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Western Experience Survey

Jacqueline M. Andrieu-Parker
Western Washington University

Gina S. Gould
Western Washington University

Joseph E. Trimble
Western Washington University

Gary (Gary Russell) McKinney
Western Washington University

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Report 1992-05: Western Experience Survey

This report examined the undergraduate student experience at Western, with special attention paid to comparing this experience by gender. The survey form used was adapted from one developed and used by Princeton University in 1990.

An overwhelming majority of the sample, male and female, were satisfied to very satisfied with their overall Western experience (93.9%). Most other areas of inquiry also showed high levels of satisfaction (75% or more). One area of inquiry--opportunities for internships, practicums, etc.--had a less high level of satisfaction (64.5%), although in this area particularly student wishes and departmental offerings are often contentious. By comparison, two areas of inquiry had low levels of student satisfaction: only 52.2% of students were satisfied with academic advising; only 49.0% were satisfied with career advising.

Response patterns by gender were both evident and intriguing. The following is a sample culled from the report: 1) Higher percentages of males had witnessed or experienced alcohol or other drug abuse, while, conversely, a higher percentage of females perceived the issue as a problem; 2) A disproportionately higher percentage of females regarded eating disorders as a problem at Western, yet females and males reported having personally experienced or witnessed eating disorders in relatively equal percentages. Thus males, it would seem, although nearly equally aware of the issue, don't nearly as often perceive it as a problem; and 3) Females were much more likely than males to participate in programs on sexual harassment or assault, eating disorders, relationships, and sex roles.

Given Western's unique history of educating women (unlike many other colleges and universities, there has never been a Western without women students and staff), perhaps it is not surprising that women were quite satisfied with their overall Western experience and report high levels of enjoyment of their classes. Two particular exceptions, however,

were noted: 1) Twice as many females as males reported that they almost always or often felt inhibited to participate in class; and 2) While students felt that faculty were interested in their academic experience, they did not feel faculty were interested in their non-academic experiences. (Research has indicated that a positive relationship, both in and out of the classroom, between an individual student and that student's instructor is of particular importance to women entering non-traditional fields, and re-entry women.)