

**Excerpts from Focus Groups with Program Coordinators,
Students, OSA's and RA's about Programs for New Students
Conducted Spring '06 by the Office of Survey Research**

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ORIENTATION AND ADVISING

Program coordinators say that the goal of Summerstart and Transitions is to get freshmen and new transfers acclimated to Western and to introduce them to various resources including academic advising.

Being from New Student Services, the bulk of our work targets new students, whether they're freshmen or incoming transfer students and their family members too, to assist with that transition be it academics, social, personal, emotional, etc...I'd say our most known or visible programs are our summer orientation programs—Summerstart for freshmen and family members and Transitions for transfer students and their family members.

(Academic Advising) We're involved with Summerstart and transitions and what we intend for students to learn from that is, well a couple things. First we want them to get acclimated to Western Washington University as a campus, and that's key. Our piece is to guide them as far as academic advising and how that's structured; how majors are structured here at Western and what the best strategies are to navigate the system for registering and declaring a major. And for freshmen that piece includes knowing who their advisor's going to be until they declare a major so if they're undecided they'll be with an academic advisor from the academic advising center...and if they have an interest area, then they're with a departmental advisor.

(Academic Advising) In the fall we invite all students to come back who attended Summerstart, or who didn't attend Summerstart. It's an opportunity to touch base with the same Summerstart faculty, and that includes us because we do all the undecided students as well. And it's an opportunity to come back and see the same students they were with during Summerstart, and they get to schedule winter quarter...

Summerstart

Students generally felt that Summerstart was well organized and valuable:

I think sometimes I feel that the organized events will just be kind of silly but then when I think about at Summerstart, which is probably the most organized freshman thing I went to--even the icebreakers weren't all that lame, like the stupid games you that you play, it was kind of fun. I think maybe Western does a good job of that in keeping it less corny that it could be.

I think it was good. Especially when they showed you how to register and we got to register early for our classes--that was really nice.

OSA's and RA's say that students sometimes talk about things they learned during Summerstart.

They don't approach and just start talking about how wonderful Summerstart is, but it's usually a lot of times like if you're talking about an office or some kind of service on campus, they say they learned that at Summerstart or just referring back to it in a way.

Or they say like we did that or we played the icebreaker when I was at Summerstart, so it comes up.

One area where Summerstart was less than satisfactory was in the advising and registration component. Some students felt that that part was rushed because they didn't have time to think or find information about what it was they might want to take or more fully explore their options:

I still thought that Summerstart was overwhelming though. Because...it was a lot of information and it was great to register but it was also—"I am going to tell how to do this and show you how, and now you're going to register..what classes do you want to take." Then I felt really rushed in thinking those out.

I know. What one do I want to ...? And then they're like, oh here are some binders and there's a whole a table. You can look at videos too and you have 10 minutes left by the way. And it is also a little bit overwhelming just getting thrown in a group of students.

I will tell you 1 thing that didn't help fall quarter academically was when they had you come to your Summerstart group again and the advisor talked about registering for classes winter quarter, it didn't help me one bit. It was a waste of my time.

Some students were also dissatisfied with the advice they received at Summerstart insofar as it ignored their own individual needs and abilities:

At summer start, they told me to take between 13-14 credits and I thought that was a bad idea. I ended up taking 13 and I was just bored. I wished that they would have forced English 101 on me in the first quarter...Because it's a prerequisite I had to take and I would have rather taken it in the very beginning. It would help me with other classes.

And you needed more credits, it sounds like it?

Mhh. I was a really big student in high school, taking that little credits in college wasn't helpful at all. I would have been much better off taking 17-18 credits and I have been taking 18 since then and I am still kind of bored.

The social component of Summerstart appears to be one of its strong points for students in the focus group. They felt nervous when they arrived, but found it easy to find friends and get comfortable in the community:

I was a lot more nervous for Summerstart than I was for actually coming to school...

Yeah, me too

Because it was the first interaction with anyone else here and you want to make a good first impression even though you really don't get to see hardly anyone... but you want to be the college student, you don't want to be the dorky incoming high school student...

I've actually made a friend straight off at Summerstart and we really hit off and we've pretty much stuck together the entire time. But besides that I didn't know anybody and a

lot of people came with people they already knew so I tried to meet a lot of people

OSA's and RA's also emphasize the social component of Summerstart. They say that making connections is of primary importance to students, and they believe Summerstart is successful in helping to make that happen.

We do orientation sessions and those are information sessions that are set up for freshmen students to basically tell them about a lot of the resources on campus, activities that can be done on campus...and basically it's also a chance for them to meet each other...It happens that a lot of students might live in the same halls and they can actually make connections. And then there's quite a few activities that we do throughout the whole day that are really geared toward making connections with not just other students but also with faculty, staff and administrators in different levels, especially with student involvement.

I think Summerstart is really important and I think if we were saying what works the best, they can get really successful in making connections. I think that's awesome. I think that's an important thing for all of them. I think that's one of the goals to have the students making connections with other students and other people and faculty members and everyone.

I know a lot of people who are very interested in meeting their roommates at Summerstart and that's really nice because then the first time to you're meeting them is not when you're moving all your stuff together, it's stressful. You have that face-to-face time as you explore Western right from the start. I know at least like 5 people in my hall that have done that.

On the other hand, there are students who would have preferred more anonymity at Summerstart and just have had the advising and registration component:

The best part was that I had to register early but I guess I'm just the opposite of other people. I kind of liked the fact I come to college and I knew the school was twice as big as my home town too, and I thought be anonymous and choose what I want to do, when I want to see people, when I don't. But then I came to Summerstart and they had the people in the T-shirts who came up to you and try to make conversation, and it scared the crap out of me. I was hoping college would not be like that and it kind of gave me the wrong impression because of course there's no out but I wouldn't like that if I had to do it again.

OSA's and RA's observe that Summerstart is a positive experience for parents.

I think Summerstart is also a really good resource for parents just from talking them on moving day because they always refer back to Summerstart...I think they're just glad to know that their kids are going to be taken care of just by the information fair like okay, there's a bus pass, we'll be able to get around. Here's Amtrak, here is how I can get

home and things like that. So I always feel that the parents are really thankful to have that.

We always get positive feedback from parents for the programming and I know a lot of effort goes into developing their program and giving them the information that's important to parents.

One student in the focus group compared Summerstart to Western Preview and found the latter to be a more rewarding experience:

Western preview I really liked because ...I was with my mom and my friend and her mom, and so it wasn't nerve wrecking because you didn't have to be on your own but there was that huge community feeling. I totally felt welcomed and really excited, like this is where I belong. So I thought that was really nice compared to Summerstart. Obviously for Summerstart you have to be on your own without your parents and friends. But I just really liked Western preview, I think they did a really good job of being really welcoming and having a lot of dorms open for showing, classes to take and stuff like that.

Transitions

OSA's and RA's say it's difficult to make Transitions as fun and exciting as Summerstart, in part because they're older students. Also many transfer students lose interest once they get the information they need.

I think it's a lot more difficult to make Transitions as fun and exciting as Summerstart. As sad as that is... it's hard because a lot of them are older people so you can't play games with them. You feel like you're degrading them or something. You get people who did running start and they're coming in with an AA and they're the same age as normal freshmen but it's a lot more difficult to make it as exciting and as pumped-up as Summerstart. For Summerstart you put on your smiles and get excited, and sing songs and run around. But at Transitions it seems a little less exciting.

I think one other thing too is that once they get their information, they're gone after 2 or 3 hours. I was in a particular session where we talked about what's new at Western and how to have fun...and it was really hard to talk about things when there were maybe one or two or three people who were sitting ...I tried to be excited but being excited in an almost empty room with like maybe 4 other OSAs who were supposed to be helping out at the sessions...

Transitions does not include the opportunity to register for classes—so the motivation to attend may be lower.

I am a graduate assistant in New Student Services. With transitions also another hurdle is that unlike Summerstart, students aren't registering for their classes. There is not as big of an incentive to come versus Summerstart where it's a big focus getting registered and being able to walk away with that class. So I know that's probably our biggest

hurdle. Why should you come to Summerstart? The bottom line is, well, you can register. Nothing else fails, but with Transitions it gets more difficult.

If students can't get the classes they want, they feel it's a waste of time so they may drop out.

I feel like there might be greater retention if transfers could choose their classes at Transitions...we get a lot of transfer students that quit Western because they couldn't get into the classes they wanted...they basically felt like they wasted a quarter at college because they didn't get the classes they wanted.

How could Transitions be done differently? OSA's and RA's provide some suggestions.

Well I know we've incorporated the override program in transitions this year. Last year we were experimenting with it, I think. That also helped build some connections with some transfer students. They were coming in, getting to know the OSAs before the actual transition's day. And that might help out a lot with retaining students.

I was the summer RA in Edens and we had a lot of students who were coming to stay the night because they were from out of town, and there was just nothing organized for them to do. So they kind of felt like there were no parties or movies to watch, or going to dinner together. That was a big thing too.

I worked in Birnam Wood this summer, which attracts a lot transfer students because it's an apartment...It allows a little bit more individuality. But Birnam Wood wasn't open for the public during Transitions, which I think is a problem ... people were coming to see the apartment... so I think if we just made some of the halls more accessible for them to see where they might be living in the following year would be great.

Advising

One difficulty that students find with advising at Western (and a potential reason why they may rate advising less positively in surveys) is the dual model of general advising and major advising. As a result, some students feel like they are in an advising limbo:

I don't know how counselors really work here. Do we even have any? I know we have advisors but people change their majors and, usually the counselors are associated with that specific department.... I feel like a lot of kids who are undecided need more guidance...

One consequence of this dual model may be that students reach out to faculty who may or may not be equipped to give them the information they need:

Now, in the spring quarter, I am kind of being pressured into talking to (an advisor) but I don't ever really talk to any form of advisor at all because for me where to go and who to talk to is really kind of confusing. So I just talk to my Greek professor a lot, but she is not

in my department either so that's kind of hard too. She is helping me figure out how to stay on track and how to manage classes, and if you can't get into one then trying to take some prerequisites ... so I've looked up to her as my advisor I guess.

There also seems to be an over-emphasis on the GURs in the first year. Some students in the focus group expressed a need to have their questions and concerns about choosing a major addressed in their first year, rather than being dismissed as something to not worry about "right now":

I don't know about you guys but like I haven't been serious about a major because of what the guidance counselor, like pretty much everybody I've talked to said--don't worry about it right now, just take some GURs and get them out of the way.

I feel like there's not a whole of access to people. Students are just like, I don't know what I want to do and they need help getting to that point or knowing what the majors even consist of, and what the classes are going to be like. So it would be helpful to have people who are just there to help people decide and have some kind of direction and really know...and who would explain those different things to them.

Here, my counselor, I met with him once. He didn't really know who I was at all even though I swank up a lot. He didn't understand why I was there... He said as a freshman I shouldn't be worried until I'm a junior.

I hate that though because you should...For some majors you need like 100 credits and you need to get started now if you want to do that.

I agree and because of that system, a lot of students are stuck here for 5 years.

It's really just not cool to say you don't need to worry about that right now.

I think that's a completely a wrong message than we should be getting, like we have enough time because I mean we're not saving money, we really don't. We have to start thinking about that.

There are resources for choosing a major that students found very valuable, but they do not appear to be well advertised to first year students, perhaps because of the emphasis on GURs:

I went to the Academic Advising Center and they were really helpful. There is actually this program on Web4U that I had no idea that was on there. I was like wow. You put in what you want to do, your majors, your GURS and it shows everything. It shows what classes you have to cover, if you want to major in this and all that.... I told her I've never heard of this. She was like yeah, most people don't hear about this. So if people go out there and look for things, I think the resources are there but they are not well advertised.

Actually, I agree with what you said. I don't think there is a problem with the amount of services, I think everything is there. There just isn't the publicity that's needed.

Likewise, RA's believe that advising in residence halls could be really helpful and convenient. However students aren't aware of the services and/or they don't know how to utilize them.

They have someone from the academic advising come in to a residence hall and sit in the lounge for 2 hours or an hour. I think it would be really helpful during registration times or things like that, but I think students don't know how to utilize it or what they are supposed to go for. It's not really well advertised or it's not really well prepared for students, so they'd know when they are coming ahead of time, or what the purpose of it is. I think it's a really good idea but there's something about it that students just don't realize.

I think it's convenient to have an academic advisor come to the residence halls. I think something that deterred me from going was I felt like it wasn't going to be very personal and it is just going to be really general stuff like these are the GURs you need to complete and stuff, and it's hard to ask personal questions.

On the other hand, this RA wishes she'd seen an advisor when available in the residence hall:

It's so strange because every time I needed to go academic advising, now I can never get in...I just wished I went when they were in my lounge down the hall.

Some students will ask their resident advisor questions about policies and procedures—perhaps because it's a staff member nearby who they feel can ask, or perhaps because they really don't know who they should be asking. They don't know what the Advising Center is all about.

(RA) Something I see is students asking me questions that they can get answered at Academic Advising. They'll come in or just randomly somebody will ask... like a couple of weeks ago I had somebody ask me if they retook a course would their grades be totaled to together and averaged or would that grade supersede. It's the convenience of going to that person in the residence halls and asking them that question. I said I don't actually know but you should talk to your academic advisor about that...

I can say, before I went to OSA training, I didn't really know that much about the office. I had the same misconception that it was basically about people who told you what classes you should take.

A difficulty in first year advising may be the sheer number of students relative to advisors, and the problem of having courses that fill up, restricting student options:

I think [the Advising Center is] ...where I went actually at the beginning of the year and maybe the lady was just rushed because it was the beginning of the year. She handed me 2 packets and basically told me to choose some classes and get out. So I just sat there at the computer by myself and looked for classes that weren't filled up basically. I didn't even know what to look for, she basically just told me look for classes that weren't full. I don't know, it frustrated me that she wasn't helpful. It was probably just because it was the beginning of the year and everybody was trying to get their stuff sorted out.

Although many students may want and like to be treated as independent and capable of finding their own way at Western, others clearly expressed a desire for a bit more hand-holding or specific direction in their first year:

At the very beginning of the year I went to meet a peer guidance counselor or whatever they're called, but she was really unclear. I was trying to explain to her what class I want to take and if I hadn't had the student services I would probably have no idea what I was doing. ...If Western set up some of kind of specific guidance counselors to talk to you about what you want to major in and keep files on you or something at least to remember what classes you're taking, then that would be extremely helpful I think for everybody.

RESOURCES AND SERVICES

Service Utilization

Although utilization of services may not predict first year outcomes in a quantitative analysis, it does not necessarily mean that these services are not effective or significant in students' lives. A true test can only be accomplished if there was a comparison situation where none of the services were present, since students only use services when they need them. As one student put it:

I think it's the times when you're like, oh shoot, I need help on this, I know there will be a program about it, and so it's usually not necessarily that they are popular but the fact that they are there when you need them. Like the Academic Advising Center comes to the dorms and I needed that definitely. It was a lot easier just to go downstairs to talk, than to actually go to the academic advising center and make an appointment. So definitely programs in the dorms about academic things are helpful though not always popular.

And then the question is how to get students to utilize the resources when they really need them? From an RA's perspective,

They always say that the people who go to the tutorial center are always the people getting A's in their classes. It's the people who are getting Ds and not utilizing those resources as much. So I think that's something that's difficult to do because it's, how are you going to bring these people in there? I don't really know a way to do that.

Awareness of Resources

Students aren't aware of all the resources available to them. Sometimes RA's and OSA's guide students to where they need to go.

When students come and talk to me, most are contemplating dropping out or they're just not doing particularly well. But then we are trained and taught to find out the reasons and the causes why, and then it's ...oh I feel isolated or lonely...(so) here are these clubs, here is the Ethnic Student Center, here is the Counseling Center. Why don't you try them

first? We're trying to find the solution to the root of the problem without just giving them the answer that they're looking for, which is to go down to the Registrar's office and withdraw. So, I think for a lot of people, they're just not aware of resources available to them, and they don't know how natural or how easy it is to go to the counseling center or the tutorial center or academic advising and get the answers. It's just really easy, like it's student-focused. Students are just unaware.

Sometimes when a student comes up to me and they are telling me about distresses, I tell them about the offices and I go with them to those offices because if they came to me with those problems, they are asking me for my support. Sometimes it may interfere with some part of my schedule but I always try to make time for people because I know how important it is for people to have that kind of support and network.

PUBLICITY/COMMUNICATION

Students say there should be better ways to publicize resources and events so they will be aware of them. They suggest a wide variety of methods, including pamphlets, bulletin boards, posters, AS weekly review, and word of mouth.

I remember when I was getting the summer packets, and they talked about a lot of services on campus but I think it would be really helpful if there were papers or pamphlets that you can just take out, and have one for like the advising center—because that's really important. A lot of people don't know even that it exists...and other big ones, like the counseling center...The other stuff, like the events, those are all great and you will hear about those. But I think the big things should be just right there—you should know about them right off the bat instead of accidentally bumping into them or someone having to tell you about them...

Publicity is key. In high school, I was in student council and the thing I've realized that you can put up all the posters in the world and hand out flyers and people don't get it. The best thing about publicity is word of mouth. I guess that would be hard to tell everyone but if there's a will, we will figure it out.

*I didn't hear about the distinguished lecture series...
Yeah, I've heard that sentiment from a lot of people because unless you read bulletin boards, which I love bulletin boards...so that's the only reason I know about a lot of the events...and people told me that if they didn't know me, they would not have known about the distinguished lecture series at all.*

I read AS weekly or the AS review like all the time. Am I the only person that reads this? It's a publication that the AS puts out and it tells like all the events and sometimes it has a couple of features, you know the stuff that's going on on campus.

Email Communication

Students say that email is a good choice for communication about resources and events.

Usually the RA or the dorm communities have all the stuff available, you just don't know where it is...maybe a better way of communicating via like e-mail or something to the students would really help. I check my e-mail obsessively and I don't necessarily always read the things in mail box like sometimes toss them out and then I go back...I think e-mails would help a lot.

I think the info fair was where I first met everybody and then got on the e-mail list and from that, they updated a lot— there were a lot of e-mails about what's going on.

I usually get most of my information from e-mails, you know, the e-mails I get from the groups that I signed up for at the information fair.

In fact, New Student Services sends out weekly **This-Week-At-WWU** emails to inform students about resources and events.

*We provide a variety of services and programming throughout the year which I think are less known but are becoming more widely recognized ... including the weekly **This-week-at-WWU email** that's sent to all new students throughout the year, and to students that would like to continue receiving that email into their second and third year at Western.*

Students agree that the **This-Week-At-WWU** emails are a good thing.

It's mainly on what's going on...Like music shows. I mostly read them because I want to be up-to-date on things that are going on.

I do think it's a good idea to have those because I have looked at them and I think I've gone to couple of events because of them. Because it will say that there is like a speaker coming and talking about a specific topic or music show or something that I didn't hear about and then I will sometimes go...It's nice to have that information.

Students suggest that the format of **This-Week-at-WWU** emails needs some tweaking so that more students will read them

Those are sort of like big blocks of texts...I don't really read them.

They don't catch your interest. I was doing some reading about how people read, and it was saying things like, we don't like big blocks of texts. We like white space in there. So then it's just, you know, blocks of text and .. too long , so I didn't read it.

I think it's good but if they made it more fun like more colorful or just pictures and stuff like that...

I think students would be interested. Like she said, it's just a text and...I don't want to read that.

Yeah, more fun. I'd probably tend to read them.

An issue that program coordinators encounter is whether to use students' university email, or their external email.

About the whole communication thing, I deal with this all the time with my students. We're trying to coordinate some event or something, and I'll say did you get my email for this document or whatever? And then they'll say, oh what email did you send it to? Well I sent it to your university email, and its like, oh I don't check that...it's all spam in there.

That's a serious good point. We've started discussing whether or not we're going to just refuse to send anything to their hotmail.

Information about the Surrounding Area

Students wish they had more information about the surrounding Bellingham area.

I wish there was more that would help students in the community because there is certainly a lot of stuff that will help you get around the campus and learn where things are, what you can do. But like I had no idea about all the parks around here that you go to, all the fun things around Bellingham, how to get around...the farmer's market downtown, that's fun.

It would have been definitely nice to have an organized program from the beginning so that I knew exactly where I was going and exactly the interesting places to go. It would have been nice if there were resources to know where cool places were.

Changing Communication styles

Communication styles are changing, so program coordinators wonder whether emails may become outdated.

Yeah, it is an issue, and then myspace and facebook and all that ...I'm thinking about how communication is changing and how is the university going to update? Because that is the reality of this generation's communications style.

Yeah, students come up and say, just advertise on facebook.

Phone calls are an issue too.

I called up a student in his dorm room, and he said, "do we have a phone in here?" He didn't know that all you had to do was plug in, but he didn't even bring a phone. He had

a cell phone, yet the only phone number I have for him is the dorm room...That's the flip side. How do I go back to the dark ages?

On the other side of that, they're all using cell phones, so I have to use my long distance code to call them.

A major challenge is that some students don't know how to use a computer—they don't have access to a computer—and they don't have a cell phone either.

Just keep in mind...those students who don't have a computer at home—can't afford to have a computer at home...Don't even know how to use a computer. Don't have a cell phone. So teaching them, this is how classfinder works...because when they got here somebody else actually registered for them...so there is no right way of communicating to the students. But at the same time, what's the mess?

Multiple Ways to Outreach

In short, getting information to students is a challenge for program coordinators. There is no right answer. Therefore communication has to come from multiple directions.

I think a challenge is figuring out how to get the information to the students. We use newsletters, we use emails...but I don't think there's a right answer. I don't think there's one way to guarantee that we're getting the information to the student. But just trying to figure out the best way to get all the information, whether it's just our availability, what's happening on campus, just getting that information to the student, what is the best way?...because we have a limited amount of resources and so it has to come from multiple areas and multiple times. But how do you tweak that when we're all operating differently, have different directors? I mean it works great when we do some collaboration but sometimes when we don't collaborate we might be duplicating stuff.

The ESC provides a lot of outreach to first year students in that they get the newsletter at home right before they get here, so that's their entrance to the ethnic student center once they are here. They do participate in the orientation fair, and that's where a lot of students actually sign up for the clubs.

OUTREACH FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

Outreach is important in order to help students succeed and graduate—particularly students who are at-risk of failing. According to one program coordinator:

I think as an institution we have the moral obligation, I mean, we've admitted the students...and on the retention side...we need to help them get through. Especially, when we talk about first generation, low income students, because even then, they have a nice financial aid package, but that financial aid package comes with loans. And if those students come in and aren't successful and they drop out, they're going back to the same kind of life that they were trying to get out of to begin with. But now they're going back

with loans on top of that because they have to pay those back. So I think a big part of it is our moral obligation to help these students be successful, to get through, so they can repay those loans, leave our institution better off than they came.

Several offices collaborate to provide support services.

We were approached by a father saying that his daughter was at Western and on probation, and he told us she's shy about coming in and she's kind of embarrassed about it...So Joan and I both emailed her and tried to get her to come in. We decided to work from both ends, and we'll get her into either your office or my office...she had an appointment with me but she canceled. Then she rescheduled, and so she's coming to see me and I can't wait to see her. Michael's worked with her. All of us are working to make sure that this student that we want to succeed is actually going to get some of the resources and I'm thinking today's the last day to drop a class so should I see if she's got something that she needs to take care of. So sometimes there's joint collaboration between quite a few offices.

One challenge is balancing outreach to freshmen with outreach to transfers.

We have to balance what we're charged with in our office versus what we'd like to do...we really wish we could do more outreach to the first quarter transfer students. They go straight to probation. They don't have the courtesy quarter of going on warning, and they're the ones who need it. Yet we coddle the freshmen along and yet we're talking about we're really concerned about retention and first generation students and this is where it happens. First quarter transfer students go straight to probation and can be dismissed and so we want to do more outreach. We're trying to think of different ways we can do that yet we're charged with all these freshmen and now they're looking at the sophomore experience and what about our transfer students.

Another difficulty is figuring out how to reach out to at-risk students without offending them.

Another difficulty is that there are ways you can and cannot outreach and contact these people...You can't just say hey you are an ethnic minority or you're a first generation, (and how do we really define that), so you go to this office or that office. We don't want them to say, "I'm a first generation? How'd you find that out?", and stigmatize and things like that. So that's a challenge...so we want to find better ways that are not only appropriate but will make them feel more welcome.

Every Student is At-Risk

A major challenge for program coordinators is determining *which* students are at-risk, and *how* to target them. Actually *every student* is potentially at-risk, considering that the current culture is overwhelming.

I think another challenge for the university is that our office has been charged to work with students, but it's very vague. We've been charged to work with students of color,

first generation students...How do you target first generation students? Does SOS target them? Academic advising? Do we share? How do we make it less confusing for the student? What's appropriate? And how do you define at-risk students? I won't even try to define it just because you know, everyone's at-risk. Everybody's at-risk. So how we're charged to work with students is a challenge itself.

The student population is really different and that's tough. It's a challenging kind of needy, enabled type population. I'm being generic but there is a climate here that's kind of hard to break though I think, because the world is overwhelming and technology is overwhelming and life is harder. So how do you get through that and instill in this population what having your passion is, or what being a civically engaged citizen is, and having your future. I find that challenging. Speed. Like speeding up. Time.

Targeting Freshmen

One way that program coordinators target at-risk freshmen is to determine which students have been placed on academic warning—to contact them personally and offer academic support.

I know that the way we target first year students is 14% of the incoming freshmen each year go on academic warning (which means) that their GPA went below 2.0. Unfortunately for transfer students they go straight to probation so one of the difficulties is where to put our focus. But we've been putting our focus on first year freshmen so they get phone calls from us. We divide up all the students and we call them and say, we're offering a 197 class for two credits graded. And they either have to sign up for that or come to a workshop, or come to one of us to talk about their situation. We're hoping that they'll come and meet with us or take the class. We feel it has more of an impact ... We want to make sure they have a good schedule, they understand all the different resources, and that they know how the policy impacts them for that quarter, and that they're not trying to repeat something unnecessarily. Sometimes they misunderstand and think that if they repeat something it removes their last grade...that they're repeating because they need it either for major prep or for prerequisites and not just because they're upset about the grade...As for resources we tell them about Tutorial services, or the Writing Center, or Academic advising. Counseling Center is one. There are a lot of different anxieties.

...And something interesting about this population is that I always look at first generation and ethnic minority because it's a personal interest of mine, and this group is overrepresented. It's at least 40% each time, and ethnic minorities hovers around 28% each first quarter freshmen cohort. So we know that those two populations are overrepresented within this group and we don't have the resources to make sure that everyone does come in for the 101, although we try to make it mandatory so they do get some sort of contact from us.

Academic Success Classes: University 197 and Access

Students who completed University 197 report back to program coordinators that this class was helpful to them in succeeding academically.

We had a student who went on academic warning after her first quarter, and she took university 197 in winter quarter. About halfway through the quarter I told the class, you guys are doing a great job in this class, you've been attending and all that stuff. She looked at me and said, well attendance is mandatory. I'm like, well you're not just coming because it's mandatory though right? She said damn right I am. I mean she was very blunt with her speech, even more so when we were in a one-on-one appointment. But afterwards she actually called me and emailed. She said, you know I got a three point something GPA this quarter and I bumped up. I'm off of academic probation. And she wrote one heck of a personal statement at the end of the quarter. It was hilarious. She's a senior this year and she's come back time and time again, just to update us with her progress. She also spoke on a student panel that we had for students who were going through probation. I saw her this quarter and she said she had a friend who wanted to take university 197 in the spring quarter and she was really highly recommending it, but we didn't offer it this spring quarter.

I teach a similar class, but they have to take it even before they're on probation, and I think there's a lot of grumbling that they have to, that they're required to take it. I teach this class to incoming freshmen so it's a more proactive step, versus a reactive step. So what I get in the first three or four weeks of a class is "why am I taking this class"? There's a lot of resistance to it. But right after the midterms hit, in the third or fourth week, and they get their grades that's when they realize oh, maybe I was top of my class in my high school but now I'm just average and I don't want to be average. And that's when that light comes on. There are success stories. There are two students who are graduating from Western, with three years and a quarter, and they're double majoring...

I think that just having that class being offered as a proactive versus a reactive step is very helpful. I think that achiever programs have been around for five years and I believe, if the numbers are correct, only five students have been academically dismissed from the university. So again, if you look at the population of first generation, the low income, actually very low income, mostly students of color, I think that their probability for being dismissed is actually higher....

The access program also targets at-risk students to provide the academic support they need.

One program we do is the access program, and again focusing on the most at risk students, academically they might not be as prepared as other students. So with the access program we hope to provide them with the support that they need, the study skills, the time management, the advising resources, just trying to get them to get their feet around the university.

Two students in our focus groups mentioned they were involved in academic success classes and that they were very helpful. They suggest offering these programs to other students as well.

I got really lucky because I have the multicultural achievement award. I don't know about the accessibility of the student service for everyone's, but I know that they have been extremely helpful for me... There were 3 workshops and ...the first one was on how to use your planner, basically how to keep track of your classes and that was actually really relevant ... But yeah, like the student services were extremely helpful...they told me which classes would be most helpful for me to take and they explained these are your GURS... I didn't know how to take electives. I didn't know how to sign up for classes and when I talked to them, they just explained to me like crystal clear... I was really glad that I got into that program.

I don't know how it works, there is like a map scholarship, and a program that goes with it, and it just helps the students get acquainted with being freshmen. It really helped me but I don't know how you would get involved in it. I am sure you could just talk to the student services and ask them about it.

An OSA suggests incorporating academic success classes for all students, to help with some of the skills a lot of students need—time management, stress management, and so forth.

Have you ever heard of a class through student outreach services? It's basically geared for students who received Gates grants or are a part of Washington State Achievers...It basically teaches them about academic success like how to manage your time and things like that. And I always thought that was very important for a lot of students in general because a lot of students come here not knowing about how many credits they should take, whether or not they should involve themselves in clubs, whether or not they should take a job or work in some capacity. I find that class very interesting because it's geared mostly towards Gates grant recipients because a good majority of them come from at risk homes or first generation families so they don't have that background of higher education or things like that in their homes or in their families in general. So I think that would be a really good class to incorporate, to get students aware of how they should manage their time and manage their stress so they could succeed.

ONE-ON-ONE CONNECTIONS

On a personal level, students say it's a one-on-one connection with someone at the university that sometimes makes a difference—in fact this helps them to stay at Western rather than leave.

I know for me it is my RD, my residence director who helped me to stay. When I lived in north campus housing I was having a lot of problems with my roommate and my RD was really helpful trying to make sure I was very comfortable as a student here, and trying to accommodate to me as best as possible. So that really helped my experience because at the end of fall quarter, I was seriously considering transferring to another school. And because of all the help and assistance that I got, then also the other people I met in my residence hall who were like, you know you're a great person, you shouldn't think of

yourself that way, you shouldn't allow these people to do this to you. Because sometimes when you're freshman you feel disempowered because of your diminutive status and the fact that you don't know a lot of people so you almost don't know where to go.

Phone calls can make a tremendous difference.

I don't know if this is why people stay or what does for them, but I remember getting a phone call ... "hey congratulations on being accepted to Western and do you have any questions? Can I do anything? We're so excited to see you." ... it's really great... They know your name and they speak specifically to you and it's another student doing it. And now we call before Summerstart to see if they registered to come to Summerstart; and then we've done a lot of calling to first year students who live off campus, which I think is also really important because they don't have as many opportunities living off campus. I think that's a really great thing that we do because it's another student calling you by name, it's not just a recording. Some people really ask you questions...and it's "let me give you all the information about that; or here's a phone number you can call to find out." I think that's a really good program that we have, and I think that could be something that would help people feel really connected.

I think the calling is important. My roommate is in the Hawaiian club through the ESC I think. And she called other students who are going to be coming from Hawaii, incoming freshmen and they just have so many questions and they are so nervous but she ends up having an hour long conversation with them and it really helps and they are really thankful by the end of the conversation...so I think knowing that there are going to be connections for you is important...Before I came to Western as it got closer and closer to the day, I didn't want to go to college anymore. I'm dropping out. But the girl who was going to be my roommate ended up calling and we would just talk for hours so it became okay, I have something to look forward. There is going to be somebody there that I think is interesting and I'm going to get along with.

OSA's and RA's recognize the importance of personal connections, and sometimes they help to provide this connection for new students.

...To this day I still see people saying "you were my OSA". And I think that's such an important connection to be able to have that upper classman friend no matter where you go...if it's walking downtown or on campus or anywhere. I think that's something that's really important... and I am a firm believer in Summerstart . I think students definitely get a ton of information, and they meet a ton of people and they make some connections...I wanted to become an OSA because of my OSA when I was at Summerstart...it's such a cool position.

I still get people coming up to me all the time like hey, can you tell me about such and such. That's always kind of cool because I do also work in the Associate Students so I do have a lot of connections in that area. But it is just really cool that they can still feel like that they can rely on me because of the knowledge that I was able to give to them and how they are still looking for ways to get involved and do things around campus.

One-on-one support from a variety of resources is sometimes necessary for student success and retention, particularly for at-risk students with multiple issues. Program coordinators work with students on academic issues, as well as parental issues and identity development.

For me, if we're impacting, I fight against technology and try to meet with students face-to-face. I think that's very important... One-on-one contact.

One of the ways that I think our programs are successful... it's the one-on-one advising that we provide each student. It's the one-on-one relationships with us as advisors and as mentors. It's the Western experience, face-to-face. And so I think that's how we impact students. And I tell students, especially when I meet with them for the first time, you can continue to come to me or you can go to Joan, or to Tom, and there's also the academic advising center... I try to give them as many options as possible, just because I know my advising style is completely different from Joan's and it could be completely different from you. And so, yeah, sometimes students try a counselor and they're like, eh, no. They try somebody else, and like perfect, I actually connect with you, relate to you. And so giving students options for contacts just because sometimes there's no connection... Chemistry.

I have a student who had A's in all her English classes in high school. When she got here she was in the achiever class and each week they had to turn in an essay, but whoa! And you know her admission essay was perfect, and so what happened here? It turned out that in high school all her English teachers were actually letting her redo her essays. The teacher would edit them, and she'd turn it back in, so she got A's. And so, nobody questioned that, but when she got here she needed a lot of help writing, and so thanks to the writing center and the director over there, Roberta... She helped her, with one-on-one tutoring and now she's successful. And the thing is it's because of that one-on-one support that Western provides to students once they get here. And just working with the student and her own identity. Her mom wanted her to become a doctor and there was no way at that point that the student could actually move into math 102 or English 101 because she failed English 100. I think we do a lot of that, working with the parents and getting them to understand what college is and that the college experience is not like it's painted on the TV or the media.

SPEAKING OF PARENTS...

Many students face pressure from home to graduate quickly due to finances. There is also pressure from home to declare a certain major in order to make money. Yet students may not be ready to declare, and their choices may conflict with parents' wishes. Students may be at-risk for these reasons—particularly when it's a challenge to understand and navigate the system.

Especially with first generation college students, they get here and they do have that pressure from home—like get your degree fast, get something that you can make a lot of

money so you can get out of this neighborhood. You know, they usually want to go into business law, or medicine.

I think one of the big things that I see...there was a student who tried to self-advise and she was going to be kicked out. She was all ready to be kicked out but we talked and I was able to beg and plead to give it one more quarter. Right now she'll have well over a 3.0 for this quarter. But her self advisement was taking chemistry and math in one quarter and taking these loads that just weren't realistic, and then doing them again because she failed them the first quarter so she tried and failed again—because mom wanted her to be a business major and that just wasn't her cup of tea. So I think it was as much a wake up call for the family as it was for her, that she's getting ready to be kicked out, and so mom's like oh ok major in whatever you want just stay in school. So now that's one success story. I think we see a lot of it because they are first generation. They don't understand the system, and often times they are coming from schools that didn't prepare them academically. But when they were at those schools they did well in math, in chemistry, and in science. So they think, well I'm ready for this—not understanding all those other pieces. It's not just the academic piece but getting involved socially and in family things.

I think it's a big challenge for low income students because they hear the message from their peers that they are on the five year plan. Some of those have been coming in with additional credits and they're really just taking their time to figure out what they want to do. Whereas a low income student, a first generation student feels like "I need to graduate on time. I have this pressure that's coming from home, and we don't have the money to go to a five year program." In contrasting that to the academic departments, sometimes there's a lot of structure and a lot of hoops they have to get through in order to get into the major, and then trying to figure out what that major is of course, before they even get to that point.

Program coordinators often help students with parental issues, and this may involve working directly with the parents or other family members.

And of course there is convincing the parents...helping students create a dialogue and getting the resources so they can talk to their parents. We see parents a lot, talk to them on the phone. They come into the office. We see aunts and uncles sometimes, or they bring in their nephew or niece because mom's a single parent, or parents are divorced and live in a different state—all kinds of scenarios. It's just very organic when they come in. You just cannot predict what this is by looking at the transcript, by looking even at past notes. You pretty much have to approach it from all the different angles and the aspects of this student, and what's been going on academically, socially, and what do they think. How are they making sense of that, and maybe steering that to maybe a little bit more realistic picture, or validating what they are thinking and just helping them get the resources to continue.

Some students struggle because they don't have support at home.

We talk a lot about parent involvement and how the parents are very critical about what the students are doing. But I think there's the other side of the coin too, where we get students whose parents don't care. They don't have that support at home. Sometimes we talk a lot about the helicopter parents and we're thinking some parents would be more involved. That's a real struggle for students because when they go home, it's like, what are you doing up there?

ESL students face another set of complicating issues, including commitments to take care of family at home.

Sometimes, I think the parents would want to be more involved...if they knew how, or if they spoke the language. English. We do have a lot of ESL, English-as-a-second-language students. So the students are the ones paying all the bills at home, they're the ones making appointments for their parents, and taking their parents to the doctor and translating, and so they have all these other commitments back home. Sometimes home is back in Tacoma and also having those commitments over here and sometimes they're involved in the Ethnic Student Center, and so—talk about time management. So as an institution we need to recognize that.

NAVIGATING THE SYSTEM

Navigating the system can be challenge for students, especially dealing with policies and procedures regarding declaration of the major. First, each academic department does things differently. Some policies limit accessibility for transfer students—students are locked out of the major and classes until requirements are fulfilled, such as a twelve credit GPA at Western.

Talking about navigating the university system, we make it hard ourselves... We have over forty different academic departments and each one of them does things differently. How do I get an override?...Or even policies that limit transfer students because they want a twelve credit GPA, Western GPA, which is good for those students who aren't going to survive if they didn't have that. But then there's a whole group of students who would survive it that are being locked out for a quarter from declaring a major or being able to take a class within a major.

The 120 credit rule poses challenges for students who have not yet decided on a major.

We have a requirement that you have to declare a major by the time you hit 120 credits. So I've seen a couple freshmen this year who've hit that limit because they come with running start credits, and they can come in with up to 105 credits now. After their first quarter we're starting to send them warning letters saying you're approaching 120 credits if you're between 109 and 120. This quarter I actually sent some freshmen letters about holds on their registration because they haven't declared their major yet, which leads to the challenges. Here are 18 year old students with 120 credits and we're pushing them to the point of having to declare a major, yet developmentally sometimes that's tough because they're not ready to declare a major at that point. They haven't made any

choices yet, or haven't been forced to make any of those kinds of choices. They have to look at what majors are available, what's a good fit, compared to what their parents are saying. They have to go through that process of finally identifying what the right major is for me versus what everybody else tells me the right major is, or what the major I think I should be doing based on what everybody else has told me.

IDENTITY AND PERSISTENCE

One goal of new student programs is to help students with identity development, and to get them involved in community. A strong sense of identity and engagement in community can lead to persistence and retention.

I think the engagement and involvement that happens for students not only gives a sense of identity, but persistence. Research has shown that it leads to them persisting in being here. I think that's super important.

For me it's more than just figuring out getting this degree. I think that would be really simple, just going through the steps and figuring out your degree. But figuring out who you are as a person, figuring out what your identity is, how you fit in to this institution, and the world at large...

I think a lot of students go through identity crisis, especially first generation students or students who are older. They're going to class with eighteen, twenty year olds and they're forty years old, and they don't have any sense of membership. I mean they're having an identity crisis of a different proportion...A lot of times its just giving them the confidence and the hope that they can do it and that its achievable and maybe providing them examples...And so if you're stumbling right now there are things that you can do, and there's a lot of help and resources...

A strong sense of identity is very important to students. Students may struggle if they feel out of place, and they may leave if they can't find their niche or if they don't feel supported.

I think a lot of, I don't want to generalize, but I think a lot of students are just looking for their niche on campus and so if they don't get hooked in with something—that's the overall theme with student activity in general— if you don't get in with a group somewhere, then they begin to feel really lonely or whatnot. It gives them a sense of identity too.

One of the stereotypes that students continually face or struggle with is that they feel like, well they've come into college, they have to give up their identity—they have to stop their home language, or stop eating the food, and they don't have the hair products that they had at home. Any of those intricate detail things become big issues when they move into residence halls or whatnot. So we try to undo that, reverse that, and say hey you're adding something to this university and we need to have this here. We need to have hair braiding, we need to have the low rider show in red square, and there's all these really

important things going on that matter to them, to that community. Then they bring their community onto campus and it really works out well.

The Ethnic Student Center

The ESC is instrumental in helping students with identity development and finding a place in community.

Their sense of identity is very strong to them, especially their ethnic identity. If they're unable to relate to anyone on their hall or in their classes, they pack bags and they go. So I think ESC does provide that safe haven for students who are very proud of themselves, or actually just developing that sense of pride, and trying to find out who they actually are. So I totally agree with you that the ESC does provide that sense of support and also challenge—who are you? I hear that all the time...If it wasn't for the ESC, I would...

The ESC does a lot of outreach with students before they come to Western—high school visits, conferences, student receptions.

ESC tries to get in touch with the students before they're even enrolled here at Western. So we do a lot of outreach in terms of conferences and high school visits and that type of thing...that's where we really get out and try to make a good impression with these students who are really focused on the college experience...The majority of them have never been to Western's campus or any university campus, so, it's a big stretch...Our goal is basically to get them orientated with being on campus, being familiar and seeing somebody that relates to their community, wherever they're coming from...

Recently we started getting into student receptions. We had one a couple years ago where we had the most African American students enrolled or accepted into the university. We had a gathering here in front of the PAC and that's the kind of thing that seems to be working for us. We're just trying to get in touch with them again. And get in touch with their parents. I think for us it's really important to get to know the whole person, their whole background. I spend a lot of time just like, I want to know who your family is. I want to know who your boyfriend/girlfriend is. I want to know all that because all that stuff matters to them. I think for our staff it takes a lot of work but it pays off. It really feels like they're fitting into this spot.

The ESC conference helps students to make connections—to affirm a sense of identity, and to build community as well as leadership.

Another huge one is the ESC conference that we hold every year, and students turn out for that and they really get hooked in. That's where we really push affirming their identity and building community and leadership. It's just like a catch phrase—this is it, there's a place here for you. This is where we want to help you grow, develop as a person, as an individual, and become leaders within this organization.

Although the ESC primarily serves students of color, the conference outreaches to other students as well.

About that ESC conference, many times people think it's just for students of color. But in the past three years I've been here, as staff, I have actually sent a lot of white students to that conference and they come back ready to stay just because again, they came from very multicultural backgrounds and they get here, they're white students, blue eyes, blonde hair, and they're shocked. They're actually in culture shock just because ...the sea of white, the sea of me, and I don't want to be here, I want to transfer out. But they go to the conference and they're able to actually develop their sense of identity and meet other people they're more comfortable with. So even though the ethnic student center specifically stands for students of color, I think it also outreaches to other students too now.

For example, two white students were ready to leave Western, but they attended the ESC conference and came back with a definite sense of purpose. They started a multicultural program and actively support other programs on campus.

There were two white students who came from Tacoma and they both had a lot of multicultural with them. They were both white males, and they were ready to transfer out. They got here and within six weeks they were like, I'm out of here. But they did go to the ESC conference, and when they came back they knew who they were and their sense of identity was actually developed. And they started the Washington Achiever Collegiate Roaming club. The purpose of that club is to do multicultural programming on campus, so they did a multicultural talent show and they have supported different programming on campus, like the low rider car show, and the women of color dinner. They do a lot of fund raising and they've been so successful. They the hold the title for most money made in one day for fundraising and that's like a thousand dollars I think, and in a week they raised four thousand dollars. They're entrepreneurs in a sense.

RESIDENCE LIFE

Another important way that new students make connections and build community is through the residence halls. Program coordinators suggest that programs are successful when students move in together and provide support for one another.

...One way that I think our programs are successful, is just having students move in together on one part of the campus. I mean that right there is the visual knowledge that we know our programs are successful...because students are connecting with one another. They're relating to one another, and so they support each other that way. Again, sometimes they need that kind of support just because when they're fist generation students sometimes the parents or family members back home don't understand like, why didn't you come to your nephew's birthday? Well I had a test the next day, I couldn't. And so when they get those comments thrown at them, sometimes they need that support from one another.

I'm working with a group of freshmen. My job is the academic advising part, but for me, because they're also high risk, it's also to build community within each cohort because they support each other. There's a lot of things that they have in common already that I play off — the low income, the first generation, that they have a scholarship—so that brings the community back together. So they support one another and they end up actually living together. In the fall they live everywhere, and then at the end of spring quarter they're usually in one or two dorms, all of them. They live in a community.

Some students get involved in their residence halls through leadership in order to initiate connections. Previous experiences in high school spurred these students to get involved at Western.

I think one of my big successes... was becoming a leader in my community...Because in high school, I was a leader in certain little aspects... I used to be a captain on cross country ...But here I live in Mathes, with my community and the RAs and all the programs that have been going on and everything. I almost felt it was a lot easier, like this is my chance to step up and meet a lot of people and I thought the best way to do that was to become a leader. So I guess I am kind of proud of the way that I kind of broke a barrier within myself and made an effort to become someone I wanted to be.

I've always really been into the environment. So I knew coming into Western that it's a really big deal here. So the first thing I did was to get connected. I became eco-rep. in my hall. So I was doing the hall counsel immediately, just because of my interest in environment, which connected me to a larger environmental community at Western, so that was a big one. ... a lot of things that I did in high school kind of spurred me to do them more here. I played alternate Frisbee in high school so then I tried alternate Frisbee team here. And I was in a service all 4 years in high school, so I joined Western students against cancer here. So I think having previous experience in clubs and then coming here, and finding that they have the same kind of opportunities was really helpful, because I knew that even if I wanted to try new things, there would always be opportunities to fall back on, with things that I've always been interested in. So that helped me connect immediately.

RA's sometimes gather groups together, to help students get through the initial stages of social awkwardness.

I've heard from a lot of residents that the dining hall is one of the most intimidating experiences at Western...You don't know people and it's really awkward to go there, and walk in and see where you're going to sit. The RAs generally try to gather residents and like them there. There are some people who feel it's like a forced, awkward social thing. So if you get a big group to go, then they can start talking to each other and then there's not that fear...

Some students were able to meet people by going to the dining hall regularly and attending various activities on campus.

I think just living on campus and going to the dining hall all the time and the Rec. Center and the movies and stuff. I think that is just a good way to feel connected to Western since you're living on campus and you know...you're around a lot of the same people.

And going to the on-campus (A.S.) movies; ones that are in this building are fun too. I've been going to these movies for three quarters, they are really good movies.

In the residence hall I ended up in, I guess since our windows were so big, people who passed by waved and stuff so it wasn't that hard to make connections for me. When I went to the dining hall my first time, I met my second roommate from that experience... I was just going around and meeting people.

Some students may become homesick because they aren't making social connections.

There are some people who are homesick, but that may be that they are not socially active enough, or they're not making connections here at Western that would fill the loneliness that they feel.

One of the biggest concerns for students is their living situation. RA's believe that students have to feel comfortable in their living situation—otherwise they may struggle emotionally and academically.

Probably one of the biggest concerns I've heard at Summerstart, is about the living situation, from both parents and the students...where do we go if we have roommate conflicts, what do we do?

I think getting someone comfortable in their living space is a first step in making their experience at Western be the best possible.

In my experience, the two biggest issues in the residence halls—besides somebody asking about dropping out—are academic struggles or roommate issues. And then the issues can be so huge because you might have great classes, and you might have great friends but if you go home to the environment that is just so unfriendly and not at all welcoming, then the student just doesn't want to be there anymore. We do a little bit of preventative programming with roommate agreements and we do mediations when necessary, but it's just finding the root of the problem and really working to get it fixed...A lot of times it comes down to personal issues...and no matter if you even talk about that, it's still going to be a really explosive situation...

I hear a lot of roommate stuff and just living in an environment with so many people... especially residents who are only children or don't share bathrooms... that's a shock to a lot of residents, just sharing a bathroom with a bunch of other people and having to wait for things—things that they are just not used to living with other people.

Cultural differences may be the cause of some roommate conflicts.

I think roommate conflicts cause a lot of stress in the hall and then it's hard to study. I had a girl from Taiwan and the other roommates just didn't understand her customs. Like when she woke up in the morning she would slap her face to wake herself up in the morning, and the other roommates just couldn't understand why she was doing this. It was so embarrassing whenever they had guests over. It was just a bunch of little other things that were just like cultural battles and you could just feel the stress in the apartment when you walked in. And it was really interfering with girls' studies and that's one of the reasons, it's just too much stress in the home.

A lot of the roommate conflicts have to do with cultural or regional differences and that's always a battle. Sometimes I don't even know how to tell them what they could do...

"Well maybe your RA could help you with that because that's what they are there for. They are advisors too." And I really try to direct them to other resources because I don't really know what to tell anyone if they're having those kinds of problems

RA's suggest that roommate issues could be resolved by changing the way housing assignments are made.

Perhaps one way to resolve some roommate issues is to be proactive and assist them in choosing their own roommates.

I know some students, once they met, they want to be roommates with that person, but they kind of realize it's a little bit too late to change because they already have their housing information ... So I wish there was some way that housing could work it out with them still. There were a couple of girls on my floor last year who met during Summerstart and wished they could have lived together.

LANDSCAPE OF OPPORTUNITIES

Program coordinators believe it's important to offer a "landscape of opportunities"—a variety of opportunities in different areas—so students can make connections in one way or another. The point is for students to be able to make connections so they will feel comfortable and supported..

Having this landscape...so that it's consistently given in lots of different areas, whether its academic advising or going to a late night event or going to ESC conferences and so all of us continuing to do this, not just their first year, I think is super important. And even, like the other night we had a late night movie and only five people showed... I didn't say to myself, oh that was an unsuccessful event. The fact that that late night was there and a student chose not to go but heard about it, not that I can quantify that necessarily, but that's the optimistic person in me just saying the fact that its on the landscape, that its there, that people feel that as they walk around and see the posters, or look at This Week at WWU. I think that has an impact in some fashion. It's the stories that you don't hear. Plus, it was successful for five students.

And sometimes, you know, I totally agree with that because we'll offer a workshop that's not mandatory and we'll be disappointed that we only got four or five but then we'll get calls or emails that say "I couldn't go to that, is there any way that I can meet with you?" So it's kind of in their awareness that something like that's there.

OSA's and RA's believe likewise that a variety of programs and methods are needed to help students feel connected, because connection happens differently from person to person.

I would say that for a lot of students the moment they feel welcome it's really maybe not a big program. It's sometimes the small, minor interactions in your hall, like meeting new roommates and getting along with them...finding your group or finding like things like environment or what place at Western you feel comfortable. Maybe it's a class or a faculty member. So I know as an RA it's not always going to be us who convince someone to stay or be the reason they stay, or we're not the comfort to them. But just being aware that for some students there is just a lighter moment in their life where they feel like I connected to this person. At convocation, many people were clapping when I first came here. I was like wow, I felt like a Western student. I haven't even taken the class yet here. So it just really depends from person to person.

From the OSA's and RA's perspective, it is important to offer a variety of first-year programs throughout the year, not just front-loading in the Fall.

I feel like all of these programs, they have the intent to get students engaged and involved because that improves retention and students stay. But I do get worried, and this happens at a lot of universities, that there's a lot of front loading. Then winter quarter comes around and it dies. And winter quarter is when there probably needs to be more because the outside isn't that great. Specific groups may pick up programming but not like the effort that is in the first 3 weeks of school.

I think we need all of these programs. I think that the more opportunities there are the better and that we keep things going throughout the entire year. If we do something consistently like late night and we do it every quarter, it's only going to get better. It's going to become more efficient in planning but it is also going to be more well attended as more people go and tell their friends and spread the word.

About that all-year consistent thing...people are still coming in the winter and...in the spring, and they don't get Summerstart and they don't get convocation. That can be very alienating especially when it's hard enough to come in when people already have friends and join other peoples' groups...but to have less programming for you too...I think it's difficult.

It's funny what you said about the front loading. Because from my perspective, working in AS, is a lot of all-year loading...but it's just really funny though because there isn't a big connection between the general university, like the different departments and the

associated students because there is such a potential for some real collaboration to go on, to really get students knowledgeable about what's going on in our activities.

Students say that a variety of opportunities are needed in order to make connections and to gain different perspectives. Sometimes these perspectives are more meaningful to students than those gained in the classroom setting.

I think that the types of connections you make, in the different programs here, are much more meaningful than some of the connections you can make in the classroom setting. And even in the dorm setting because when you go to a program and you meet people, you can almost guarantee they are somewhat like-minded and you can bond over that shared experience and I think that it's incredibly beneficial and also just being cultured and going to the different kinds of things and activities and keeping your interest broad. I think that's beneficial as well...I know that just being here a couple of quarters, you get used to the environment and you do feel more at home; you do feel more prideful and do not feel lost; doesn't seem so big when you go to the different programs.

I think that certainly there are different levels of activities and sometimes when it's more intense and more serious level, you come away with more knowledge or more emotion, like for example when the general spoke about genocide, you walk away with a different perspective. And I think that's really important and I think it's great that Western offers so many different outlets to gain different perspectives and I think that's a really important phase to go through college and through your whole life really but especially in college when you're supposed to be finding who you are in the world.

Along with that, that's exactly what I wanted to say. You go to these things and you come away with more than you expected to. Like for me, I went to a lot of things, I wanted to make some friends, that's just something to do and I come away with a definitely different perspective, and I really feel like I've grown since I've been here.

NEW STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Which programs or activities have helped new students to feel most welcome and connected to Western? Which ones have made a real difference for them? Students in our focus groups mention several things, reinforcing that a “landscape of opportunities” is needed because students make connections in a variety of ways.

- Information Fair
- Ethnic Student Center
- LGBT Alliance
- Out of State Student Association
- Convocation
- Residence Hall activities
- Late Nights and Underground Coffeehouse
- High Street Music Festival

- Sports/Recreation
- Small Groups
- Several things, including personal contact
- Distinguished Lecture Series
- FIGS

Information Fair

The Information Fair is popular. Students say the Information Fair is where they sign up for various organizations and activities, and this is very helpful to them—it gets them involved.

(OSA) I think students will respond immediately when they have the red square info fair, which takes place the 2 days before classes start. That's really popular because most of the clubs from the ethnic student center come out and people just come and sign up...and learn more about them really casually...and most freshmen attend the info fair so that's great exposure for the clubs, to get involved.

They had that fair at red square at the beginning of the year and that helped so much because I've got involved in all kinds of clubs and like circle K and reading and writing...and a lot of educational programs at that fair. That info fair was really helpful. It really got me involved.

I am an out-of-state student. I think that the red square info fair is the most helpful event put on. I joined the Out-of-state student association, the club.

I agree the info fair was really cool because I've got involved in lot of groups and clubs that are really great.

I think the info fair was where I first met everybody in the LGBTA and then got on the e-mail list; and from that, there were a lot of e-mails about what's going on.

The info fair got me involved with the sailing team.

Student Outreach Services collaborates with the ESC and other campus organizations to put on the Information Fair. They believe the Information Fair is particularly successful in getting new students signed up for various organizations and activities—especially ethnic clubs.

Student Outreach Services works with the ESC to outreach to all the ethnic clubs and their socials at the beginning of the quarter just because that's where the first year students tend to go to...they tend to try to find other people that look like them or speak like them or eat like them or dress like them and so we do outreach to all those clubs, there's about seventeen. First year students participate in the orientation fair, and that's where a lot of students actually sign up for the clubs.

It's kind of tricky because there's a certain group that goes to summerstart, and we really focus on first generation and low income...so Red square fair is where we really hit

students for the first time. They're coming through and signing up for all the organizations.

Ethnic Student Center

As discussed earlier, the Ethnic Student Center is instrumental in helping students with identity development and finding a place in community. In fact, some students decide to stay at Western because of the ESC.

A really common theme for the ethnic student center is that you hear the same story over and over—"if I didn't get involved with this organization I would have transferred out." You can ask any student in ESC and that's a common story—that they would have left, or gone home, or transferred to another school because it just wasn't working for them.

OSA's and RA's confirm that students love the ESC conference. In fact the conference helps students to stay at Western because of the connections they are able to make—connections that make a real difference. There may be other connections that help students stay, including a counselor or advisor. The main point is building connections.

I hear a lot of times from people that they really loved the ESC conference. That was one thing that made them stay at Western. It was just like wow, that's a really powerful thing to say because you never really consider like why are people staying... For some students, if they come from urban areas, they find Western to be kind of alienating because they may not be able to fit in with the culture of Bellingham or Western. Maybe they have a roommate who really disenfranchises their experience here in some way...it's a whole platter of reasons why students decide or think about leaving Western or transferring to another school. I think that with the ESC conference they build connections, which is one thing we stress at Summerstart—building connections. I think that's the main reason why people stay. Because once you meet that one counselor or advisor that really helps you to succeed or achieve your goals that can really be a factor in why people stay here.

Also, with the ethnic student center conference...that one has always had a really high attendance... We've always had at least 200 people. And I always liked that because it brings a lot of people together. It also brings in a lot of students who may not be able to come out of their comfort zone, and be involved in activities that really get them to know more people, to know more staff and administrators and get connected to things...

More students might attend ESC activities if they knew for certain that they're invited—even if they're not a member of the organization. They need to know that it's an open invitation.

I think a lot of students don't think they can be involved if they don't belong to a certain race or if they don't fit the bill from their perspective. I think on their part that they don't try hard to recruit people or make it seem inviting. I just think that students get this in the head—like it's a Hawaiian night; it's not for them. They are not part of the club or it's an exclusive membership.

Also students are more likely to attend ESC programs if they are held in open areas such as Red Square, and they're free.

The ESC programs that I've seen most attended are the ones where you don't have to come and go into a room...like the Low Riders show has been one that a lot of my residents have completely attended because it's held in Red square and it's free. It's one that you can just walk through and you can look at things, you can be as involved as you want to be. I think that let's students really choose what their comfort level is...not having to walk into a room, where they might not know anyone or might not feel comfortable.

LGBT Alliance

Again, finding ones community is very important in order for students to feel welcome and connected. It's about finding friends, as well as acceptance and support. Some students say the LGBTA has made a real difference for them.

The LGBTA put on several things...there was an ice-cream social and coming-out stories and I was on a couple of panel...and they had a lot of events fall quarter ...they had awareness week, coming-out week...they are very out there and had a lot of events with a lot of people. And it was great to meet a lot of people...It's nice to find people, because I'm bisexual and to find a group of people that's all very accepting of it, and they're very supportive. Especially when you're coming to a new place where you hardly know anyone, and you want to find people that are really cool with you. That made it really easy to meet people and also to get involved with political stuff going on...but mainly making new friends.

I went to a couple of them but not as many as I wanted to...and I had a great time because, as she said, you can meet people who were really okay with you being you, just slightly off from the way everybody else views you as normal.

Well, it was also very accepting. It wasn't like you walked in the door and they were like, so are you gay? You know this is everybody's allies—everyone is welcome. It's the most accepting and open group that I've... because I've gone to a lot of different groups different meetings, and that's the group where I've always felt completely accepted.

Out-of-State Student Association

The out-of-state student association was very helpful for one student.

The Out-of-state student association...we got together and went for ice-cream or stuff like that. It was another way to get involved...It was a lot of fun. I've met a lot of new people; people from all around the state. I thought it was wonderful. It was very helpful.

Another student mentioned the out-of-state dinner, but it was more important for her parents that they attend.

I didn't want to go, but I went to the Out-of-state dinner... That was good. I mostly went because my parents wanted to go. It was fine, the food was really good. It was nice to just go to it. Other than that, I was not much involved.

Convocation

Several students say that convocation helped them to feel welcome and connected. First, here is an explanation from OSA's about the goals of convocation.

Convocation is like a rite of passage and then a welcome to Western. It's just pretty much a ceremony to kick off the year and say you're now part of Western, this is your school, your community, and we're glad you're here.

And it also includes the older students too because they have to go stand outside and wave and cheer for them, so it's kind of like the older students establishing a tradition.

And it is really a goal for them... putting in their mind that the ultimate goal is to get you educated and out the door. I mean a little bit more positive than that.

Students say convocation was fun, particularly going outside where all the people were there clapping.

The convocation, that was fun. I got a kick out of the convocation. It almost felt like for a moment that we were at a freshmen school. It wasn't just a public funded school—it kind of felt really close-knit going outside... seeing everyone clap as you were walking all along to Old Main, that was fun. Kind of like Harry Potter. Just like this path of all these lights and people. It was exciting, I was so cool. I was just smiling, I loved it.

Freshmen particularly liked having the older students there welcoming them. It felt like a gathering of the whole community, and it felt supportive and empowering.

Going outside, where all the older students were there, that was the fun part. That was the bit I liked. That was cool, because it was just like a whole community getting together and just the real welcoming. There wasn't the being dropped in the middle of college and rushing to get in classes that are already full. It was mostly like you know, we're welcoming you here.

I hear some of the reactions and students are always happy that they went because it is a great opportunity for older students to make a good first impression and be really welcoming and accepting of the new students.

I've heard that a lot of students felt empowered that older students were welcoming them into Western... they were like oh, this is a supportive and welcoming environment and

people want me to succeed. I can actually make friends with a junior or senior and it won't be weird. I thought that was pretty cool and a lot of students were actually talking about that. I really loved convocation, it was so much fun.

Students say they were bored with the lecture they got inside, and some left early. They suggest that this part of convocation should be shorter. It is the part outside that students really enjoy.

Students really like the end but they are kind of bored with the lecture they get inside... There were quite a few students that left early.

I think if they made it shorter like the inside part, the sitting around, because people leave thinking that was that. My RA told me I had to go to this and it was nothing great.

Karen Morse is not the best speaker that I've heard. From students last year when I lived in a predominantly freshmen hall, they really loved the end and you could even see it all in the people's faces when they walk out, they are just so surprised...

The lecture should be more interesting and relevant in order to capture students' attention.

I didn't understand when we were listening to this lady talk and then I realized—the whole time I thought that there was somebody down on the stage, and then I realized that it was a recorded speech or something. I don't really understand where the feed was coming from because there was no actual person in the room. They just opened the screen and they were recording her life and presenting it.

Sometimes I thought it was kind of nice that she was talking to us but I don't know. In my high school, I knew the principal by name and he knew who I was. I don't know it's difficult to do in a university. I don't think I've ever seen the president ever again. I have no idea who she is and what she even does.

Did she just talk about alcohol pretty much the whole time? I remember everyone was like, why won't she talk about something else? All she talked about was some story about someone who had died of alcohol poisoning and yeah, that's relevant to college. In fact she didn't talk about anything else.

Convocation could be more fun and celebratory by adding a few touches.

I think if it was more like a rallying thing or more exciting, everyone is wearing blue, passing little pom-poms, more celebratory, that would make things a lot more interesting.

I think it would help if there was a drum. Like a drum beat and we would keep walking and not stop and make it awkward. And people should throw confetti and I think there should be like little things that make those sounds and make it a big party because I just felt awkward and like everyone around was just standing. Something that would involve everyone like that.

Residence Hall Activities

For some students, the most influential time for making connections was during the first few days while moving into the dorms— meeting RA's, roommates and others in the dorm; and being shuffled around to various places, like the Information Fair and a BBQ.

I don't know if it's a program or not but I know the first day when you move in and everything... you got shuffled around different places, like let's meet here for dinner, let's do this and that but I actually really like that because you kind of get to know the faces in your community and you make small connections and I especially liked recognizing who the different RAs were and knowing that was a resource I can go to and yeah, that was probably one of the most meaningful events and I don't think it was really an event per say.

The whole move-in weekend, the first few days before school started, info fair at Red square and enough time to like hang out with your roommate and get to know them. Meet people in your dorm and stuff. You can't really repeat that but it was definitely the most influential on me.

I had a fear — who am I going to eat dinner with, and what if I don't like my roommate? I think I remember, I don't know what that was for but there was some BBQ on the lot, and like certain things here and there so I didn't feel like I was sitting in my room alone. That was a big fear of mine. I always wanted to be doing something so that was really helpful, definitely.

Late Nights and Underground Coffeehouse

Students say that Late Nights are fun activities where they can meet and to get to know each other.

I went to the Late Night at the Rec Center... that was the first weekend...

So did I.

Me too.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

That was pretty fun. It was awkward sometimes because it was filled with people that you didn't really know and if I say hi, what do I do? It was so fun to go and hang out, and also I live in Fairhaven and they put on a dance and I went to that.

(OSA/RA) The Rec. Center Late Night was definitely well attended. There were so many students and they were just getting to know each other, and it was really cool to see them all in a big group, talking as fast as they can because they are getting to know people. Even coming from Birnam wood, we had a lot of transfer students who didn't know a lot of people, it was really good to bring them there because then we had activities where we could hang out and talk.

(OSA/RA) It's good to have an alternative atmosphere for late night activities especially if you're a minor and you're looking for things to do...It also provides a lot of

opportunities to get information about clubs that are tabling there or putting on certain activities. They are just really fun overall. You get to meet a lot of people, win prizes and sing karaoke.

Students want to be in intimate settings where they can make more personal connections.

Connection. I think the students are asking for that. The focus group I did with students about why you didn't go to Late Night was, "I thought it was a huge concert and I want to be in an intimate setting where I can hang out with just a few people," and that was important for them and leads to their need to meet new people. That was an important piece for them.

The Underground Coffeehouse is another fun venue where students can meet each other and hang out. More publicity should be provided.

What I was actually surprised about is that Underground Coffeehouse, like open mic nights and the concerts they have on Wednesdays and Fridays. I was surprised at how much I enjoyed the atmosphere. I don't know if that's a program but those concerts I really enjoyed. I've been to so many of those and I am surprised because I didn't really hear about any of them. I kind of stumbled upon it by surprise.

High Street Music Festival

For one student it was the High Street Music festival that helped him feel connected to Western.

The High Street Music festival, definitely. Like all festivals of any sort you get a lot of people outside doing things like a birthday celebration...I spent all day there—I thought it was so much fun. And anyone can go. It's not dorm affiliated necessarily but encouraged definitely. People from off-campus come; people in the community come and I think that definitely helps, when you feel more like I'm not doing this just because someone told me to—it's about the community feeling...

Sports/Recreation

One student met people by participating in cross country camp, and another met people by working out at the gym.

I actually was here before everyone else because I did cross country, so I went to cross country camp, and I was in Bellingham so I already got to meet some older kids and kind of got my college jitters taken care of before the school actually started...

For me it was going to the gym all the time. I love the gym here... I spent an hour and half there every day and I used to work out at home a lot and everything, so it will help me get out and meet people more just by being out where others are working out, doing the same sort of things.

Lectures/Speakers

The Distinguished Lecture Series and other speakers captured the interest of some students.

I went to the Distinguished Lecture Series. They bring in people. I am sure you know about it. Like they brought in the teacher of the year and he was phenomenal, he did a really great speech. And also I just went to a lot of the speaking events. And Rita Dove came and I went and saw her and who was that girl? Her show was like tractors--Reva Huston--That was so good.

Just recently I went and saw the General talk about genocide, and it was kind of sad but good. And events like those speak to my interest more— the more intellectual events I guess. I like those more than like, “hey come play the new roomy game”. Although I did go do that and it was fun but I enjoyed myself at the speakers more.

The reason why I go to them is because my professors usually recommend it or say something about it. So if I’m interested in the class I will probably go and listen to the speaker or something because I believe my professor. Like, if he’s going to go then maybe I will go too.

I didn’t go to any of the distinguished lecture series but I ran into a women’s awareness week that just happened and I went and saw a random speaker for random awareness week, and the ESC puts on regular speakers here and there so I’ve gone to some of those, which I thought were really interesting.

Small Groups

Another way students make connections is through participation in small classes or small group activities.

For me it was, I am taking classical Greek language and Diane Johnson is the best professor...In the first week of school, she talked about being a Kappa, which is the classical languages club ... and that class is still my smallest class. So I’ve got to know everyone, it was really cool because all of us got to pick Greek names and so like my first friends outside my suite were in that class. So joining the delta-beta-kappa club got me into how our club system works... We do a lot of group activities and it brought me closer to the professor and to the kids in my class. It’s one of those series classes, so it’s starts out 101 and now I am in 103, and the same group of people started 201 and then 203. I think that really just made me not shy and got me into the innards of college club life. It was really cool.

Several things

One student says *several things* have helped to make her feel connected—including personal contact from Summerstart people, Late Night at the Recreation Center, participation in Hall Counsel, and talking with people in her classes.

I think right off the bat, the fact that the orientation people called us right before Summerstart and said, hey, we're really excited that you're coming and if you have any questions... That was like, god, they want me there! There's a real person talking to me on the phone right now that made me feel connected. And then, I agree the Rec. center definitely made me feel connected. Just going, it's really fun. It's always something to do with your friends...I think the dining center too because you're kind of getting into a routine of who you eat with and that makes you feel connected, knowing that there are your friends that you meet. You're all going to go to the dinner at the same time and probably sit at the same table. It's like okay, I've got that. It's cool. We tried to do themes in hall counsel so it's always really interesting to see people dress up as. Well now it's kind of dwindling because everybody is kind of just getting into the summer...But I think it's kind of fun so I like to do that. And I met a lot of people instantly that way. Hall counsel is a great way to meet people...And then just being talkative in class and talking to the people around me. Even in a 300 person class, I made a friend first quarter...We were sitting next to each other, both kind of like what am I doing? ... So we sat next to each other every day and it was really nice to have somebody there. Just to be social.

FIGS AND MAKING CONNECTIONS

OSA's and RA's say that FIGS are a nice way to make connections and to build solid relationships.

I was in a FIG and it was really nice to have your schedule taking care of, and that's really how I met a lot of people...because they also let you know this person lives in your hallway and they are also in the same FIG as you. And I thought that was really helpful so that we had something in common and we could study together.

My favorite was during spring quarter ...I had a group of tight people that I had most of my classes with, so that gave me a chance to make really solid relationships ...I took other classes with my FIG as well so I was still able to meet some people from other classes.

I took FIG too and I think overall the experience was really good. I had communication 101 and we were broken down to a smaller group of just 10, and it was nice to know those 10 people who were almost in all of my classes. The only down part was my seminar teacher. The teacher was not a very people person. She was really intimidating so we dreaded going to our seminar just because she was really scary. But it was nice to know that at least I had 10 friends with me. I really liked having the same 10 people in my fig. It was really nice to make this connection and I see those people still on campus now and we talk, and they are people who I've know for the past 3 years.

Some suggest that FIGS would be more effective if they were tied to housing—communities of people with common interests.

I think it would be more effective if they tried to group together in housing. Like if parts of campus would like have just one community of people who were taking this major or interested in this subject. I don't know if there is that many people who are even enrolled in FIGs to fill a residence hall but...it would help to study, form study groups, and make bigger connections because you're going through the exact same experiences.

Actually a stack in Fairhaven and Ridgeway Delta are designated as FIG residence halls. And that maybe just this year, it may rotate each year but I know for this coming year it's stacks in Fairhaven and Delta.

One student is sorry that she hasn't participated in a FIG because of the connections she could have made.

I wish I had been to a FIG...that would have been better for making connections, meeting more people...

On the other hand, one student is glad she didn't take a FIG. She believes that by taking other classes, she had a lot more freedom to meet people from all over campus.

...You might not get as many connections if it's so focused on, "here is your FIG and now your FIG is living in this hall with all these other FIGS and now you're never going to the Ridge because your FIG is here." I mean, I don't know if that's how it worked. To me I would feel like I was in some sort of an academic military. I am really glad that I didn't take a FIG when I was a freshman because I felt like I had a lot more freedom than my friends who were in FIGS and I met a lot of people from all parts of campus that were taking other classes, and that's how I picked my classes for winter and spring...because someone over here was in this class and so they said it was neat and now I'm taking it. I'm not really sure I would have gotten that if I were in a FIG or surrounded by people who were in other FIGs.

Further reporting is available on the topic of FIGS. Contact the Office of Survey Research.

SERVICE LEARNING

Service learning is a valuable method for engaging students socially *and* academically. It's also a way for students to build connections for the future.

It's more than an education. This is part of their life. I always tell them they're on two tracks. They complete their degree but at the same time they need to be thinking about what they're going to do beyond their degree. So, service learning opportunities, internships, career fairs—even if they're a freshman its worth attending and using those resources. We hear those stories all the time sitting in the TLA discussions and in other meetings where students say I wish I would have known about this when I first got here. And a lot of that information is presented to them but they have to hear it again and again and again before they can make that connection of what it means to them... you want be able to demonstrate that you have an interest in this area and it's a way to network and maybe even build connections, future connections, career connections. So

we try to get them involved with service learning organizations, career center, and outside places like Whatcom Volunteer Center because they're kind of the hub of non-profits and volunteer organizations where they can get some additional experience.

The ESC puts on several events for the university which involve student leadership. Students learn about themselves and their culture, and they develop valuable transferable skills.

Within the ESC students are putting on events for the university...like the Low rider show, luau, Martin Luther King Jr. celebration, Malcolm X celebration... they're providing a tremendous service for the university, the whole diversity type thing, the contribution stuff. They also have an opportunity to get credit for it. It's kind of like it's a service learning project. We had students put on the heritage dinner this past Saturday, and they're getting credit for it. And I think that's a real bonus. I mean they put on a dinner that it hasn't been done before at the university. Imagine all the hoops and hoopla you had to jump through, all the paperwork you had to fill out. Now tell me where are they going to learn that in a classroom? And they are learning an incredible amount about themselves and about their culture.

It's our job as professionals to teach them, how are those transferable skills? How can you use those skills in any kind of job? And that's a major comment when we talk with alumni. We always hear, "I don't use anything in my degree in my job—we use the stuff that I learned from the ethnic student center."...Leadership skills.

The Center for Service Learning offers several opportunities for students to do direct service in the community.

At the center for service learning...we do events that are geared towards first year students in collaboration with new student services...we begin with a social change fair, the chance for change, at the beginning of the year, to target those students and promote that ethic of service...then also at that fair we promote make a difference day, which is a nation wide day where they do direct service in the community. And in winter quarter is a Martin Luther King book drive and read-in day, and we train Western students to read to children, multicultural diversity books on Martin Luther King Jr. day. Then we have Earth day, another direct service day where we worked with five or six parks this year.

Hands-on learning helps students to succeed academically, because it is a more engaged way of learning. Students are also exposed to a variety of career choices.

The Center for Service Learning has a lot of stories. I can't connect them necessarily to first year students but as a model, and I think a more engaged way of learning, that it inherently is successful for especially non-traditional students. I recently had a student disclose to me that he was ADD and medicated and he's a graduating senior and he just discovered service learning this year. He said "why didn't I know about this, why didn't I know about this when I was a freshman?" Because he felt that it was the first time he could succeed because it's hands-on learning. He was able to engage more of his senses and kinesthetically. Hands-on learning also exposes students to career choices that they

wouldn't know about otherwise, and they work in small groups so they have to develop leadership skills and deal with small group dynamics. They have to take ownership for their own learning. They often times hate, and don't want to do it. It's extra work and they want everything handed to them; so within that little bit of messiness I believe is where their learning takes place. So just as a model I think it really needs to be more a part of how students learn here, so that the ones who fall through the cracks can be more successful.

BALANCING ACTIVITIES AND ACADEMICS

It can be a challenge for students to balance activities and academics. Many students need help developing time management skills. The ESC says this is their biggest struggle.

I think that's our biggest struggle—that students become so involved in the organization (ESC) that it's the number one priority and academics is number two...So we try to intervene so that they're not heading off in the wrong direction. It's a passion, versus the GUR's. I need to have—I have a purpose now. And I think it's a tremendous struggle.

Their conflict is wow, I have this opportunity...I can be anything within my culture on this campus and that's what we really aim for— to be who you are on this campus, bring it to this campus and that's a wonderful thing...and they're doing it for themselves...but it conflicts at times with how to balance that with academics. So you're struggling sometimes. The community action type stuff conflicts with the university policy.

First generation students or students who are older..... they come here and have to relearn everything— time management, note taking, test taking skills, not having a structure of having somebody who can look at your papers, look at what you're doing or help you monitor your activities and work the system for you...So helping those students just kind of piece that out and do the time management and prioritize, balance academics with events they're currently involved with. It's a huge challenge for students, especially with all the other things going on that we don't even see.

Some students don't get involved in clubs or activities because they don't have the time. So they may feel they are missing out.

I felt like there was so much that I wanted to do and I couldn't do it all. So I thought I was missing on a lot because I was like, oh I am really tired and I really want to go but I think I will just take a nap instead. There's a lot of going and a lot of people from different organizations like at the info fair, it's like this and this and this and I'm like okay, okay, okay, that sounds like fun. It was definitely kind of overwhelming because there is so much to do within your dorm and within the clubs and on campus that I think I almost involved myself too much at first.

I know I'd really like to be more involved in clubs but I work too much, so I usually can't go.

I'm just almost always busy like we frequently have rehearsals and master classes and lessons and stuff in the evenings, and music and theater and stuff. So I just don't really get to do a lot at Western.

WESTERN READS

According to discussion facilitators, the purpose of the Western Reads program is to provide an opportunity for new students to make connections and to become academically engaged.

One of the most important goals...was basically making some connections on campus for students who are just coming in. That was just a real fundamental exposure to programs, services, faculty ...in a fairly informal setting where they're sitting around in a group and having a conversation.

Choosing a book that would build community between and among the students so the topic of it was something that would be a draw... it could draw people together because of their own perspectives, whether it was a high school experience, or why they were here, what they intended to do in terms of focusing as a major or where they're going to go this year...it all kind of tied together.

I would add ...something around an introduction to the intellectual life of the mind—so seeing college as an intellectual experience—and by choosing a book and having conversations about it, the idea that it would be an introduction to college that wasn't just a social thing, but a here's what college is about, ideas and books.

It's also a matter of relieving or reducing some of the anxiety new students might have in terms of the image of a professor, humanizing them, and letting them know that we're here for them so that they would at least have one professor that they knew that they could come and talk to throughout the rest of the year...In my case several of the people that were in the discussion groups have come by the office or talked to me strolling across red square so it served that purpose to some extent.

This student enjoyed her discussion group and it helped her to feel comfortable academically.

Western reads, I actually really enjoyed. I think the reason why I liked it so much is because it was before school started so I went with a roommate and some other people and we were discussing this with a professor. I don't know who she is, I haven't seen her since but she was awesome. She was really friendly and our RAs were there and we were all very into it. So I think my experience was different. And I think that made me a little more comfortable for academics here. I did have a fear coming here that I didn't know how prepared I was going to be intellectually compared to everyone else...And so it was nice to go and to feel comfortable enough to say what was on my mind as far as reading an academic thing..

Other students read the book and enjoyed it.

I actually liked the book. We read it in my AP English class. So that was pretty cool. So when I got it in the mail, it was pretty cool. I just read it again.

I didn't have anything else to read and I really like to read so I've read it and I really liked it. But when I first got it, I guess at summerstart, I heard from a few people that it was really dumb and they didn't like it. But I really liked it, although I can see why you wouldn't. And I am glad I did and we're discussing it in English now.

I thought it was good to give those books out because I know a lot of people who read it. So you wonder if they did read them at all, and they're like, oh yeah I read that book. I was like, really?

Facilitators say that during their discussion sessions, students asked practical questions about college life. It appears that this was an unexpected outcome, yet it's an aspect of the program that was successful because students were able to make connections and get answers they needed.

My students began to ask practical kind of questions, not just about access to resources, but how to be successful students, what problems to anticipate.

I had to help prepare them for kind of the long haul at Western; for asking about the teachers that people find engaging and that people find interesting to be with in the programs so that students just get a little advice on what to do if they feel a little bit lost in the shuffle.

They wanted to know about being at Western and what's going to happen, how I'm going to be treated, what kind of classes am I going to have?

They used a lot of their high school background and whether this experience at the university would be different from that, and that took us into wondering about what college life was going to be like, and where is this, and how do I do that, and kind of a little general advising.

Some of these questions about college life may be a natural outcome of the book, *Curious Incident of the Dog*....

I asked whether or not they thought Christopher would be successful at college. And practically all of them said no because of the social challenges, so it seemed like they were aware of what was going to be involved with college in terms of social challenges they didn't seem to get into the academic stuff so much. They were real clear that Christopher wouldn't cut it.

What students are actually experiencing in those first few days is moving into dorms, and meeting roommates, and where's the Rec. center, and did I bring the right clothes...its that student life and engagement and so where is the draw for students to go to a book

discussion group? How do you merge those in a way so students would like to go to that conversation? —because not only is it about this book that is engaging intellectually, but it's a chance to actually find out about some things that are so incredibly relevant in those first few days.

Discussion facilitators were disappointed with the low attendance.

I remember thinking about how disappointed I was in the small participation that I had. We eventually joined two groups, but even combining the two groups we had two students in the first one two dorm resident advisors and then five in the second session that we held with another dorm advisor.

The big surprise was dealing with much smaller groups than we'd anticipated and how long to wait for people to show up. For example, I had colleagues who had no one show up and I had twelve students or so, so my sessions were bigger than most.

OSAs and RAs believe that interest was low because students have so much to do in the first few weeks of college.

I felt like the attendance was really low and there just wasn't enough interest from students. There is certainly a lot of in the year for them to do that. Getting your books, running to your classes.

I didn't go... because it was given to us during the first few weeks in college when we're already so busy with everything.

I know from my community the attendance was fairly low and the interest was fairly low from our students too and I am pretty sure that it's just because in the those first few days students are still getting oriented with the hall and the town and with their new surrounding that what's optional is optional.

Nobody went from Birnam Wood. Actually Birnam Wood was completely left out it, which was interesting because we had a lot of transfer students and we also had a couple of first year students. But for some reason we weren't invited initially to one of the discussions so that they had to have a special one for Birnam Wood and then nobody went.

Students say they were not motivated to read the book or to attend the discussion sessions, in part because it was optional and there wasn't an incentive.

I don't think anyone went if they didn't read the book since it was an optional thing. I mean, if you didn't read there was no point in going. You're just going to sit like there for like an hour and a half...at least the groups that I was a part of. I would say there were maybe 3 groups with about 12 people each... So somewhere around 30 to 40 people maybe but I'm from a hall that's traditionally much more involved and more like first year student hall traditionally.

What's the incentive? I think a lot of people aren't very motivated to go to just the discussion, a book discussion. I think if it was more integrated into something that they already have to do anyways, there might be more motivation to read it.

It might help to have Western Reads integrated into the first year curriculum.

I think that, if they integrated that more into maybe first year curriculum, it would be more motivating to read it. if we said you're going to have to read this and talk about it in English 101, then it might be more motivating for them to read before they come...like this is going to be an important thing for them to use once they get there. Otherwise, it feels like, why should I even read it.

During Summerstart, OSA's told students that discussion groups would provide a chance to make connections with students and faculty.

We introduced the book to most of the freshmen and transfer students at Summerstart and we said this will be a conversation starter for you and you meeting new people and stuff like that. You will be able to meet people when you go to the discussion groups. It was definitely a part that we emphasized.

However, this really didn't happen in some groups.

I know, in my group, I didn't feel like there was a ton of meeting people going on. There was a little bit of the classroom setting for talking about the book in an English class. But I had 4 of my residents come and they've been hanging out together already. They all came as a group and left as a group, and I don't think they really connected with anybody else at the discussion group.

The only thing I really remember from my discussion was that one person dominated the whole discussion and I don't think the facilitators did a very good job of facilitating...one gentleman spoke almost the entire hour, however long...they kind of asked questions, but once they asked, he was the first one to speak up and then no one else really... it's hard your first or second day to count on someone you don't know. That doesn't even happen in classrooms, some social thing that where you're kind of out on an island for the most part.

Part of the problem with the program may be that students aren't clear about what the program is supposed to accomplish. RA's are also not clear.

The trick of the matter is that I don't know necessarily that we as RAs even know what the purpose of the program is. No one ever really told us. Everything we're telling you is what we guessed the purpose is and because of that it's really hard for us to say it went really well or it went really poorly. Because if the purpose was to get people out and seeing the campus and just getting their feet wet, then I think it did. But if it the purpose is to get people into a real interesting discussion and having everyone on the same level

as far as we all read this book, then I think it failed. I don't know what the purpose is necessarily.

The program may not work the best because students would rather do something fun and social rather than something academic.

I think if I had to pick something that was not working the best, I would probably say Western Reads just because I don't think it's something that the students are as interested in and it feels almost like going to school more...like having to read and then discuss. It's like going to another class or something versus something like an ethnic student center activity, which is having fun and meeting other people.

Students also say they'd rather read, and not have to discuss.

I think it's not like in the past where colleges had students really read books and then talk about what the author meant and the character analysis. I think the trend more now is just straight away from that. Mentally, I'm pretty sure, the people would just rather read and not discuss it. I mean, they are kind of tired of having to read between the lines.

People sort of lose the reading for fun thing once they hit college. And if you don't read for fun, you actually lose that, you lose the ability. You have to actually work to pick it up again. So, you know, everyone has all of these text books that they had to read. So it's just like okay, I just want to do something fun and I don't want to have to think too deeply through this. I just want to sit down with a mug of tea, and just read for a while.

On the other hand, students suggest that the book choice could make a difference. The book should be relevant and current, and even controversial.

It was a smart decision to choose that book because it is so easy to read. So in fact, you've got a lot of people to read it. But it doesn't really work because it's a light fiction. If you want to have something for people to discuss it should have been non fiction or something more contemporary...

Something political.

Something more with depth that people would take to a book club.

Something that more people care about, that want to know more about or want to hear what other people think about. But it's like, I don't really care what people think about autism, so why I would I want to go to a discussion.

A collection of short stories might be good just because it's easier, you can pick them up, you can pick the book up and then you can put it down and you can come back to it later.

Something that everyone knows. Something we can relate to. Like war.

Lots of students say something like Michael Moore would get people rallied up... People would want to come and talk about it because there would be people who are completely against him and people who are totally supportive... it's really controversial and really current. Like you read a fictional light book about autism and you're not going to get everyone's attention but a book like "stupid white men", it catches people's interest and they are going to want to talk about it.

I don't know if a Michael Moore book would be the best choice because yes, it is controversial but I don't know if it would make sense to go to that extreme... I was thinking of something along the lines of something that could be translated as political but like a memoir. Maybe Tim O'Ryan or something like that. I don't know if you want to go more current, maybe more from the Iraq war but that also has underlying psychological, sociological, and maybe even mathematical messages behind it.

Yeah, but if it's too political, people aren't going to read it because some people are just going to go, I'm sick of politics, let me read something fun. There is that fine line you have to walk.

I think anything really that's dealing with current political or social kinds of issues would get a lot more people's attention.

You know, we're at college. We want to change the world.

Further reporting is available on the topic of Western Reads. Contact the Office of Survey Research.

STUDENTS COMMENTS ABOUT PROGRAMMING

We asked students to give us any additional comments they might have about programming for new students. First, they say Western's campus is divided into three different parts.

When I came up here, I was told north campus is for kids who haven't quite left high school or whatever and the Ridge is the party area, and Fairhaven is for all the hippies.

That's exactly what I got. There are very distinct sections.

Geographically it's hard...we're a long campus. It's unusual.

North campus is like the Christian coalition kind of thing—conservative. It feels like the farther you move down campus, the more open minded it gets. In a weird way it's true. There are a lot of kids, not the majority, but there are kids on north campus that are really open minded and liberal and there are, trust me, kids in Fairhaven that are really super conservative and scary like that. But just in general, it seems to be true. Then I go to the Ridge and everybody is partying. And I'd go up there on Saturday night and I'd see people hanging out their windows drunk, and I was like oh my god, it is ridiculous. So it's true, as stereotypical as they are.

Students who live on the ridge say they are not interested in new student services.

I live on the Ridge and it's a much different living situation than in the dorms down here on North campus. I guess when you live in the hallway type dorms, everyone is more centrally located. And living on the Ridge is more of an independent lifestyle and the general mood or feeling of that area, people aren't interested in the new student services and I think a lot of money was wasted.

I'd say, my first quarter was mostly based on the people I was with and on the places we'd go, not really anything with the school. I think most of us... we go off campus.

On the Ridge, there was very poor attendance (for activities). Not many people... The dances, any of the activities they put, all the night time stuff in the lounges. Couple of people showed up to any of them. One of my suite mates was on the student council board for the Ridge and he just said they were spending thousands of dollars on things that very few people showed up for and while I do see the significance of it for the dorms on North campus and possibly Fairhaven, on the Ridge it's a waste of money because the people who live up there don't want to go.

Fairhaven students feel cut off from the rest of campus, and some would like to be more involved.

Living in Fairhaven, I live on South Campus... we don't even hear about any events. It totally feels like we're cut off ... I never even hear about any of the events on campus. I don't know about the Ridge but it really feels like south campus is cut off from the rest of the campus a lot of the time. So it would be nice if people from north campus would just put up some posters down there or something. It would be nice to be more involved with the main campus.

On the other hand, some Fairhaven students would rather not make the trek to main campus.

I was dating a guy who lived in Fairhaven and when I was over there it was a completely different world... it's very different when you're living right next to where there are billboards everywhere about events going on. You're in the same place. You don't have to make a trek, like if you live in Fairhaven, to come over for an event that's going to be an hour or two hours and then go back home. A lot of people don't want to make that trek. But in Edens hall, we always have bulletins everywhere about things going on that are a 2 minute walk away, so I think people are more likely to go to them and be more interested...

Students living on North Campus are more likely to know what's going on, and they're more likely to attend.

We're right next to the VU, the North side of campus so everyone I guess, Mathes, Nash, Hagginson and Edens know what's going on.

There are posters all over red square and Higginson and Mathis and Nash, so I always

know what's going on in the VU and stuff. But if you're at the Ridge or Fairhaven, unless you come down here, you're not going to know what's going on in the multipurpose room and things like that.

Accordingly, one student believes the majority of funding should go to North Campus.

There are all 3 different parts of campus having their own stuff going on. And I think that if money were to be allocated, it should be proportionate to the people who live there. I think North campus deserves probably the majority of the money.

Overall, students say Western should work at uniting the campus.

I think Western needs to work at uniting like the north campus and the south campus because right now, if I had to identify with something, I would be like yeah, I am from south campus if somebody asked me.

I knew a girl and she told me the exact same thing. She said if you go to Fairhaven, you are going to be a little isolated. Western definitely needs to work on uniting the entire campus. It can't be divided anymore.

I feel like in a weird way, I thought when I came here, there would be like a lot more school spirit...it really feels like Western is so split up in certain ways. There is not really one unifying theme for the whole university. So maybe concert holidays, like the whole campus got involved in something...and for Halloween the whole campus was decorated the same way.

Students are looking for a sense of community, a whole community.

I really think it is important to include the whole campus and not just have the freshmen just meeting freshmen. We need to meet sophomores, and juniors, and seniors too. We need to be involved in the whole campus not just freshmen.

It is important for the upper classmen to realize that they need to meet the younger classmen. It's all part of having a sense of community.