

# chimes

WESTMINSTER CHRISTIAN ACADEMY



## WINTER 2024-25: THE GOAL OF LEARNING

Does Education  
Matter?

Highlights from  
Around Campus

Alumni Spotlight:  
Rick Mayes '87

Investing in the Next Generation  
of Christian Educators



# The Three Rs of Academic Excellence

## A NOTE FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

Westminster Christian Academy provides our students with a world-class Christian education. Our mission is to equip students to serve Christ in college and career and to engage the world and change it for Jesus Christ. To achieve this goal, we are committed to academic excellence, which we define as fostering meaningful relationships, rigorous learning, and kingdom restoration.

### Relationships

Effective teaching relies on nurturing and supportive relationships. At Westminster Christian Academy, our work is not solely a career pursuit but a calling rooted in our deep care for students and each other. Students are seen, cared for, supported, nurtured, and challenged, fostering a sense of confidence and resilience. Engaging in candid, thoughtful, and lively conversations in our classrooms encourages deep learning, respectful debate, and the development of lifelong friendships.

### Rigor

We define rigor not as “more” but as “better.” Rigor is a means of enhancing students’ critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Rigorous instruction involves challenging students to independently grapple with complex concepts and issues. As students draw conclusions and make connections across diverse subjects, they develop a growing sense of responsibility for their learning. This self-reliance extends to their Christian faith, which includes confidence in the truth of God’s word and security in their faith.

### Restoration

We live in a fallen, broken, and confused world. Restoration is a fundamental aspect of our academic approach. It involves

academic achievement and the holistic development of students. We create an environment encouraging students to grow, mature, and reach their full God-given potential.

Our educational approach seeks to bring intellectual calm from chaos, moral clarity from moral confusion, beauty from ugliness, and unity and peace from disharmony and conflict. Students learn to perceive nature’s awe-inspiring beauty, complexity, diversity, and elegance as the product of God’s creative genius, not mere chance. Students become not just passive observers of beauty but active creators of it. They learn that their worth, and that of others, does not come from what they do or possess but from the fact that God created them, they bear his image, are deeply loved by him, and have a purpose for their lives. Armed with their newly acquired wisdom, knowledge, and skills, students are empowered to make a positive impact on their lives and communities.

Westminster Christian Academy provides a no-compromise education. Our students are educated by world-class, caring teachers in a Christian environment focusing on academic excellence in developing the heart and the mind so that “in everything Christ might be preeminent” (Colossians 1:18).

Dr. Barrett Mosbacher  
Head of School

**Editor**

Christian Meeks

**Graphic Designer**

Amy Roff

**Photography**

Mike Rohlfing  
Volunteer photographers

**Head of School**

Dr. Barrett Mosbacker

**Head of Academic Development**

Micah Gall

**Director of Development Operations**

Shannon Kekhaev

**Head of Enrollment and Marketing**

Jennifer Sengpiel

**Head of Finance and Operations**

Todd Fuller

**Head of Student Development**

Dr. Dani Butler

**Athletic Director**

Cory Snyder

**Westminster Christian Academy**

800 Maryville Centre Drive  
Town & Country, MO 63017  
314.997.2900 • wcastl.org

*Chimes* is published by Westminster Christian Academy and mailed to alumni, families of current students, and friends of the school. Westminster 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. To request a free subscription, email [info@wcastl.org](mailto:info@wcastl.org).

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By Shannon Kekhaev, Director of Development Operations

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# On Campus

## NEWS & EVENTS



### A DIFFERENT FORM OF DESIGN

**Did you know** that Westminster has access to some of the most prolific and advanced software in engineering? A large part of that is thanks to Jeff Shultz, who teaches Computer Assisted Design (CAD) and Computer Science part-time at Westminster. These two classes allow students to explore practical mathematics in the engineering field using advanced and robust software used by companies such as Boeing Defense, GM, and SpaceX, to name a few. “We are one of the very few high schools in the country to utilize this sort of software,” says Mr. Shultz. “Our students aren’t using a school license. They are working with the same software as Boeing or GM. We want our students to be able to get to college and be fully prepared to keep up with the much faster pace there because they’ve already had experience in these fields.”

CAD and Computer Science are both semester-long classes in which students get hands-on experience creating 3D models such as iPhone cases and pistons and learning C++, a coding language that uses variables, loops, and complex statements to create solutions. These classes are exciting opportunities for students to get a head start on possible future careers in engineering and programming.



### RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING

**Every year**, Emerson Electric recognizes educators and teachers in the St. Louis metropolitan area who are examples of excellence in their field. Recipients are nominated by school administrators and range from kindergarten teachers to college professors. This year, middle school Spanish teacher Gina Meeks was recognized and awarded the Excellence in Teaching Award. Señora Meeks has been teaching at Westminster since the 2014–15 school year and is well-loved by her students for her genuine care for the language and culture.

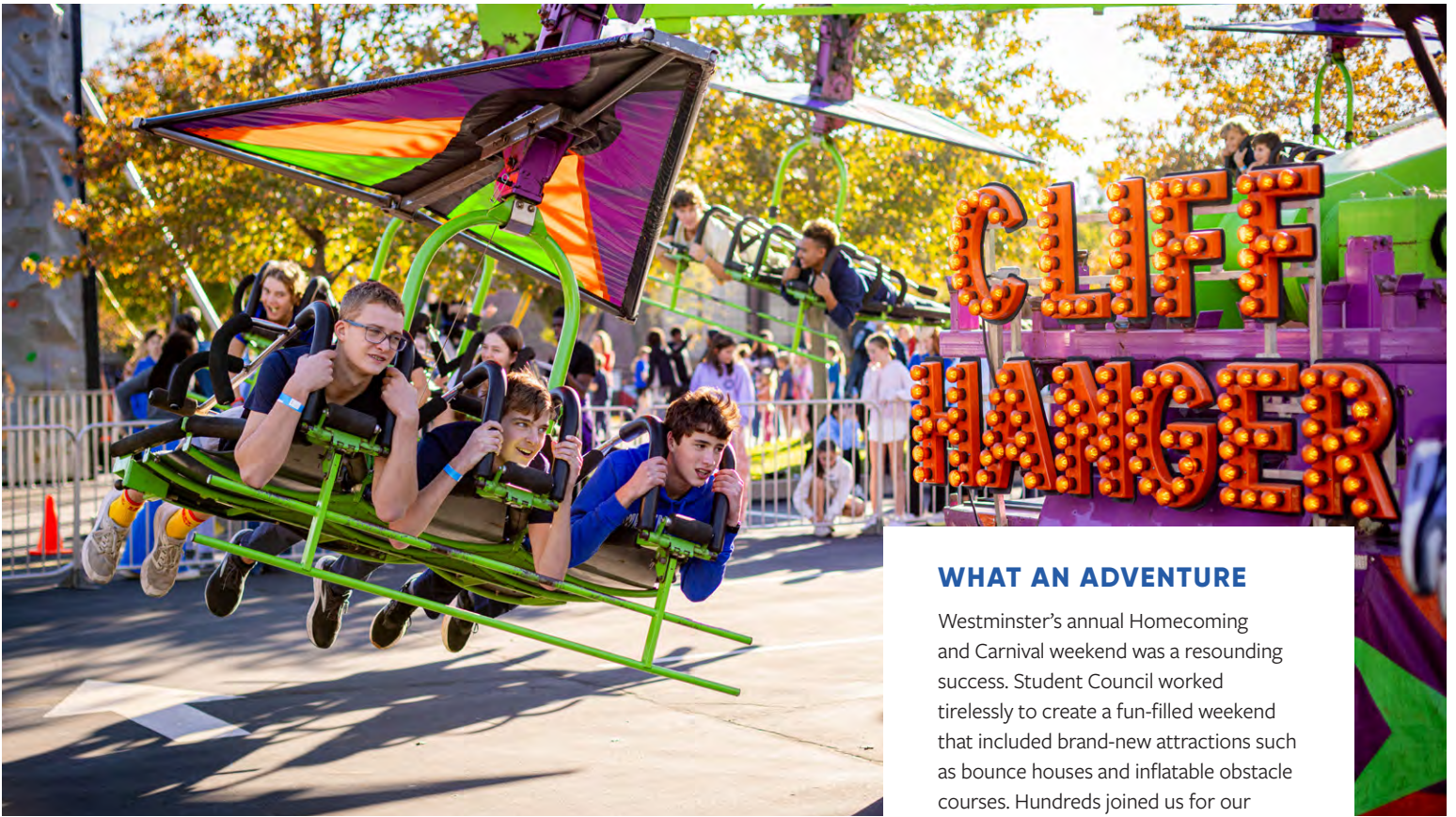


### MARCHING TOWARDS SOMETHING NEW

**Westminster offers an abundance** of fine arts classes and programs for students. Concert band, orchestra, chamber choir, boys and girls choir... there are options for everyone interested in the performing arts. However, Westminster has never had the opportunity to host a marching band. Until this year.

Senior Morgan Dewitt has always loved marching band. At her previous school, she spent a lot of time in the marching band, and she knew that she would miss it when coming to Westminster at the beginning of her junior year. “It started around Christmas last year,” says Morgan. “After the Christmas concert, we were talking about ideas for the new year. I suggested finding some way to integrate a marching band at Westminster.” The idea took off from there, and for the rest of the school year, Morgan and Dr. Gargrave, the band teacher, formulated ideas and picked out possible music to perform.

On Saturday of Homecoming Weekend, Morgan took on the title of drum major and led the Westminster band in a march at halftime of the varsity football game. Despite not having a large group of students, the band had tremendous fun performing in front of the home crowd. “It was very enjoyable,” says Morgan. “We all just felt very accomplished knowing we could pull it off with so few people and little experience.”



### WHAT AN ADVENTURE

Westminster's annual Homecoming and Carnival weekend was a resounding success. Student Council worked tirelessly to create a fun-filled weekend that included brand-new attractions such as bounce houses and inflatable obstacle courses. Hundreds joined us for our adventure-themed weekend. The varsity football team also put on a show with a resounding 51-7 victory over Duchesne.



## WESTMINSTER IN CONCERT

**Each year**, students in our choir, band, and orchestra audition for their respective St. Louis Metro All-District groups. Together, these groups rehearse and then perform, led by notable conductors. This year, we are thrilled to have had several talented musicians placed in these elite groups.

### All-District Choir

#### Soprano:

Junior Ginger Cox, Seniors Carissa Mitchell, and Charlotte Roberts

#### Alto:

Freshman Brenna Williams  
Senior Caroline Engel

#### Tenor:

Freshman Nathan Polk, Sophomore Will Havens, Junior Joah Noack

#### Bass:

Juniors Luke Mason and Quentin Farquharson, Senior Charlie Mathis

### Middle School All-District Orchestra

#### 7th Grade:

Alyssa Whyte (Principal 2nd violin)

#### 8th Grade:

Bennett Dierking (viola), Elliot Dierking (violin), Barie Ika (violin), Emily Roberts (Concertmaster), Teilakay Strong (violin)

### High School All-District Orchestra

#### Freshman:

Micah Whyte (viola)

#### Juniors:

Elizabeth Myers (Concertmaster)  
Adam Schelker (violin)

#### Seniors:

Raquel Herrera (violin)  
Charlotte Roberts (Principal viola)

### All-District Band

#### Freshmen:

Clement Wong (clarinet, concert band)  
Nathan Polk (piano, jazz ensemble)



## EXPLORING THE MORALITY OF LIFE

**Art, like education**, often challenges us to think deeply as actors portray complex themes and ideas. Some plays, in particular, present opportunities for meaningful conversations, such as *The Summoning of Everyman*. Written in the 15th century by an anonymous author, *Everyman* is a morality play that explores death and judgment. It was the first play directed by our Theatre Technical Director, Quentin Cockerham, at Westminster in the Black Box. “We wanted the audience to wrestle with the play and its complicated themes,” says sophomore Norah Burke, who played the roles of Fellowship and Beauty.

## FAIRY TALES GALORE

**This year’s junior play**, *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*, was a hilarious success. The play is a variety of classic fairy tales with strange and exciting twists, and our budding actors had a tremendous amount of fun rehearsing and performing.

“My favorite part of *The Stinky Cheese Man* was the fun we had backstage,” says eighth grader Josiah Butz, who played Jack, the narrator. “It really helped strengthen my friendships.” On the other hand, even a play about silly fairy tales came with lots of hard work, as Josiah realized. “The hardest part was definitely memorizing my lines. I spent hours at a time going over them.”



## ESPORTS TAKES OFF

**Westminster’s newly formed esports program** has had an incredibly successful inaugural season. Open to middle and upper school students, the esports room is always busy at the end of the day. This past fall, the 8th grade and upper school students participated in local competitions through the Missouri Scholastic Esports Federation (MOSEF), competing in the game *Super Smash Bros.: Ultimate*. At the middle school playoff tournament on November 14, 8th grader Jake Gentry upset an undefeated opponent to win the region. Jake, along with fellow 8th grader Maxx Boheim, were then invited to compete in the state competition at Union High School on December 6.

Esports is the fastest-growing competition globally, with millions of people tuning in to professional matches worldwide. This fast growth has seen the competition flourish at the collegiate level as well as the high school level, with Westminster being but one of many schools in the St. Louis area adopting the program. Like our other athletic teams, esports at Westminster is modeled under our Ten Athletic Pillars, and we desire that our students not only compete well but also present themselves in a way that glorifies God, even on the internet.



# FALL TEAM HIGHLIGHTS

**GO CATS!**

## CROSS COUNTRY

**Boys** — The boys team qualified for State after a 4th place finish in the district meet at McNair Park.

**Girls** — After getting bumped to Class 5 after last year's 2nd place finish at State, the girls team qualified two individuals, senior Anna Drochelman and sophomore Isabella Holohan, for State, where they set personal records with the 5th and 6th fastest times, respectively, in school history.

## FIELD HOCKEY

The team entered the postseason tournament as the #11 seed. After a first-round bye and a win over Edwardsville, the Wildcats ultimately ended their season in the round of 16 to Ladue.

## FOOTBALL

The team entered the district playoff bracket as the #3 seed. The team was victorious in the quarterfinal game against St. Charles High but ultimately ended their season in the semifinal game at Orchard Farm.

## GOLF

**Girls** — The team was elevated to Class 4 after last year's 2nd place finish at State. Seniors Anna Drochelman and Sophie Nall advanced to the state tournament as individuals this season. This was Anna's 3rd time qualifying and Sophie's 4th.

## SOCCER

**Boys** — After last year's State Championship victory, the team was elevated to Class 3 for this season. The team played a tough schedule, including three games in the inaugural St. Louis Champions League. At districts, the boys ended their season as runners-up following a double overtime 0-1 loss in the district championship against Ladue.

## SOFTBALL

It was a record-breaking year for Wildcat softball. The team accumulated a program-high 27 wins during the season on the way to their highest finish of 3rd place at the State Tournament.

## SWIM

**Boys** — This young squad has made a lasting impact on the program. This season, record times have been broken in 4 different events. The team qualified for three relays and seven individual events at the State meet, where they medaled in 6 events and finished 5th place.

## TENNIS

**Girls** — The team took 3rd place early in the year in the highly competitive Metro League Tournament. They won their first match of team districts against Cor Jesu before ending their season against the eventual State runner-up Ladue Rams.

## VOLLEYBALL

**Girls** — The Wildcats captured an impressive 29 wins on their third District Championship run in four years. The girls also brought home two in-season tournament championships at the Visitation Tournament and the Troy Invitational.



View team schedules, scores, and more at [wcawildcats.org](http://wcawildcats.org).

## AWARD-WINNING WRITING

**Senior Taryn Cunningham recently entered** an essay into the George Watt Essay Contest run by ALBA (Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives), a historical society commemorating those who fought in the Spanish Civil War.

Taryn's essay focused on the "lost children" of Spain—children who were separated from their parents at birth, due to accusations of disloyalty, and subsequently sold to other families loyal to the dictatorship. Along with a cash prize, Taryn's essay will be published on ALBA's website and newsletter. Congratulations, Taryn!

## ÓRALE! WAY TO GO!

**Learning a foreign language** is very important. You never know when you will encounter someone who does not speak English, and as senior Kate Beste recently learned, even a little bit of knowledge of a different language can go a long way.

Kate took three years of Spanish in high school at Westminster, and in her work as a lifeguard and through Senior Service, she has found several opportunities to use what she learned in practical ways. In Maryland Heights, where she works, there is a large Latino population. "There are a lot of Spanish speakers that only speak Spanish," says Kate. "The little bit of Spanish that I know has really helped me in conversations with them. As Mr. Barrs says, 'the little you know, use it.'" Likewise, Kate has been serving this past fall at Mercy Hospital as part of her Senior Service. Part of her responsibility is helping to make birth certificates, and the Spanish that she remembers has helped her out when taking care of Spanish-speaking families. Kate says, "You don't need to be fluent as long as you can get by in a conversation."



## FASHIONING A NEW LOOK

**With such a wide variety** of art courses at Westminster, our students can express themselves in unique and exciting ways. Senior Busola Obanigba is currently taking AP Studio Art and working on designing and creating fashion using discarded newspapers, trash bags, plastic, and more. Busola's goal is to "make the environment a better place. I am Nigerian American, so I am combining that with designs from my culture, like shoes and bags."

For Busola, creating fashion is a way for her to express her creativity and find her identity. She is also the president of the Fashion Club at Westminster, where she helps other students focus and work on their confidence. "As a club, we work on confidence and expressing ourselves. We sketch and make designs, and our goal is to host a runway show that highlights sustainable fashion."

Fashion is undoubtedly a passion for Busola. Beyond her work at school, Busola is an entrepreneur with her own brand and currently sells cosmetic items. "My goal is to one day sell my brand that people can buy from. I actually want to major in medicine and find ways to combine medicine with fashion." A unique combination, Busola's goals for the future include developing comfortable scrubs made out of sustainable materials and perhaps clothing that, one day in the future, might even be able to help in other ways.



## BRINGING FRANCE TO ST. LOUIS

**Over the past summer,** sophomore Maddox Hilfrink and his family hosted a student from France for a few weeks. "Mr. Barrs told the class about the opportunity last year," says Maddox. "My family and I were really interested, and so he put us in touch with OuiConnect. They gave us some more information, and that led to us hosting Sammy." Maddox enjoyed the opportunity to spend time with someone from France. Together, they explored St. Louis and even went to Tennessee, where Sammy played the drums on stage in front of an audience. It was also a learning experience for Maddox, who is currently in French 3 Honors. "I like learning about the culture and the language," he says. "Hopefully, in the future, I'll have opportunities to go to France and immerse myself into that culture. [Sammy] taught me more about his culture than I can learn in the classroom." Host opportunities like the one Maddox and his family took part in are excellent ways for our students to learn more about the world God created and meet brothers and sisters in Christ from different nations and cultures.





# DOES EDUCATION MATTER?

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACADEMIC RIGOR





**“The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education.”**

**MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.**

**W**hat is the point of education? After all, most of us have smartphones in our pockets that can instantly find the answer to any question. What is calculus? When was the Constitution written? Who was Shakespeare? Each question can be answered with a quick Google search or by asking Siri. So why bother paying for a college preparatory education? Perhaps we can answer those questions by asking another question from the Westminster Catechism. What is the chief end of man? The answer is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. So why do we bother with academics at all? Because we cannot glorify God if we do not know Him first, and education—particularly a Christian education—is integral to knowing God and praising and delighting in Him.

At Westminster, we believe the ultimate goal of education is not just covering material but student learning, and true learning stems from academic rigor. At first, the term “rigor” might be daunting for some students as it is often interpreted in correlation with workload.

As a college preparatory school, there is an expectation that courses at Westminster will be challenging. By combining that expectation with preconceived notions of rigor, students may believe everything comes down to the final grade. However, while we give our students final exams and grades, we pray that students understand learning and education are so much more than that.

To us, learning is far more than what information we know. Academic rigor stems from pushing our students to engage autonomously with complex subject matter. If we were to put it into an equation, it would be “autonomy + (grade-level appropriate) complexity = rigor.” Our philosophy of academic rigor is not asking how we can make education as challenging as possible, within reason, for our students; instead, we see rigor as a means of teaching students to problem-solve and think critically. We believe that is the basis of effective educational learning, and for that to take place, there must be mutual trust and respect between the teacher and the student.

Meaningful relationships between teachers and students are nurtured through encour-

agement, care, and support in environments where risks are taken, candid conversations occur, and failure is embraced as a tool for growth. Teachers at Westminster genuinely care for their students and seek to utilize any methodology, practice, and assessment to invigorate student enthusiasm and learning. Enthusiasm is crucial to learning because it drives our desire to dig deeper into any subject matter. Yes, there still exists a specific curriculum that classes follow, and at Westminster, we look to find consistency regardless of the teacher in each class. However, our philosophy on education allows each teacher the space to express their creativity, interests, and styles. When a teacher shows genuine love for their craft, it gives their students space to feel confident and take ownership of what they’re learning. Enthusiasm, after all, is contagious. Just as each student is unique in learning and processing information, teachers are unique in how they present their subjects. However, regardless of class or teacher, consistency is found in our philosophy of academic rigor.

The standard of academic rigor ultimately comes down to teacher expectations in the classroom. “There are different aspects of rigor,” says Dr. Andrew Shaw, who has taught at Westminster for over 40 years and served as the Science Department Chair. “You can have the rigor of content that is difficult and challenging, but you can also have the rigor of the expectation of the class.” Let us look back at our equation for academic rigor. Rigor comes from autonomy and grade-level appropriate complexity. In practice, we mean that regardless of whether or not students take a concept or AP-level course, each student is expected to take ownership of their learning, think critically, and wrestle with what they are learning.

Naturally, some students find the classroom setting easier than others. While some struggle in school, others excel. Every student is different. “God made all of us individually and as unique beings with a unique combination of strengths, talents, and potential,” says Dr. Shaw. “However, my hope is that every student encounters a class where they really have to stretch, struggle, and feel uncomfortable and, ultimately, adapt. This is valuable because life is full of times when this happens, and it



won't always be in formal academic settings. If you've never had to wrestle or struggle, what will happen the first time you're confronted with something you don't know?" While our students take math, English, science, and many other standard high school courses, learning how to learn is just as important.

At Westminster, we offer a robust education designed to give our students the space to learn, thrive, and be challenged. In middle school, our students don't just study and learn classes like geography. They learn to be connected, collaborative, and resourceful. Our world-class faculty equips them with the tools they need to succeed now and in the future, and it's crucial that they create meaningful relationships with their peers, teachers, and with Christ. In upper school, we provide our students with programs and practices that emphasize reaching higher in all aspects of life. Part of reaching higher is pushing our students to think critically and make connections across different subjects. We want them to show compassion for one another and learn from their mistakes. All of this culminates in encouraging and invigorating student enthusiasm for learning.



When students are excited to learn, they are more willing and capable to go beyond what they learn in the classroom and find new and exciting ways to think deeply. Kable Cunningham, 7th grade Old Testament teacher, worked with her students this past fall on a study of the book of Genesis. To test their knowledge, they competed in fun mini-challenges, including putting biblical events in order, filling out Abraham's family tree, and recalling key memory verses. It was a great way to test what they had learned and made the learning process new and exciting, enticing students to go deeper in their understanding of scripture. Learning, it turns out, can be fun and original, and we encourage that. Teachers at Westminster are unafraid to employ whatever tools, be they new teaching techniques and technologies or age-old practices, while jettisoning those no longer viable. In upper school business, Colton Albers often seeks to find new ways to present lessons in his marketing classes that will have a more significant impact on his students. "Some-



# "An education that asks nothing of us is worth nothing to us."

times what we do lands well with my students, and sometimes it doesn't," he says. "When students struggle to understand the material, it's my job as a teacher to circle back and find a different way to connect them to what we are learning. The trick is to find ways to adapt as a teacher while also pushing students out of their comfort zones enough that they feel the challenge of learning." Part of education is finding ways to elevate learning, whether using old teaching practices or developing new programs so that the learning is meaningful and leads to deeper analysis. It is also important for these practices and programs to invigorate student enthusiasm. A great example is WestminsterYOU.

WestminsterYOU, a program launched in 2021, allows students the option to join specialized academies such as Law & Constitution, Theatre, or Business or to take enrichment courses that, while not graded, offer opportunities to dive deeper into topics that interest our students, such as learning oceanography or studying and earning a First Aid/CPR/AED certification. "Diving deeper into things gives us a deeper understanding of God's truth," says Micah Gall, head of academic development. "Enjoying God and delighting in Him requires us to know Him well, and that is what education is about."

Often, graduates of Westminster return and express their gratitude for the school because many find themselves ahead of their peers in writing, whether in college or their careers. Our students are set up for success because we firmly believe in building excellence in writing. In grades 7-9, students build a solid foundation in their writing capabilities by studying literature and working on media literacy, creative writing, and research papers. In grades 10-11, the focus turns toward an emphasis on literature study, particularly literature from Western civilizations and American

authors, as they explore different experiences, cultures, and peoples. As seniors, our students take advanced expository writing that furthers their understanding of the writing process and adds finesse in preparation for college. "What does it mean to be human beings?" asks Heidi Thies, upper school English teacher and co-chair of the English Department. "We believe that studying literature and writing about it is what connects us to our humanity. We don't want our students to lose that." We want our students to read texts that lend themselves to deep literary analysis. Our teachers are committed to the intrinsic value of education, and we want to equip students with the strength to think for themselves.

Critical thinking is a crucial skill for all of us and, as such, is at the core of education. But, in an age of technology where information is readily available, why do we continue to push our students to read and write, especially in light of generative AI becoming increasingly more common? After all, why spend time writing a research paper when AI can write it for you in a fraction of the time? "We still teach reading and writing because it helps us develop logical analysis," says Mrs. Thies. "We ask students to craft a paper because we are asking them to consider and labor over it. Writing builds up mental strength and the ability to think deeply and be able to argue and support your opinions with evidence. It's a skill that transfers past just a paper. It is a valuable asset to students that opens doors they might not realize." Without doing the heavy lifting of writing on our own, we become weaker in how we think and in how we formulate our opinions and answers. Whether math, science, or American history, writing and learning build up our brains and capabilities. Our expectation for our students is that they do the work even when it is hard. We want them to push past their comfort zones and grapple with what they are studying.

Practice is hard, as any athlete will tell you, but it builds endurance and mental toughness. It establishes a work ethic. Education is the same. Academic rigor is formulating a work ethic in students. We want the work our students are doing to be challenging. At the same time, we acknowledge the need for rest. "We know that the more things we have on our plate, the harder it is to do quality work in all those areas," says Micah Gall. "Rest is a biblical principle that is commanded of us that we often fail to abide by. That in and of itself is reason enough to give students an opportunity to find times of rest." Specifically, students at Westminster are encouraged to take study hall opportunities throughout the year, and for students electing not to participate in Academies or Enrichment courses, we offer Academic Recovery. This program is designed to give students time, space, and support each week. During Advisory, students can use the time to finish assigned work, seek extra help from teachers, or visit the Writing Center or Math Center for academic support. Students with a failing grade may be assigned to an intervention program to address academic deficiencies and allow them to boost their grade(s).

The truth of education is that learning is hard. It can be uncomfortable. And it should be. An education that asks nothing of us is worth nothing to us. Rigor should be evident and prevalent in academics, but that doesn't mean academics should be overwhelming. We want our students to think deeply and work hard in reading, writing, and practice. Whether a student is taking AP, dual enrollment, honors, regular, or concepts level classes, at Westminster, we want everyone to apply themselves well and develop a lifelong love of learning. Does education matter? Yes, it does. Learning shapes who we are as human beings; a Christian education, in particular, helps shape us into light-bearers for the kingdom of God. •



Rick with sons Tim and Ben, daughter Ali, and wife Jennifer in Peru.

# Finding Fulfillment Through Education

**RICK MAYES '87**

“Education is not the filling of a pail but rather the lighting of a fire.”

–William B. Yates

Nearly a decade after the foundational years he spent at Westminster, Dr. Rick Mayes '87 stumbled into a career in academia that would ultimately ignite a profound sense of passion and purpose. At the time, he was working on his Ph.D at the University of Virginia when his planned political career ended with the loss of President G.W. Bush's reelection effort in 1992, followed by President Clinton's failed healthcare reform effort in 1994. As a newly unemployed and discouraged graduate student doing research all day with minimal human contact, he agreed to be a teaching assistant for one semester. He quickly discovered the role was both restorative and encouraging.

“Interacting with young scholars became about more than just teaching a subject. As I engaged with my students, I naturally began helping some of them navigate the challenges of college life, and I found the role very personally rewarding.”

25 years and an impressively robust resume later, Rick continues to impact the next generation of learners through teaching, mentoring, researching, and leading students on global service-focused research

trips through a program he co-founded called Living-Learning. These initiatives have been transformational for the students and faculty who participate and countless others worldwide who benefit from these meaningful programs.

Rick is currently a professor of health policy and chair of the University of Richmond's Health Studies department. He is also a professor at the University of Virginia's School of Nursing. His writings have been published in the *New York Times* and various prestigious medical journals. He has authored several books and presented research and health policy to a litany of respected and influential medical establishments. Rick is as esteemed as he is distinguished, receiving several student and faculty-nominated awards throughout his career—perhaps none more prestigious than being voted by students to give the University's "Last Lecture," an honor reserved for the most influential and beloved professors.

Although Rick originally pursued higher education as a means to an end, *staying* in academia has been a perfect fit for fueling his passion for learning that began as a Westminster student.

"My WCA education made me curious about life. It fostered in me a genuine desire to learn, which is one of the best gifts an education can provide. I was surrounded by teachers at WCA who genuinely enjoyed learning, and I absorbed that from them."

Since 1976, Westminster has been igniting lifelong learners and critical thinkers like Rick through a commitment to educational excellence focused on rigor, relationship, and restoration.

Rick says balancing academic rigor and relational connection was "the hallmark of WCA during my time there and probably still is—great mentors like Andrew Shaw, Jim Marsh, Florence Lewis, Jim Drexler, Bob Vass, Sherry Blough, Kent Kehr, Terry Johnson, David Haas, Larry Birchler, Arlen Dykstra, Scott Holley and more. In particular, my interactions with Mr. Hearne and Mrs. Lewis were incredibly inspirational and profoundly impactful for me. It's a privilege to create similar experiences for my students at UR."

Rick admits he was "kind of a pill" during his years at Westminster and that it took time for the mentoring and care he received to bear fruit. Westminster's focus on restoration, along with hundreds of hours of listening to and reading the words of inspirational pastors and theologians, helped shape Rick into the teacher and mentor he is today.

"I am *undoubtedly* more patient and supportive to my students as a result of the patience and support I received at Westminster from teachers who saw the best in me, even at my worst. My memories of WCA are now filled with the value it was for me as a teenager despite the fact that I did not fully grasp it at the time."

Whether researching chronic disease patterns, pondering health system organization, influencing health policy, teaching, mentoring, and/or leading a service trip, Rick is drawn to his profession because it focuses on reducing suffering and improving human health and well-being. One of his favorite quotes comes from George Bernard Shaw, highlighting how true joy comes from being used for a mighty purpose, belonging to a community, and serving sacrificially. The quote ends by saying, "I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live..."

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## "MY WCA EDUCATION MADE ME CURIOUS ABOUT LIFE. IT FOSTERED IN ME A GENUINE DESIRE TO LEARN, WHICH IS ONE OF THE BEST GIFTS AN EDUCATION CAN PROVIDE."

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"Back in the 1980s, Westminster was basically a young, start-up school with no financial tailwinds or reputational momentum. It was a small army of passionate staff and visionary supporters trying to create something unique and special. I remember students contributing to the efforts by selling pizzas cooked in the cafeteria to fundraise for the school. It's a fond memory now, but it also illustrates how Westminster had to hustle with a scrappy, gritty perseverance to get to where it is today. I'm proud to have been a small part of that."

Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations." Keep carrying the flame, Rick! Your impact is inspirational, transformative, extensive, and eternal. •

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*How has a Westminster education impacted your life? Contact Kelly Johnston, Alumni Relations Coordinator, at [kjohnston@wcastl.org](mailto:kjohnston@wcastl.org) to share your story!*



### A Note from Your Alumni Relations Coordinator

Whether you've been gone a year, a decade, or half a century, my heartfelt desire is that each of our alumni feels connected to, cared for, and celebrated. No matter which campus you called home, we want you to know that Westminster's heart still beats with the same foundation of faith and unwavering mission.

As we seek to strengthen our alumni community through new initiatives such as the alumni connector portal, alumni chapel, and more, we pray that all will be encouraged by the opportunities to connect both with one another and the continued Westminster story that God is faithfully writing.

As alumni, you are part of a diverse and growing legacy of men and women, united by shared memories and a common bond, making an impact worldwide. As Westminster continues to grow and deepen its roots, we desire more than ever for our alumni to preserve traditions and invest in the next generation. We invite you to honor the past and contribute to the future through leadership, mentoring, giving, prayer, and presence.

Regardless of where you are, we want to hear from, see, and welcome you back home!

Kelly Beckemeier Johnston '97

## Class Notes

### ALUMNI NEWS



### '82

**Friends from the class of '82** recently celebrated over 40 years of friendship with a dinner party at the home of Brookie (Kramer) Moore. It was a great night for former classmates to catch up. At the dinner were Melanie (Miller) Pai, Curtis Francois, David Garrison, Pat Dare, Todd Johnson, Scott Massot, Nancy (O'Neal) Miller, and Linda (Smith) Trost. The group would love to expand and host a larger reunion. If you graduated in 1982 and are interested in attending, please contact Nancy Miller ([nancymillerevents@yahoo.com](mailto:nancymillerevents@yahoo.com)).



### '95

**Leisa (Bononi) Covelli** and her husband, Joe, celebrated the graduation of their oldest son, Mason, from Florida Coast University and their middle child, Tyler, who graduated from high school. Their third child, Chaley, will be a junior.



### '07

**Katie (Parvin) Bush** lives in Nacodoches, Texas, with her husband and children. They live on a small farm with chickens, turkeys, a pig, and more. She currently homeschools their five children.



### '92

**Nicole (Collett) Wilkerson** and her husband, Chris, legally adopted their two godsons this past summer in June. The family currently lives in Florida.

### '09

**Matthew Farquhar** finished his time with the US Navy in May 2024. He moved to Nebraska City, Nebraska, to work at Cooper Power Plant (Brownville, NE).





**Tim Applebaum** owns Fox Company Yoga in St. Louis. Tim served in the infantry Marines in Afghanistan from 2011-12 and began yoga post-military service. He founded Fox Company Yoga to bring healing, fitness, and flow back to Saint Louis.



**Jordan Duke** and his wife, Tracy, welcomed daughter Eloise Catherine Duke on July 29, 2024. Jordan, Tracy, big sister Addison, and Eloise reside north of Chicago in Libertyville, Illinois.



**Sam Knehans** recently received the 2024 College Sports Communicators Rising Star Award in recognition of his work at the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics, Southern States Athletic Conference, Ivy League and Sun Belt Conference, and his service and dedication to the profession of athletic communications.



**'15 Madaline (Ross) Holder** and her husband welcomed a son, Bentley Ross Holder, on September 8, 2024. The Holders currently live in Midland, Texas.



**'16 Nick Cacciarelli** completed law school, passed the bar exam, and was sworn in by the court. He works for Brewer Law Firm in Dallas, Texas.



**'20 Emily Bratch** recently welcomed her second child, Grayson. His big sister was very excited to welcome him to the family.

**Mike Lemp and Hanna Ottsen** got engaged in downtown St. Louis and are planning a 2025 wedding.

**'22**

**Belle St. John** married Aiden George in October. Siblings Mae '23 and Jack '24 were also in attendance.

## IN MEMORIAM

**JoBeth Black '04** passed away on July 1, 2024, surrounded by her family. JoBeth was a nurse at Barnes Jewish Hospital for 13 years in the Neuro Surgery and Acute Neuro ICU and was an avid skier, hiker, and fly fisherman. We pray that God gives her family comfort and peace.

**Taylor Bookout '12** passed away on September 8, 2024, surrounded by his family. Taylor was an avid baseball and hockey player who loved playing the guitar. He was hired in 2017 as a paramedic with the St. Charles County Ambulance District, serving at Stations 12 and 35. Taylor courageously fought cancer for the last four years.

**Alumni:** *If you would like to be included in the next issue of Chimes, please send your update, graduation year, and a recent photo to [alumninews@wcastl.org](mailto:alumninews@wcastl.org).*

# ALUMNI REUNIONS



## Class of 1994 Reunion, 30 Year Reunion

*Left to Right:* Jon Easterling, Joel Bell, Ray Lang, Reid Olson, Mike Masters, Joanna (Reiso) Browning, Jason Bahnak, Rusty Schluchter, Andrea (Tepper) Binder, Heather (Goodin) Zindars, Simon Brobbel, Ernestine (Hayes) Carter, Lora (Huddleston) Headrick, Casey Borgman, Todd Jones, Angie (Billings) Lindsay, *Not pictured:* Sara (Bell) English



## Class of 2004 Reunion, 20 Year Reunion

*Back Row Left to Right:* David Stair, Andrew Fields, Aubrey Howard, Michael Shaw, Joe Middleton, Neil Peterson  
*Front Row Left to Right:* Katie Poland, Jessica (Arrington) Precise, Jenny Reinwart, Abby (Dollarhide) Younglove, Elizabeth (Simon) Holliday, Caroline (Gamache) Howard, Abby (Schnitzler) Evrard, Angela (Ludwinski) Riley, David Ottolini, Le'Mell Harlston



## Class of 2014 Reunion, 10 Year Reunion

*Back Row Left to Right:* Chad Maxey, Zach Shikles, Haley (Woolbright) Horina, Eichel Davis, Jensen (Holt) McNair, Collin Einertson, Theodore Muschany, Andrew Colgrove  
*Front Row Left to Right:* Caleb Hicks, Kaylee (Noel) Hicks, Aly (Nichols) Edwards, Jennie Albertson, Andy Thomas, Maddie Ottsen, Taylor (Pfeifer) Pfaff, Madison Deves, Kendall MacDonald, Emma Bailey, Anna (Bergman) Wyche, Morgan (Siebenman) Diamond, Corey Falkner, Austin Raines, Tristan Becker, Kristen Ahlbrand, Sam Snapp, Jonny Kinney, Greg Fleissner, *Not Pictured:* Hannah Hickman, Andrea Williams, Alec Runge



## Alumni Soccer Game

*Back Row Left to Right:* Caden Collison '24, Brian Stair '07, Jose Holliday, Coach Legters, Ben Collison '96, Andy Spalding '05, Scott Ingram '03, Kyle Ingram '01  
*Front Row Left to Right:* Jared Camp '08, Brendan Zee-Cheng '06, David Stair '04, Jack Dohr '13, Tyler Collison '23, Justen Beasley '07

# Investing in the Next Generation of Christian Educators

FROM A GRATEFUL MOM

BY SHANNON KEKHAEV, DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT OPERATIONS



Having grown up in Illinois, I haven't always understood the quintessential St. Louis question, "Where did you go to high school?" Trust me; I now know far too much about far too many schools. Perhaps you, too?

All jokes aside, as my husband and I made St. Louis our home in 2014 and began praying over our children's education, we started to value the distinct qualities that set schools apart. What we have come to value most is gifted educators who love Jesus and know how to integrate faith and learning. Remarkably, over the past ten years, a number of our children's teachers have been Westminster alumni!

These gifted educators have shared their knowledge and heart with my children, and when asked, they can point to their Westminster experience as integral in modeling what Christian education, when done really well, looks like.

"I believe God has been ordering my steps since high school to teach and do the same thing for my students that my teachers at Westminster did for me," Grace Linton Madey '13 shares. "I can encourage students in their walk with Christ and teach them about the wonders of who God is, whether it's in math where we praise God for being a God of order, science where we learn about the intricacies of his perfect creation, or history where we are constantly reminded that we are part of 'His story.'"

**"Without those foundational years at Westminster, I would not have the confidence I do today to teach these young image-bearers about the great God who loves them more than they can imagine."**

Hannah Sabadell '17, sixth grade teacher, affirms, "I was inspired at Westminster by watching my teachers weave Biblical truths

into academic and personal conversations. My teachers deeply cared for my academic success, my spiritual growth, and my ability to persevere in my faith. This proved to me that shepherding students' hearts alongside their minds is critical for bringing others to the Gospel!"

Teachers like Hannah and Grace exemplify the importance of academic and spiritual preparation during the formative high school years.

Outside of a parent's influence, teachers and coaches play one of the most profound roles in a young person's life – and Westminster is excelling at preparing young people for careers in education. As Hannah puts it, "Ultimately, our world needs more disciples of Christ, and it is the vital role of a Christian educator to help prepare them."

Today, with a solid decade as a St. Louisan, maybe that "high school" question isn't all that bad. Because if I'm a parent, and I learn that my children's teacher attended Westminster Christian Academy, I will most certainly appreciate the answer. •

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*Shannon Kekhaev serves as Director of Development Operations at Westminster. She loves to connect with members of the Westminster community to hear their stories and share how God uses generosity, prayers, and service to advance Westminster and change the lives of students and families. You can reach Shannon at [skekhaev@wcastl.org](mailto:skekhaev@wcastl.org) or 314.997.2901 ext. 6424.*

# WESTMINSTER



2024-25 Westminster  
Students of Alumni Parents

800 Maryville Centre Drive  
Town & Country, MO 63017  
[wcastl.org](http://wcastl.org)