

## Philosophy of Education Statement of Covenant College

Covenant College's principal aim is to explore and express the preeminence of Jesus Christ in all things, inspiring and equipping God's people faithfully to fulfill their part in the grandest story of all, God's history-encompassing project of bringing glory to himself through exalting Jesus Christ and summing up all things in him. Covenant College's Statement of Purpose articulates this aim in terms of three goals for Covenant College in all its efforts: to build a community of people responding to their identity in Christ, to develop programs designed and operated from a biblical frame of reference, and to provide educational experiences which foster life-long and Christ-honoring service.

The following account of Covenant's philosophy of education builds on that statement and explains how the college understands the specific role it is given within God's comprehensive plan for humanity and history. First we explain our commitment to God's Word as the inerrant source for our understanding of God's will and our calling as an educational institution. Then we consider the grand narrative of God's actions in his creation, particularly those features of God's creative work most relevant for grounding a Reformed Christian approach to higher education. Finally, in the remainder of this account, we work out the implications of God's grand project in history for Covenant College's specific task.

This document arises from our actual practices and convictions but also presents our ideals and goals regarding the importance of working out our Reformed theology and worldview in the classroom, on committees, in our disciplines, and in the larger community. To specify our educational philosophy in such terms does not imply that Covenant College can live up to its own philosophy in all respects. In fact, the statements of our goals can make our failures rather obvious. Nevertheless, our philosophy of education does reflect the shared understanding of the board, administration, faculty, and staff that unifies our college community in its educational role and the task of fulfilling it together.

We believe that, as an articulation of this understanding, this statement will provide helpful guidance to the college's senior administrators as they carry out their responsibilities, to individual faculty and staff members as they pursue their callings in this place, to committees of the faculty and the faculty assembly as they direct the academic work of the college, and to future colleagues as they seek to understand and participate in the educational mission of the college.

Rather than being seen as the final word on our philosophy of education, this statement of our beliefs should be viewed as a platform from which inquiry will continue as the college engages in the ongoing project, articulating more clearly, concisely, and completely the philosophy of education of Covenant College.

## I. God's Word: Our Rule

Every member of Covenant's administration, faculty, and staff aims to have his or her work informed by and conformed to God's Word. We are convinced that the Bible is God's Word and that its human authors were carried along by the Holy Spirit and preserved from error. While the Bible's principal message concerns the kingdom of God, it makes claims which touch on every area of life and every academic endeavor. It is thus the ultimate rule for everything we do at Covenant College.

God's Word is clear about many things, but faithfully applying it to our work as educators requires both supernatural intervention and natural diligence. We are dependent upon the Holy Spirit's work of illumination in our hearts and minds, opening our eyes to the truths set forth in Scripture. The Word faithfully preached is an ordinary means by which the Holy Spirit challenges and comforts us, not only as followers of Christ, but also specifically as educators and students. Along with these supernatural means, the Holy Spirit's work develops in us a zeal to read the Scriptures carefully, to hold each other accountable for our growing conformity to Christ, and to investigate the many ways in which the study of general revelation can inform our understanding of God's Word. Our handling of Scripture is thus a corporate responsibility that we take seriously.

The Word of God undergirds and shapes our philosophy of education in at least four ways. First, it sets before us the way we should go, directing our steps in God's way of blessing and recommending fruitful practices, habits, and lines of inquiry. Second, it warns against foolishness and wickedness, constraining our behavior for our good and setting helpful limits on our speculations. Third, God's Word offers principles to guide our work and our life together. Fourth, the Bible reveals the big picture of what God is doing in the world. Scripture details God's actions and purposes in his interaction with his creation and his creatures; this grand narrative provides the context for our understanding of the place of our life and work as a Reformed Christian college in God's world.

## II. The Grand Narrative

God himself tells us in the Scriptures that the ultimate purpose of his creative activity is his own glory. The exaltation of Jesus Christ is the history-encompassing means by which that purpose is fulfilled. He is the Alpha and Omega, through him all things were made, in him all things hold together, and the end of history will be reached when all things are placed under his feet. Christ's preeminence is the central fact of history, the focus of God's story in creation, and a fitting motto for any earthly endeavor. The key to interpreting God's action in history is Christ's exaltation, and the project of summing up all things in him comprehends all creation. Although the project unfolds in time and passes through phases, it all happens under the rule of God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit, and for the glory of Jesus Christ.

The progressive unfolding of this single purpose began with the creation through Christ of all things out of nothing. The creation was brought into existence to be the stage upon

which the Triune God, the Master over all creation, would work out the drama of the exaltation of Christ. This stage—the whole creation—was initially both orderly and without blemish or evil.

From its inception, the whole of creation is continually sustained by Christ by the word of his power. And his sustaining providence displays two kinds of orderliness which were evident from the beginning. One kind consists in his regular maintenance of natural things in ways often referred to as “laws of nature” although they are not laws to which he must submit. The other kind of orderliness is found in the Master’s intentions for the way his moral creatures are to relate to him, to each other, and to the physical world. Although he gave form to some of these relationships from the beginning, the full realization of this orderliness depends upon human discovery and development.

The successive acts of the Master’s drama are dominated by covenantal relationships between him and his covenant servants. The first of these servants, Adam and Eve, were made in God’s image, invited to delight in serving him, and charged with exercising faithful dominion as his representatives in the world: to govern the creation without dominating it, to tend it without exploitation, to unfold its potential, and to enjoy it. In these activities human beings, as God’s stewards, through investigation, come to realize how all their activities extend the myriad expressions of their fellowship with God. This exercise of dominion serves the Master’s ultimate end by anticipating the perfect rule of Christ. All human work is ultimately to be for Christ’s glory.

Adam and Eve were equipped in mind, spirit, and body for the task given to them. Created in the divine image, they were endowed with reason and the capacity for study; they were prepared to search out the diversity and complexity of the created order and to discover its laws and norms. As moral agents they were empowered to recognize the value in creation and even to assign value in the Master’s name. Their imaginative and creative powers were also essential to the exercise of faithful dominion. Although the exercise of these powers required effort, it was a delightful labor. Because they were created to be active servants of the Master, their faithful work was both a duty and a joy.

Our first parents were also created in such a way that their necessary connections and interactions with the creation would generate cultural contexts and life situations that demand meaningful interpretations. As a part of active stewardship, their descendents divide their work into disciplines according to their gifts, develop the social institutions required for flourishing, and create artistic works to express the full range of human experience.

For reasons known only to him, it pleased the Lord to have the drama of Christ’s exaltation develop through the rebellion of his first covenant servants. Adam and Eve’s willful eating of the forbidden fruit plunged all of humanity and the whole of creation into a fundamental struggle between two principles. One principle seeks to honor the Master’s reign and is life-giving; the other is opposed to it and brings death. Although the integrity of the created order was not destroyed by the fall, every aspect of creation has been adversely affected by the resulting antithesis in which each individual and every relationship participates. The struggle between the Spirit of Christ and the spirit

of the world is manifest in both institutions and individual lives. Even for Christ's own, the conflict between the new redeemed nature and the old sinful nature is a persistent part of earthly life.

The good creation suffers from corruption and disease. Structurally sound objects, processes, relationships, and institutions have been distorted. The moral norms for human cultural activity that God established for creation are no longer perfectly followed. Men and women who are supposed to be servants of God seek instead to serve themselves. Their efforts to exercise dominion by developing institutions and unfolding the potential in creation are plagued by rebellion against God's law. However, although the effects of the Fall pervade all human activities and relationships, God's will is not thwarted because even rebellious creatures and distorted structures unwittingly serve his purposes in the grand demonstration of his perfections.

All human creativity is a gift from God and as such reflects the nature of our Creator and glorifies God. We are sub-creators, imitating our Creator, using the raw materials he has placed in the world. However, all human works, whether by believer or unbeliever, are marred by sin. The form of any human creation is never perfect, and the purpose of human work often strays from the revealed purposes of God. Further, all human work is finite and to some extent fleeting: paintings fade, cultures and languages die, cars break down, and corporations go bankrupt. Nevertheless, the ideas and artifacts of human history deserve our study and enjoyment; as blessings flowing from God's common grace, the products of human endeavors are often insightful, beautiful, true, and useful. Those who enjoy these blessings should also be aware of their source and be led to repent and to acknowledge God's kindness.

Having permitted the fall, the Lord God graciously provides for the fallen world. This provision is evidenced through both common grace and special, saving grace. God, in mercy, graciously restrains the effects of the fall, delays final judgment, and enables fallen creatures to exercise their remaining powers in productive ways. Because these blessings extend to all humans—and even all of creation—they are rightly called “common grace.”

Also he is undertaking to deliver a portion of creation completely. The purpose of this deliverance—like the purpose of the fall and the workings of common grace—is the final exaltation of Jesus Christ, to the glory of God. In human history and in eternity, Christ is exalted in the working out of the redemption that he accomplished for the elect. Those who are drawn to Christ share the responsibility to carry the good news of Christ's work to the ends of the earth. Just as the cultural mandate directed Adam and Eve to glorify God by exercising dominion over all of creation, Christ's great commission sends his people to proclaim his glory and salvation to the every tribe, nation and tongue.

Jesus purchased the redemption of his people by his perfect obedience, his suffering and death on the cross, and his resurrection on the third day. The establishment of the kingdom of God, the redemption of his people, takes place over time. Until the consummation, Christ's people share in his ongoing work and in his suffering. They work to make his universal reign visible, aware that the temporal fruit of faithful efforts

is subject to reversal and decay. They share in his sufferings even as they struggle to put off the old self and put on Christ, growing in humility, zeal for the truth, faithfulness, and love. The Spirit's work to renew their hearts and minds, however, is permanent. All these effects in the lives of his people and the results of their actions bear witness to Christ's present rule and point to the summing up of all things in him.

The regenerating work of the Holy Spirit is essential in the lives of God's people, and at the heart of the Spirit's transforming work is repentance. In the renunciation of their rebellious desire to be like God, they acknowledge that they, once his good creation made in his image, are also fallen sinners being remade in Christ's image. Repentance is more than sorrowing over individual sins; his law, written in the hearts of his people, is exemplified in a persistent desire to love mercy, to do justice, and to walk humbly before God. This sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit results in a desire for obedience that pervades every activity, producing effects that are evident even to unbelievers. Led and empowered by the Holy Spirit, God's people endeavor to embody the power of the gospel to change lives and bring peace.

The Cultural Mandate and the Great Commission are the Master's coordinated commands. Both serve the one end of history, God's glory through Christ's exaltation. Indeed, while every human action is a mixture of faithful service and self-service, all human work is done in the sight of the Master and is thus spiritually significant. Because earthly masters typically measure success by visible output, it is tempting to think that the ultimate Master does as well; the Scriptures, however, call believers to imitate Christ, deny themselves, take up the cross, and wait patiently for God to accomplish his purposes. It is appropriate to be encouraged when faithful effort is visibly used by God; yet Christ's people delight first in faithfulness to the Master's revealed will and are sustained by the Spirit's comfort and presence even in the midst of suffering and disappointment.

Although Christ's reign began with his resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father, the full realization of his reign and the fulfillment of his exaltation are yet in the future. The Master's grand narrative that began with creation and continued through the fall and the first fruits of Christ's redemptive work will conclude with the consummation: the summing up of all things in Christ. In a cataclysmic final act this world and all the effects of sin will be judged by the Lord Christ. Persistent rebels will be condemned. This world will be succeeded by the new heaven and earth; a new order will surpass the pre-fall world just as our resurrection bodies will surpass our corruptible earthly bodies. Human efforts to develop the potential latent in the original creation will be evident in the new reality, but they will pale next to the glory of Christ. After he judges all things, history will be complete. Christ will be perfectly exalted, and he will turn over all things to the Father.

Until that final consummation of all things, God's servants look forward to the fulfillment of the Lord's designs with eager anticipation; they marvel at his mercy and condescension and take delight in doing his bidding while they wait. Though faithful service involves effort and even disappointment, they know that they have been called to represent the Master and his purposes. And they know that his ultimate victory is

certain.

### III. Covenant College's Narrative

#### A. Our Ultimate Purpose

It is in the Master's grand narrative that Covenant College finds its own place of service to the Kingdom. As a college in a world corrupted by the fall but experiencing God's common grace and saving grace, its educational task is to inspire and equip Christian students to be faithful stewards of their God-given abilities. This task must be based on a proper relationship to the true and living God, for knowledge and wisdom begin with the "fear of the LORD."

As the college of the Presbyterian Church in America, Covenant contributes to the denomination's efforts within the Church Universal to build up the body of Christ, the locus of God's activity in the world. As a whole, the church has the task of nurturing the entire spiritual life of every believer and of preparing and encouraging all believers to engage the world as Christ's ambassadors. The church and family have direct responsibility for encouraging faithfulness to God; Covenant College supports their efforts by identifying and nurturing, in our students, the academic and social skills needed to exalt Christ. The faculty and staff accept the responsibility to be mentors, teachers, and leaders in the lives of Covenant's students. The college serves student, family, and church primarily in two ways: through faculty exercising their academic gifts in their various disciplines *and* through providing a spiritually rooted educational environment designed to nurture students as Christian scholars, shapers of culture, and productive stewards in every area of life.

All of Covenant's programs are designed to prepare God's people to be faithful stewards of their academic gifts, faithfully exalting Jesus Christ. This is accomplished by searching out the riches of the created order—unfolding the potential latent in the natural, aesthetic, and moral world. In addition Christ is exalted as we work to build up the Body of Christ and serve the needy, fallen world by proclaiming the gospel of peace, by performing deeds of mercy, and by pursuing justice. Covenant emphasizes the integration of faith and learning as it helps students develop talents for use wherever the Lord leads them. Thus, guided by the mind of Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, they are prepared to contribute holistically in many different contexts such as academic work in graduate and professional programs, church life, the family, the arts, businesses, schools, civic organizations, and community development efforts. Because Christ's exaltation is advanced wherever image-bearing dominion is exercised, training godly, faithful stewards requires the nurturing of talents in all the disciplines from art to zoology.

After leaving Covenant, students will have numerous opportunities to increase the usefulness of their talents and to serve others as Christ's instruments. In an increasingly diverse, interconnected, and spiritually open world, Covenant prepares students whose abilities to integrate faith and learning allow them to seize these opportunities, to appreciate the value of all kinds of work, and to imaginatively envision new ways to

work for the Kingdom of Christ.

The task of selecting opportunities and focusing their efforts requires wisdom, and for believing students the local church is an essential source of guidance. Therefore, Covenant encourages students to see the vital connection between the faithful use of their talents and the life of a local church. Students thus are encouraged both to use their gifts to contribute to the vast array of human ventures—like business, the arts, or politics—and to embrace the fellowship, guidance, and ministry of the local church.

## B. Our Role as Stewards

Equipping students to be faithful stewards starts with recognizing the broad range of talents, dispositions, and relationships for which they will be held responsible. Each student has a unique set of intellectual, interpersonal, creative, and spiritual abilities.

Pre-college educational and social experience typically identifies and strengthens many of these gifts, granting students a sense of accomplishment and often a realization that they are responsible to use their gifts well. Such awareness is fostered in many students by believing parents who are seeking to raise their covenant children to be covenant-keeping adults. Church communities have also contributed to this effort, supporting the parents' comprehensive work, while focusing on spiritual development. Covenant College seeks to further students' holistic spiritual growth, nurturing academic, moral, and professional development. Every aspect of college life affects students' spiritual lives, and our primary service to parents, the church, and society as a whole is the academic development of our students. This task is most effectively entrusted to professors who have been trained extensively in various subjects of disciplined inquiry and practice, who share in the Reformed worldview, and who value and can effect the integration of faith and learning.

To be faithful stewards of expertise in their subject areas, professors seek to be involved in the on-going discussions of their disciplines. Their educational work involves initiating students into the labors and joys of these disciplinary traditions, at the same time showing students how to serve Christ through their work.

While acknowledging the importance of disciplinary expertise, Covenant recognizes that all of creation functions as an integral unity because all was created by the one God. The academic disciplines have grown up of necessity to set manageable boundaries on individual inquiry, but the tendency of academics to isolate themselves within their disciplines cannot do full justice to the integral nature of God's world. For this reason Covenant encourages not only disciplinary specialization but also wide-ranging discussion and scholarship across different fields of study as we seek to understand God's creation in all its interdisciplinary relations.

Fundamentally our concern for a holistic Christian education recognizes that faithfulness with academic gifts cannot flourish in isolation. The spiritual and social conditions of students are also important to the college. Students with withered spiritual lives or poor social skills are unlikely to exercise their abilities to serve the

church and society in a way that exalts Christ.

Through its chapel programs, student life, practical service, and health services, Covenant seeks to nourish all the spiritual and social aptitudes needed to support the God-honoring use of academic abilities. These aptitudes include capacities for leadership, artistic expression, and physical prowess. The administration, faculty, and staff believe that all college programs, curricular and co-curricular, should work together to provide students with opportunities for growth, principles for guidance, and models worthy of imitation. Students who are surrounded by faculty and staff who are growing in humility, faithfulness, and zeal for the gospel find it natural to see their academic and spiritual lives as a single project and to experience growth themselves.

It is generally expected that professors are concerned with their students' academic talents and other related abilities. But conscientious faculty and staff know that the scope of Christian education entails much more; they aim to encourage their students to think, love, and act rightly.

Shaping students' mental vocabularies and active affections means more than getting students to know the right answers. At Covenant College, we recognize that the shaping of conceptual commitments and driving motivations is at the heart of the faithful development of academic gifts. Our faculty is deeply committed to Scripture as the informing and guiding authority that must shape all of our concepts and affections. To put on the mind of Christ means we must enter into an active process of learning what it means to think, love, and act in accordance with Scripture. In this sense, faithful stewardship of one's conceptual commitments and driving motivations is not only an academic but also a spiritual task. Faculty, staff, and students share the responsibility of being conscientious stewards of God's Word. This means that all involved must live out a life of careful attention to what the Bible says, searching out and applying it to their work both inside and outside the classroom.

At the same time, Covenant's professors are particularly sensitive to how the spirit of the age exerts its influence on everyone's thinking—including their own. We teach students how to test the worldviews of our age—and earlier ages—against Scripture. For students, often this process of becoming aware of these cultural assumptions involves examining and questioning their own habitual mental framework and affections—their worldview.

Our desire to follow God's will in our thinking, loving, and acting requires both discipline and submission. Students are encouraged to bring God's Word to bear on all the claims they encounter in their studies; even the claims made by their teachers need to be tested, and every appeal to Scripture by students is taken seriously. The educational process becomes a mutual sharpening within the body of Christ as students are encouraged to share their own insights relating Scripture to creation and the needs of a fallen world.

Through this active engagement with Scripture and with their professors' teachings, as well as through personal reevaluation of their own habits of mind, heart, and will,

Covenant students learn that taking responsibility for their conceptual commitments, affective motivations, and behavioral habits is a foundational part of faithful stewardship of their academic gifts.

Further, the conscientious application of God's gifts involves translating Christ-like thought and affection into godly action and holy living. Since the fall, faithful stewardship includes putting off rebellion, ungodliness, and indifference in our own hearts and joining together to fight injustice and to counter the effects of the fall within our society. The struggle against our own sinfulness is most effectively pursued within the local church. In the pursuit of justice, however, the Christian community can join with sympathetic or cobelligerent secular organizations in a variety of projects designed to establish social structures that will, through mercy and humility, bring healing and other anticipations of Christ's reign in the consummation. Covenant's faculty and students seek to use their academic gifts for service of all kinds, with all kinds of people, and for every righteous end that glorifies God and brings honor to Christ.

### C. We Pursue Our Purpose in Obedience

Covenant College, as the college of the PCA, does not presume to undertake its educational work on its own authority or without oversight. The governance structure of Covenant College is framed by the authority structures put in place by the bylaws of the institution. The college's board of trustees has the ultimate authority for the operation and oversight of the college and primarily exercises its control through the creation of policy and through the selection of the college president. The board, which is responsible for maintaining Covenant's fidelity to its mission, is appointed by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, the denomination's highest ruling body, and is composed of teaching and ruling elders. Their oversight of the policies, personnel, and spiritual vitality of Covenant College is active, engaged and prayerful.

As described in the college bylaws, the president exercises supervision and control of the college as a whole and of all the educational departments of the college, prescribes the courses of study, and selects the teaching faculty and administrative staff, reporting all of his selections and recommendations to the Board of Trustees for its approval. Nonetheless, the president looks to other members of the institution for recommendations of personnel and policy for his consideration. The president is responsible for receiving and reviewing recommendations from the faculty and making recommendations to the board concerning programs, personnel, policy and practice in all academic areas, and to inform the academic administration and faculty of actions of the board relative to these recommendations.

A special relationship exists between the faculty and the president. The faculty has a primary concern in the academic program of the college and makes recommendations through the academic administration to the president regarding academic programs, policies, and personnel selection. The faculty has an advisory influence in matters of logistical concern to the academic program such as buildings, budgets, and scheduling. Within the bounds of institutional policies, faculty members determine specific

classroom matters such as the designing of assignments and the assigning of grades. The faculty has a primary influence in matters of academic program and policy. As is appropriate, due to their training and experience in their disciplines, faculty members have a primary influence in academic matters and are responsible to transmit to students the standards of excellence, significant accomplishments, and traditions of inquiry in their disciplines.

The administration, faculty, and staff of Covenant College willingly exercise their authority in submission to the Word of God and under the oversight of the college's board of trustees, praying that the Holy Spirit will lead and superintend their work.

We affirm that the Bible is the final authority because it is the very Word of God. As the Covenant educational community is committed to serve the Master's grand design of exalting Christ, every professor and senior administrator embraces the inerrant and infallible Word of God as the only rule of faith and practice. We recognize that the responsible handling of God's Word requires discipline, information, and mutual accountability; through such accountability the Spirit leads God's people into truth. This truth contains not only God's intentions for history and his will for our lives; it also makes assertions which have implications for every area of human inquiry and endeavor. Therefore, submission to God's Word is the essential basis of Covenant College's approach to its educational task.

Convinced that God's Word is excellently summarized in the Westminster Confession, the senior administration and the faculty of Covenant College share a common commitment to the guidance provided by the Westminster Standards. These standards guide and constrain the work of the college only insofar as they express and specify what the Scriptures teach; their authority never equals that of Scripture. Even so, conscientious commitment to the Westminster Standards informs the life of the college.

New faculty members and senior administrators are examined extensively on their understanding of this doctrinal standard and the extent of their conformity with it. In addition, every year each faculty member subscribes to the system of doctrine taught in the Westminster Confession. By taking seriously this process of examination and yearly subscription, the faculty and administration are united in a shared understanding of what God requires of his covenant servants and the life that believers are supposed to build together. Because the Westminster Confession expresses an especially high view of the authority of Scripture, this process of examination and subscription also helps to ensure a commitment to submit everything to God's Word. Submission to the authority of the Bible and a commitment to confessional subscription help keep Covenant College faithful to its mission.

#### D. The Means by Which Covenant Pursues Its Purpose

Covenant faculty members pursue scholarship in many ways and use a wide variety of instructional techniques and strategies to inspire and equip students to be stewards of their academic gifts, but this diversity rests on a shared conception of college instruction and a common commitment to holding every idea up to the light of Scripture. Although

Covenant's professors are accredited experts in their fields, they are life-long learners, who model Christian scholarship for their students by continuing to develop and exercise their own gifts in serving their academic disciplines, the church, and society as a whole. Professors work together to fulfill these obligations. They encourage each other in their work, seek out each other's expertise, and pray with and for each other and for their students.

And integral to all classroom education is the concern to help students relate their academic obligations to the rest of their lives. While the church and family are primarily responsible to model for students how to be faithful church members, spouses, parents, and friends, the college faculty models for students how being faithful academics translates into faithfulness which influences other areas of communal life. In these multi-faceted roles, faculty members accept their obligation to be worthy as mentors, examples of spiritual and academic maturity.

Faculty members are expected to stay current with developments in their disciplines. They also need to contribute to these developments through writing, artistic production and performance, research, conference attendance, and continued contact with colleagues at other institutions. As much as possible, they bring this professional involvement into their classrooms, showing students that effective teachers are themselves continually developing their academic gifts.

This understanding of the professor's role and obligations entails several important implications for the way Covenant professors relate to each other, their students, and course material:

- Professors recognize that all of their work is spiritually significant and must be approached prayerfully before and during class. Praying with and for students is both a privilege and a necessity.
- The only infallible standard of truth is God's Word, and professors embrace the responsibility to bring the Scriptures to bear on all their work. This means studying the Bible on their own with the concerns of their discipline in mind and incorporating what they learn in their teaching. It also means talking openly with their students—both in and out of class—about all the ways that Scripture informs their scholarship and listening carefully to the insights that their students have about God's Word.
- In the effort to induct students into the practice of Christian scholarship, our faculty members emphasize the collegial nature of this task, respect the work of other professors and departments, and develop an appreciation for the importance of cross-discipline dialogue, knowing that all truth is God's truth.
- Professors do not see themselves as oracles who possess all the answers; they are learners as well. Instead of treating students as perpetual novices, professors want to see students become independent learners and junior colleagues capable of making significant contributions. Professors are mentors raising up the next

generation of Christian scholars, equipping them to use their abilities to serve the church, their academic disciplines, and the world beyond the academy.

- Because academic experience and training have equipped professors with expertise in their disciplines, the faculty refuses to see teaching as mere facilitation and values-clarification. In other words, professors and students are not academic equals. Professors appropriately set expectations for students to meet and teach truths necessary for students' development. In doing so, professors encourage student expression and listen carefully to students while seeking to challenge them. Professors take the western canon seriously, both its primary texts and its standards for excellence in writing, reasoning, and rhetoric. Because these texts and standards are not infallible, however, professors also model the practice of submitting the western canon to the judgment of Scripture.
- Professors are committed to sound doctrinal teaching and to forming in students the skills necessary to be discerning about the ideas they are encountering in their studies. Teaching discernment means taking into account students' readiness to make productive use of texts, ideas, and opportunities that are academically and spiritually challenging.
- Professors are committed to studying the works of human cultures because they believe that God is glorified and his truth is proclaimed in these works, both directly and indirectly. Even now, all truth is his truth, all beauty reflects his beauty, and all excellent work done by humans, despite the marring effects of sin, shows forth the excellence of God. In studying the works of Christians and nonbelievers, we help our students to appreciate and understand them, as well as to critique and evaluate them. We attempt to "expose the unfruitful works of darkness" as well as to "hold on to the good."

Significant to Covenant's understanding of academic excellence for both faculty and students is a desire to faithfully serve Christ. This means working diligently, carefully, and well; such work will produce results that show adequate mastery of the subject being studied. For some students, diligence and care will result in work that meets very high standards. Because Covenant is blessed with many talented students, it is appropriate to ask a great deal from them. But rigor is not an end in itself; pursuing academic excellence for the sake of being known for excellence would be mere vanity. Covenant always emphasizes that the stewardship of gifts serves the grand project of exalting Christ.

### The Core Curriculum

Important implications of our approach to Christian education are reflected in the concept of the core curriculum. During the course of their four years, students must choose to focus on a particular area of study in order to develop the basic skills needed for a successful apprenticeship in their chosen major. While these choices are important and necessary, many of the skills and understandings that students need are common across the disciplines and are the focus of the core curriculum. Therefore all students

are required to take a set of courses designated as the core. This curriculum serves student growth in at least four ways.

- It nurtures the academic skills and presents background knowledge needed for achievement in all the specialized disciplines. The learning experience in core courses involves critical reading and discussion, analytic thinking, and evaluative writing on a broad range of cultural issues; these activities are intended to sharpen and deepen students' skills for the more advanced courses.
- The broad scope of the core acquaints students with the rudiments of many different disciplines and offers students opportunities to reflect on the wide-ranging ways that God works within his magnificent creation. Such a panoramic view is important not only for a more complete Christian understanding of the world, but it also serves as a spring-board for many students to discover how their own interests and talents fit into the full spectrum of God's calling for His people. This in turn helps students to make better-informed choices about how to narrow the development of their academic gifts.
- The interdisciplinary nature of the core helps students to see connections between disciplines. Also, they learn how knowledge which seeks to be faithful to God's creation reflects an integrative worldview which is not fragmented but is unified and interrelated, such that our religious commitments are a connecting and underlying thread through all our knowing, being, and doing.
- The content of the core, a wide-ranging historical-cultural understanding of the relation of faith to the world, also aids in preparing students to serve in many communities and to meet a diversity of needs that they might not have otherwise recognized.

### Focusing on a Major

For students who are ready to specialize, the teacher-student interaction becomes even more intentionally an apprenticeship relationship. Students need to see how disciplinary specialization will enable them to use their gifts to glorify God, to unfold the potential in creation, to serve the church, and to serve society as a whole. They will learn much of this by imitating the ways that professors in their disciplines use their gifts for these ends. Advanced courses apply the tools of the various disciplines to issues confronting both the church and the world. Students come to see how believers and nonbelievers in their discipline can shed light on pressing problems. They confront the ways that their disciplines depend upon the expertise of others in working toward solutions. And often, by watching the work of their professors, students see the difference that Christians can make by working in their chosen fields. Student-apprentices prepare to work on their own by following the pattern of their professors, who accept the task of stewarding their academic gifts in a way that pleases God and is worthy of their students' imitation.

## Campus Life

The goal of producing graduates who are faithful stewards of their gifts has implications that touch on every area of college life, particularly for students in the traditional program. The residence life program pursues hall identity, personal development, and team-building strategies that complement the academic mission. The athletic program encourages and honors faithfulness more than victory, and the college works to see that athletic participation enriches academic development. The mentoring model is also evident in the practical service and work-study programs where students learn Christ-like servanthood by imitation in a variety of activities. Every program at Covenant aims to show students that all involved are fellow servants of a single Master working for the single end of glorifying God.

## IV. Conclusion

Covenant College as a Christian educational institution is committed to performing its role in God's purpose of exalting Jesus Christ as Lord. God has graciously delivered Covenant's administration, faculty, staff, and students from the futility of living to serve any other master. As a collective body of rescued sinners, Covenant College is dedicated to inspiring and to equipping students to become faithful stewards of their academic gifts. This faithfulness will be evidenced as they contribute toward Christ's exaltation by loving God, delighting in their work, unfolding the potential in the created order, and serving the church and society as a whole. To be part of God's grand strategy in this way is a privilege impossible to exaggerate, and Covenant College is thankful for the part it is allowed to play in this glorious drama—to teach and model the fact that, in all things, Christ is preeminent.