural Science Inquiry—the new curriculum stresses the connection between knowledge and methodology that is so essential for successful careers in today's world. These categories expose students to fundamental questions about creativity, psychology and the brain, shared global responsibilities, ethical communities, the structures of modern life, and the potential of science. General education should also provide some depth. Rather than simply require students to take random upper level courses, *Breakthrough* has the student select two upper level courses from an interdisciplinary cluster that is connected to one of the themes. Students pursue a set of questions rather than checking off requirements and, in effect, earn a mini-minor of three courses. The concentration is not in a single discipline like a major or minor might be, but is explicitly interdisciplinary, encouraging students to apply different methodologies to finding answers.

# **Breakthrough: General Overview**



*Breakthrough* is dedicated to the development of Lifetime Leadership Skills. These practical skills are necessary in the rapidly evolving workplace facing our graduates and, in fact, are in high demand among employers. The ability to communicate clearly and directly either orally or in written form is not only part of our general education, it is stressed in nearly every class. Westminster makes sure that students graduate with appropriate information and digital literacy. After four years, our students will also have to show that they understand the link between research and analysis that underpins an evidence-based society such as ours.

## **BREAKTHROUGH: Explanation and Description**

### **FOUNDATIONS**

The Westminster Seminar and the LST course will remain unchanged for the purposes of this proposal. Academic Writing, and the Math requirements also will stay the same. **P.E.** remains an essential part of the development of our students.

The foreign language requirement is different. There will no longer be a "civilization" course option to replace a second semester of language. Should a student test into 101, they will be required to take two semesters of foreign language. Should a student test into 102 level class, they can take one additional course and earn the lower level credits to satisfy the two-semester language requirement. Students who test into the 200 level or higher and have passed the appropriate proctored exam will be considered proficient and therefore will automatically fulfill their language requirement.

### **THEMES**

At the heart of the requirements are the themes. They are designed to be highly interdisciplinary in order to maximize the ability of different departments to find ways to be included.

The themes are also the starting point for the different cluster options. Each theme has a corresponding cluster which delves into the topic in greater detail.

**AESTHETICS:** When we are immersed in the study of literature, art, music, design or theater, we are constantly opening up new perspectives on the world. Our encounters with human creativity develop our critical appreciation of how artistic works reflect and shape our individual and shared experiences. Students will study the importance and impact of human creativity either through the study of artistic expression or participating directly in the creative process. By engaging in the study of aesthetics, students come to appreciate the diversity and intricacy of the creative and critical processes and can build informed and mature methods of evaluation. Further, students can develop their own creative processes, which can then be applied to courses in all disciplines.

- Criteria: Courses in this theme should
  - develop the ability to analyze and discuss literature, art, music, design or theater using a variety of approaches;
  - explore the methods, conceptual tools, and theories that support and enhance human aesthetic and literary experience;
  - teach the relationships between arts, literature and any aspect of society, past and present;
  - study the creative mind: arts and literature in cognitive studies and neuroscience;
  - explore digital production of verbal and non-verbal forms of arts and artistic practices in the virtual world.

**VALUES AND DIVERSITY:** We live in an increasingly interdependent world of diverse values and cultures. Our challenges include learning to appreciate cultural differences and while enabling normative reasoning which will help us to learn to work together to address a host of global ecological, economic, social, political and ethical problems. To live as informed and effective citizens of the emerging global community, we must all develop deeper appreciation and understanding of various cultures and values and the forces that draw people in our world together and drive them apart

Courses in this theme will address the roles diverse values play with respect to how individuals and groups interact with one another in society and across social boundaries.

This can be achieved through ethics courses which emphasize values and moral reasoning or through a closer investigation of our own society and the experiences of different groups. These courses will encourage and enable students to become aware of and reflect critically on their own values and the diversity of values within the United States and across the globe. Accordingly, topics in this theme will include, but are not limited to: the historical, political, and economic study of minority groups' relationships with each other and with the majority; aspects of minority culture; historical and contemporary issues of race, gender, and discrimination; and the role of religious, secular, or linguistic identity in our lives.

- Criteria: Courses in this theme should
  - Explore values and diversity through literature, history, civilization, ethics and/or religions;
  - Examine the ecological, economic, social, political, and/or moral aspects of the relationship between minority and majority cultures

- Engage in critical thinking about some of the major contemporary normative issues including those which involve identity, gender, and race

**GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES:** With the increased ability to travel and communicate with people around the world, it is important that we learn and understand the background of global issues that affect our lives. Courses in this area will examine either the relationship of local society to the global, the nature of non-American cultures, and/or the background for understanding contemporary global issues.

- Criteria: Courses in this theme should
  - Give students an in-depth look at global issues by covering many facets involved (economic, intellectual, political, religious, scientific, social) and exploring their interrelationships;
  - Expose students to political, historical, economic issues related to a country or countries outside of the U.S.;
  - Teach students to see patterns and meanings of various global issues and how people respond to them

**HUMAN DEVELOPMENT:** Human behavior and development occurs within a setting that includes biological and social contexts, and the broader changes in society. Courses in this theme address the interaction between human biology and society from a variety of contexts, such as functional, cognitive, emotional, philosophical, and social, and how these contexts relate to the human experience. The courses in this theme will discuss how a person thinks, makes decisions, and shapes his/her worldview.

- Criteria: Courses in this theme should
  - focus on our current understanding of human biology and our changing understanding of cognitive and neurological development;
  - explore the interaction between humans and technology, such as Artificial Intelligence, genetic engineering, and other technological changes;
  - explore fundamental aspects of human biology and how the human mind develops and forms ethical ideas, thoughts, and memories;
  - focus on fundamental social or natural science aspects of psychology;
  - explore how humanity has attempted to explain and define what it means to be human.

**INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIETY:** There are many different systems, political, economic, and social, that shape our lives. Courses in this theme will examine these systems in a variety of social institutions such as families, communities, governments, and economies. These courses will give students an understanding of themselves in society and culture and enhance their capacity to live effectively as citizens and leaders in society.

- Criteria:
  - Systematically explore major questions about societies and/or cultures
  - Utilize critical thinking skills to examine issues facing institutions in society
  - Analyze and explore discoveries and theories of important social scientists

**NATURAL SCIENCE INQUIRY (with lab):** The physical, chemical, geological, environmental and biological sciences seek to understand the natural world. By systematically observing and

analyzing phenomena, natural scientists have produced a complex and multifaceted set of theories that continually evolve.

Courses in this context will introduce students to the key theories of a science and to its methods of inquiry. In this course students learn how observations are used to develop hypotheses, how hypotheses may be tested experimentally, and how results of experiments may be quantified and analyzed to assess theories. By emphasizing methodology, these courses improve the ability of students to make informed decisions about scientific issues that affect their world and further develop their critical thinking and problem solving skills. Finally, courses in this theme will address a number of broad questions pertaining to science: How do the ideas of science evolve and how does their change affect other aspects of our culture? What are the psychological and moral ramifications of particular scientific developments? How does technology affect scientific endeavors? By exploring these questions, students become increasingly aware of the interaction between science and society.

- Criteria: All courses in the scientific inquiry context should
  - introduce students to a representative body of knowledge in the discipline;
  - lead students to an understanding of the scientific method;
  - participate in a hands-on application of knowledge and use of the scientific method

### **EXPLORATION COURSES**

Students are required to take two upper-level Exploration courses which are interdisciplinary in nature. For students who have declared a single major, the two courses cannot be applied to satisfy requirements toward a student's major. However, students with multiple majors may apply these courses to one of their majors. Approved Exploration courses can be applied toward completion of a student's minor(s) and certificate(s).

- Criteria for Exploration Courses:
  - Courses are upper-level (300 or higher)
  - Courses are interdisciplinary (i.e. an issue from the perspective of two or more disciplines)
  - Those proposing the courses must explain how the methodologies from two or more disciplines impact the course goals, content, and outcomes.
  - Courses require multiple pathways or prerequisites.

All Exploration courses must be approved by the Curriculum Committee. Part of the approval process includes frequency the course will likely be taught.

## **LIFETIME LEADERSHIP SKILLS**

Westminster encourages lifetime learning, which is enabled by the development of specific intellectual skills. All of Westminster's learning goals are integrated within the General Education curriculum and through the majors, but particular emphasis on skills that are needed for success in the 21st century is essential for promoting active, interdisciplinary learning. Westminster students will take courses that allow them to sharpen their skills in written and oral communication, information and digital literacy, and research inquiry and analysis.

To be tagged in the catalog as developing a particular skill set, a course should demonstrate how it develops the skill set beyond the expected minimum level of proficiency. Departments are encouraged to submit justification for tagging a course with a skill set to the Curriculum Committee. Justification should include a description of how the skill is developed and assessed and how the course meets the criteria for the described skill. Courses may be tagged with an emphasis on up to three skills.

**Communication-** Communication includes the ability to write, speak, read, and listen effectively. Development of these skills is essential for preparing students to be confident communicators with the capacity to convey, engage, apply, and reflect on knowledge accessed within their chosen fields.

**Learning Outcomes:** Prior to completion of their degree at Westminster, students will develop skills in written and oral expression. Specifically, students will:

1. Construct meaning from communications they receive.
2. Understand communication as a process that requires reflection (e.g. brainstorming, outlining, and revision), involves choice, and has consequences.
3. Write effectively (demonstrate an understanding of context, purpose, and audience; develop content in a manner that conveys mastery of subject; demonstrate understanding of the conventions of the discipline or task; use high-quality, credible, relevant sources; use language that is clear, graceful, and error-free).
4. Speak effectively (demonstrate an understanding of context, purpose, and audience; organize ideas in a clear and cohesive way; use language that is appropriate and that enhances understanding; deliver message in a polished, confident manner; use supporting materials that are varied, appropriate, and credible; present a compelling message).
5. Use communication to successfully relate to others and perform in organizations.



**-Writing Intensive-** Two courses required. Earn credit in two courses designated as Writing Intensive (WI) in the Schedule of Classes published each semester. The first course must be taken by the end of the sophomore year. At least one of the courses must be an upper-level course. Students transferring credit in composition (ENG 103 or equivalency) must take three WI courses, with at least one upper-level course.

This writing requirement has been established in conjunction with the Curriculum Committee, which views critical thinking and clear writing as integral to a liberal arts education and as essential to life beyond college. WI courses are not composition courses per se, but rather courses in various subject areas that pay particular attention to writing as a learning tool. While all courses at Westminster involve writing to some extent, each WI course assures that students will use writing as a means of learning the course material. These courses are specially designed to offer students the opportunity to learn about writing in the fields that interest them the most. WI courses are offered in almost every department. While courses are not designated WI in the catalog, they are noted as such in the Schedule of Classes published each semester.

- Criteria:
  - Writing intensive courses students will produce written assignments at various times throughout the course and revise some portion of their work
  - Students will study and practice writing in the discipline;
  - Students will have individual conferences with the professor

**-Oral Communication & Presentation Skills-** One course required. Students will earn credit by completing a course emphasizing oral communication and presentation skills. Students may take any course designated OCP to fulfill this requirement, but it is recommended that they complete this course within their major in order to promote meaningful engagement with and application of this skill in their chosen field.

Students graduating from Westminster should understand what it means to be an effective communicator within society and within their chosen field. OCP courses will focus on the structure and organization of presentations, the dynamics of effective delivery of information, and how to present information to different audiences. They should also provide generalized information on effective communication so that students can extend these skills beyond the particular course. While courses are not designated OCP in the catalog, they are noted as such in the Schedule of Classes published each semester.

- Criteria:
  - Courses that are designated with the departmental prefix SPE (with the exception of SPE 203) will count toward this skill requirement and will automatically be designated as OCP unless specifically noted;
  - In OCP courses students will complete at least one major presentation assignment relevant to the field being studied;
  - Students will meet with instructors for conferences to gain specific instruction and feedback on oral communication and presentation assignments to develop their skills in some form of oral communication (presentation, rhetoric, argumentation, debate, etc.);
  - Students will practice oral communication through multiple forms of activities and assignments that prioritize progress in the development of oral communication skills.

**Information and Digital Literacy**-One course required. Westminster prioritizes development of the skill of information technology, or the ability to employ computer and other technologies in writing, in the manipulation of data, and in understanding the nature and limits of technology. To adapt to rapidly changing technology tools, students should have both information and digital literacy. This implies the ability to access, retrieve, evaluate, manage, and use information effectively and efficiently from a variety of print, non-print, and digital sources through the use of computer and other information technologies. Information and digital literacy will correspond to the demands of the students' chosen field of study.

This skill is addressed throughout the curriculum as indicated by courses tagged as IDL. While courses are not designated IDL in the catalog, they are noted as such in the Schedule of Classes published each semester.

**Learning Outcomes:** Prior to the completion of their degree at Westminster, students will learn to:

1. Apply information technology (and the appropriate terminology and concepts) to define, comprehend, and solve problems.
2. Demonstrate the ability to save, retrieve and find data/information for a particular information or research need. The ability to organize, present, and share data/information efficiently and professionally in formats or contexts such as word processing programs, databases or spreadsheets, social media, various digital tools, and presentations is fundamental to demonstrating a basic level of information and digital literacy competency.
3. Demonstrate the ability to evaluate the credibility of information and/or resources found.
4. Demonstrate an understanding of the role and limitations of information and digital technologies.

- Criteria: Courses delivering this skill will ensure that students are able to:
  - Demonstrate proficiency in basic computer and other information technology skills through writing, presentation, manipulation of data, and creation of new information;
  - Develop technical skills needed to utilize relevant word processing, presentation and/or statistical software;
  - Provide students with opportunity to gather, analyze and express ideas effectively and persuasively through the use of information resources and a variety of digital technology and media tools;
  - Understand how to integrate digital tools into their own learning and research in order to further their analytical skills and research and presentation capacity.

**Research: Inquiry and Analysis:** One course required. Active learning, analysis, and application are essential for the development of mature critical thinking. In order to further student's development in higher-level thinking, there must be an emphasis on inquiry and analysis. Inquiry is a systematic process of exploring issues/ objects/works through the collection and analysis of evidence that results in informed conclusions. Analysis is the process of investigating complex topics or issues in order to gain a better understanding of the factors that interact and shape relationships, outcomes, or events.

To practice inquiry and analysis, students should learn how to be critical of others' research and develop their own individual research. Research involves the ability to select an appropriate and well defined topic; to evaluate existing knowledge, research, or views related to a topic; develop an effective design process based on methodology or theoretical framework for the related discipline; and analyze evidence to support the conclusion of research.

Completing this process of research will help students to apply the tools, theories, and conventions of their field to a specific area of inquiry. Therefore, courses that meet this skill (tagged as RIA) should be taken within the student's field or chosen in consultation with their department.

**Learning Outcomes:** Prior to the completion of their degree at Westminster, students will demonstrate the ability to:

1. Learn the research conventions of the student's field, including scholarly expectations and the process of research design.
2. Critically evaluate research, including the design, evidence, methodology, results, and conclusions contained within particular sources.
3. Learn the tools of analysis and methodologies that further a student's research within their field;

4. Identify and access relevant, appropriate primary and secondary sources of information and use such sources to reach justifiable conclusions based on sound evidence.
- Criteria: Courses delivering this skill will ensure that students are able to:
    - Design and execute an original project in line with the research conventions of the student's major field;
    - Utilize methods and tools that enable students to undertake the process of research inquiry and analysis in the student's major field;
    - Make connections between existing bodies of research in the field and how the student's own research can contribute to that field;
    - Participate within their chosen field by understanding the research opportunities, norms, and expectations of that field through some process of feedback on their original research (presentation, peer review, etc.)