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Where Western Students Live and Study

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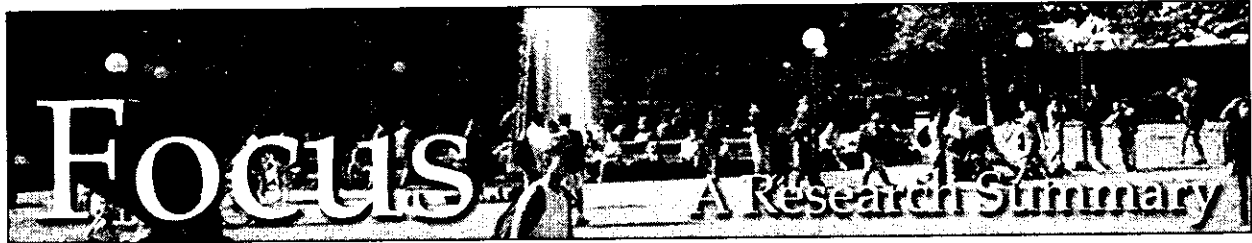
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Where Western Students Live and Study

Prepared by Gary McKinney, Carl Simpson, and Linda Clark

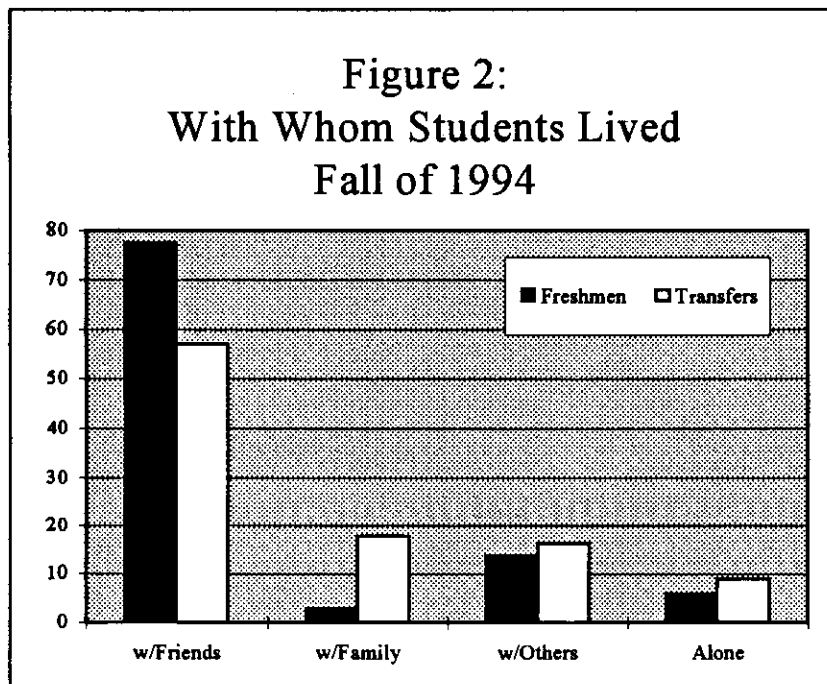
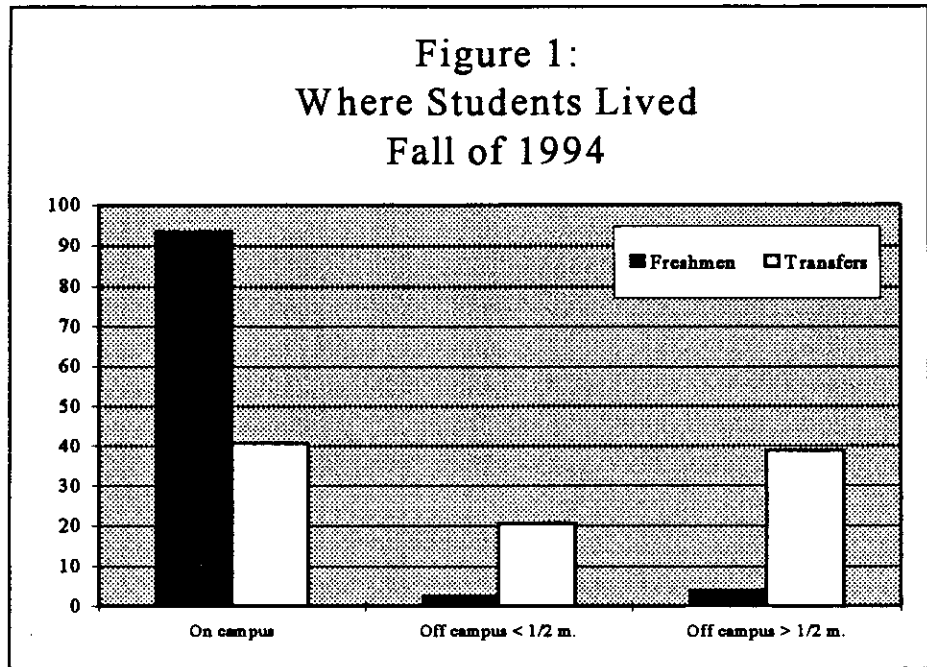
During fall quarter, 1994, the Office of Survey Research conducted a telephone survey of in-coming freshmen and new transfers. A total of 322 freshmen and 270 new transfers participated. Among the survey's items, students were asked to describe the courses in which they were registered, as well as their use of and satisfaction with academic advising for their major, their transition to Western, and their living and studying arrangements. The topic of this issue of Focus is where students live and study, and their levels of satisfaction with those living and studying conditions.

Questions with reference to living and studying conditions were included in the survey at the request of the Provost, who was concerned about quietude—a universally inherent problem associated with the kind of dense living conditions found in college residence halls. The goals of this modest exploration were to learn where Western students do most of their studying, to gauge

whether students living in residence halls and elsewhere find their rooms adequate places to study, and to learn how much of students' studying occurs in their rooms as opposed to other buildings on campus. The study made little attempt to diagnose reasons why studying areas are or are not satisfactory and offers no advice for remediation. Nor does the study address the myriad of programs offered by residences. The only goal was to estimate how satisfactory study arrangements seem to be for Western's in-coming students.

Findings for this brief study were taken from students who entered Western for the first time (as in-coming freshmen and new transfers) in the fall of 1994. It is a fact of residence hall life that many students move from dorm to dorm, especially after their first quarter at Western. Thus the information provided in this study should be viewed as a statistical "snapshot" of conditions and attitudes of first-time Western students in the fall.

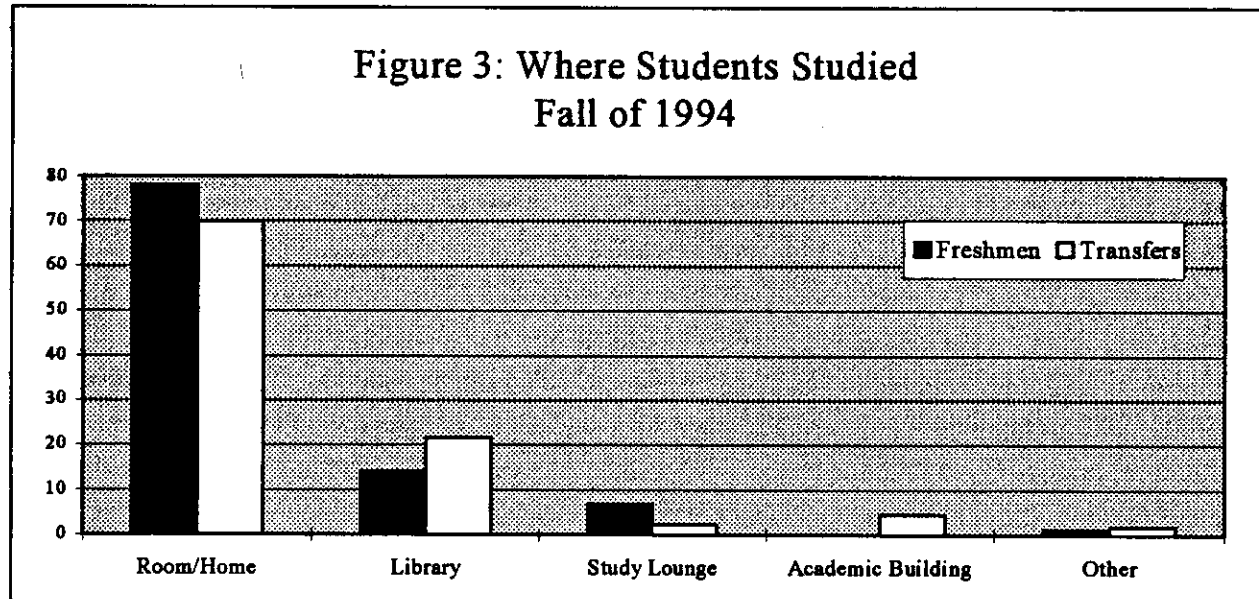
First-time, incoming freshmen lived primarily on-campus (93.5%). Less than half that many new transfers lived on campus (40.7%). Nearly an equal number of transfers lived further than one-half mile from campus (38.8%). About one-fifth of transfers lived within one-half mile of campus (20.5%).



Most freshmen (77.5%) and a majority of transfers (57.1%) lived with friends. Some new transfers (17.7%), but few freshmen (2.9%) lived with family. About the same percentage of freshmen and new transfers lived with people who were neither family nor friends, so-called "others" in the survey (freshmen = 13.7%; transfers = 16.2%). Few freshmen or new transfers lived alone (freshmen = 6.0%; transfers = 9.0%).

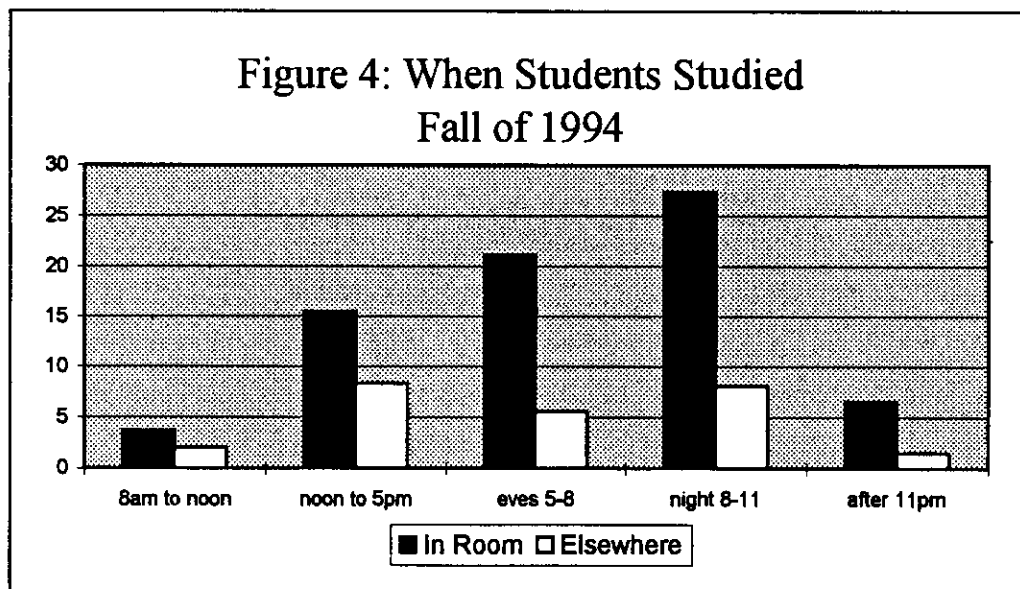
Over three-quarters of freshmen (78.0%) and nearly three-quarters of new transfers (68.9%) did most of their studying in their rooms. New transfers were slightly more likely than freshmen to study in the library (21.6% of new transfers versus 14.0% of freshmen). Also, some freshmen studied in the study lounges in their dorms (6.8%), while some new transfers studied in academic buildings (4.5%).

Figure 3: Where Students Studied
Fall of 1994

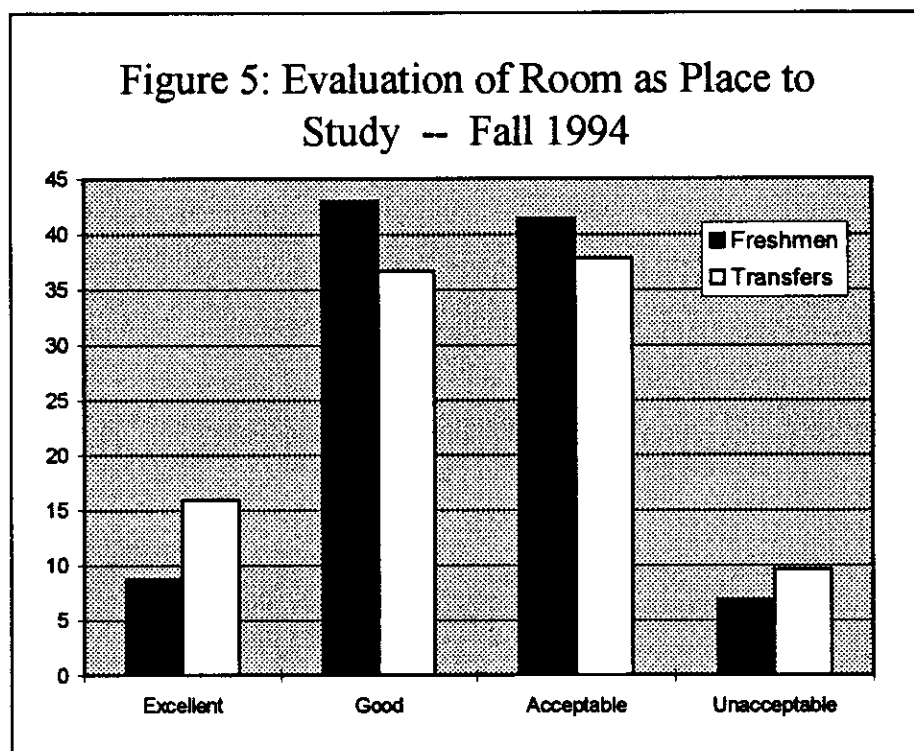


Students studied most often in their rooms, but when they did study elsewhere, it was usually between noon to 5 p.m., or 8 to 11 p.m. Very few students studied before noon or after 11 p.m. The peak study time of the day was between 8 to 11 p.m., with 27.4% of students studying in their room and another 8.1% studying elsewhere.

Figure 4: When Students Studied
Fall of 1994



Whether a freshman or new transfer, about half the survey respondents considered their rooms an “excellent” or “good” place to study (51.7% of freshmen; 52.6% of transfers). Another 41.4% of freshmen and 37.8% of new transfers rated their rooms as “acceptable” places to study, while only 6.9% of freshmen and 9.6% of new transfers rated their rooms as “unacceptable” places to study.

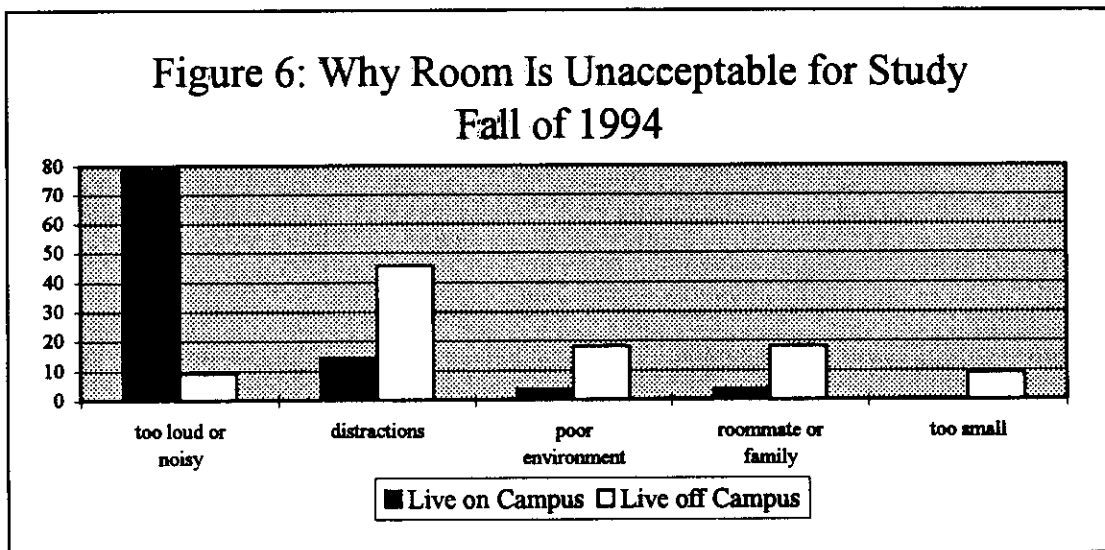


While the finding that nearly half of new students viewed their rooms less than “good” places to study could be seen as damning with faint praise, the finding that more than 90% viewed their rooms “acceptable” is reassuring given the low expectations with which one must approach the question. Most of these students were either living on their own for the first time, or living in high density university residences, or both. While the findings indicate room for improvement, they are at the same time more reassuring than might have been expected.



Of students indicating their room was “unacceptable” for study (47 out of the overall total of 592 freshmen and new transfers), the reason most frequently cited by students *living on campus* was “too noisy/loud” (78.6%), while the reason most frequently cited by students *living off campus* was “distractions” (45.5%). (See Figure 6.) One way to gauge the effect of dense living on students’ perception of their rooms as a place to study can be found in the following data: the percentage of new transfers rating their room an “excellent” place to study increased the further away from campus they lived: *on-campus* = 6.4%, *a half-mile or less from campus* = 10.9%, and *farther than a half-mile from campus* = 28.8%. On-campus accommodations no doubt had the highest density of population; accommodations within a half-mile of campus (more than likely

apartments in a relatively populated near-campus complex) had a slightly less density of population; while accommodations farther than a half-a-mile from campus had the lowest population density. (See Figure 6.)



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This modest study would seem to indicate that given the difficult nature of providing quietude to a relatively densely-packed group of young people--many of whom are still teenagers living away from home for the first time--Western is doing well. This observation is based on the finding that 93.1% of freshmen rated their room at minimum an "acceptable" place to study. Conversely, only 6.9% of freshmen--nearly all of whom live in campus residence halls--found their rooms "unacceptable" for study. While this study did not examine options for improvement, one serendipitous finding is worth highlighting in conclusion. During the period the survey was conducted, most of one residence hall, Edens Hall, was designated as substance free and "quiet." When evaluations of rooms as places to study were compared by residence hall, 30.8% of Edens Hall residents indicated their rooms were an "excellent" place to study. For all other residence halls, the highest percentage was 9.1%. While comparisons between Edens and other halls is complicated by the fact that much of Edens was new and also that it is a smaller hall than most, findings nevertheless suggest the possibility that residence policy and student selection may be able to affect the residence atmosphere.

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