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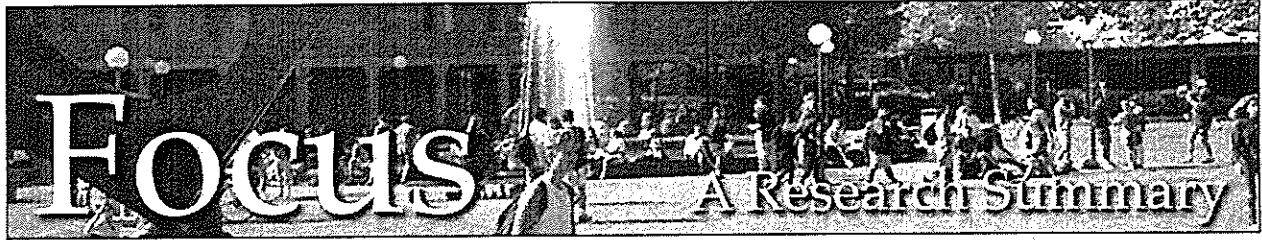
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## The 1995 Senior Survey: A Longitudinal Study of 1991 Freshmen

Prepared by Gary R. McKinney and Joseph E. Trimble

During the spring, 1995, Western students who had taken the fall, 1991, Freshman Survey (technically, the Cooperative Institutional Research Program Student Information Survey) were sent a follow-up questionnaire, the College Student Survey (CSS)--referred to in this report as the Senior Survey. *(As with the CIRP Survey, the CSS instrument was developed by the Higher Education Research Institute, a part of the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Los Angeles.)* The Senior Survey was designed both to parallel the Freshman Survey, and to supply elemental information on college students after they have attended an institution of higher education for a predetermined period of time, usually two or four years after entering.

The administration of the Senior Survey in the spring of 1995 was the second time the survey had been administered at Western; it was first used in the spring of 1993, when students who had taken the Freshman Survey in 1989 were surveyed. When findings warrant it, comparisons between the 1993 and 1995 cohorts will be made, though overall the differences were rather minimal.

### DEMOGRAPHICS

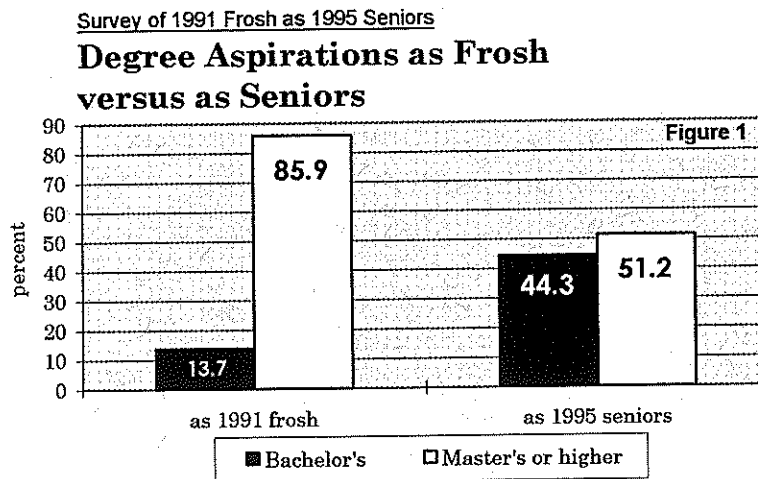
In the spring of 1995 the Office of Institutional Assessment and Testing (OIAT) matched 689 currently enrolled students who had taken the Freshman Survey in the fall of 1991. Senior Survey questionnaires were mailed to those students. The final tally of completed survey forms was 304, a response rate of 44.1%.

In 1991, the gender ratio for the entire entering freshman class was 57.6% females and 42.3% males; the gender ratio for the 1991 Freshman Survey was 61.0% females and 39.0% males. The gender ratio for the 1995 Senior Survey was 74.0% females versus 26.0% males. Most respondents listed their ethnicity as White/Caucasian (93.8%); most were between the ages of 22-23 (96.7%); and most reported having earned undergraduate grades that fell in the B to A-range (80.2%). Thus, demographically, survey respondents were mostly white, 22-23 year-old

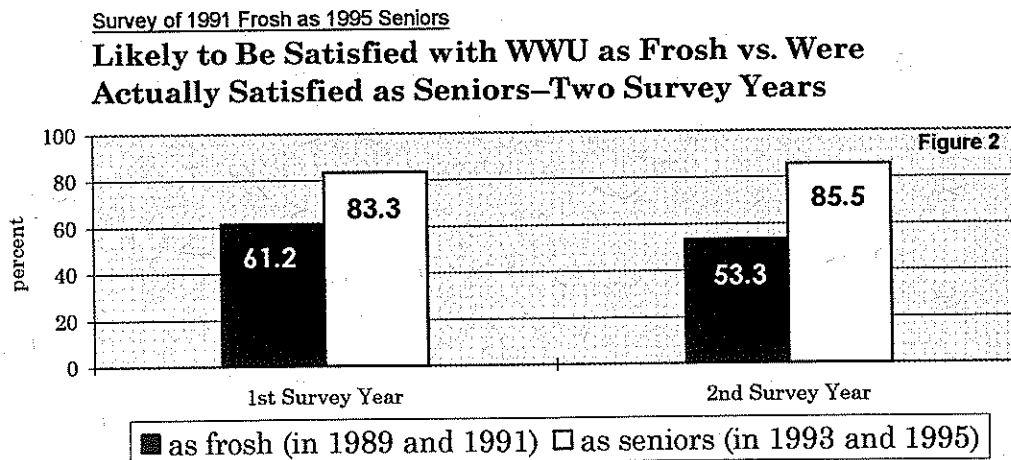
females with above average academic records. Because of the relatively low sample response rate (44.1%) and the obvious gender bias (nearly three-quarters female), the authors suggest both discretion and caution when reviewing the findings in this report.

### DEGREE ASPIRATIONS REEVALUATED, EVENTS RECONSTRUCTED, AND ACTIVITIES REDIRECTED

As 1991 freshmen, few Senior Survey respondents (only 13.7%) aspired to simply a bachelor's degree; most (85.9%) aspired to a graduate, doctoral, or professional degree. As 1995 seniors, far more survey respondents were ready to settle for a bachelor's degree (44.3%), though a majority (52.7%) still aspired to an advanced degree and/or training, a slightly higher figure than for seniors from the spring of 1993 (51.2%). (See Figure 1.)



As 1991 freshmen, 53.3% of 1995 survey respondents thought they would be satisfied with Western--far more wary of Western than the freshmen class of 1989, of whom 61.2% thought they would be satisfied with Western. Yet four years later, 1995 seniors had been won over, with 85.5% indicating their satisfaction with Western, a slightly higher percentage than found for 1993 seniors (83.3%). (See Figure 2.)

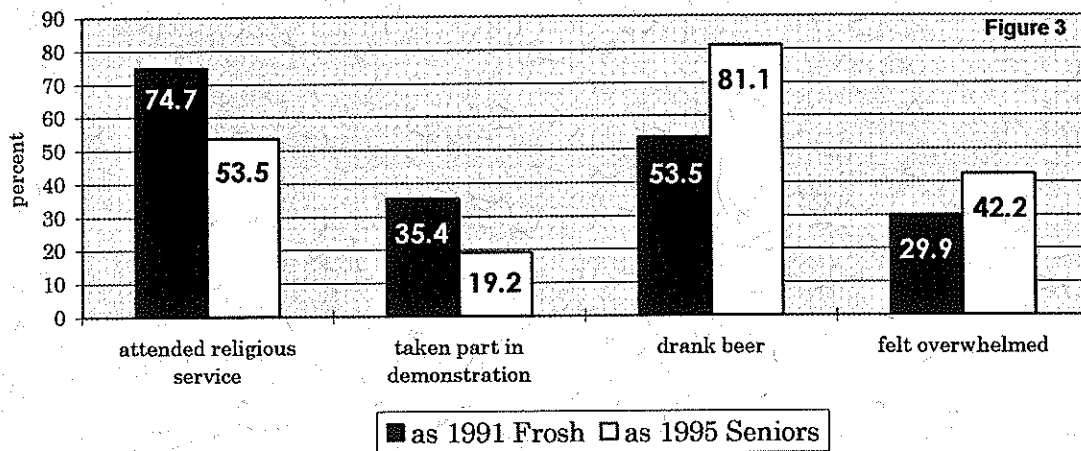


The financial realities of attending college forced some survey respondents into events they had not planned on. As in-coming freshmen, an insignificant 0.7% planned to work full-time while in college; by the time they reached their senior year, 10.9% indicated they had worked full-time. Other findings indicated survey respondents may have undervalued their preparedness for college: as freshmen only 54.0% anticipated that they would earn a "B" average; as seniors, 86.1% had actually earn a "B" average.

Many activities of Senior Survey respondents got redirected between their freshman and senior years. They were *more* likely as freshmen than seniors to have attended a religious service (74.7% vs. 53.5%) or to have taken part in demonstrations (35.4% vs. 19.2%). They were *less* likely as freshmen than seniors to have drank beer (53.5% vs. 81.1%) or to have felt overwhelmed with all they had to do (29.9% vs. 42.2%). (See Figure 3.)

Survey of 1991 Frosh as 1995 Seniors

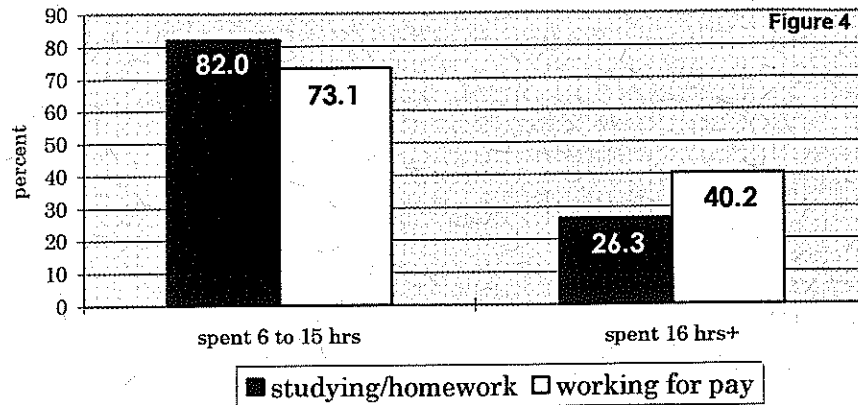
### Four Activities: Changes after Four Years at Western



### SENIORS SPEND THEIR TIME WORKING, IN CLASS, OR STUDYING

Nearly all 1995 Senior Survey respondents (95.7%) indicated they had spent between six and fifteen hours a week in classes or labs; and most (82.0%) indicated they had spent the same amount of time studying or doing homework. A very high percentage (73.1%) also had spent between six to fifteen hours a week working for pay. Many 1995 seniors were actually more likely to spend their time working for pay than studying or doing homework. While 40.2% indicated they had spent sixteen hours or more a week working for pay, only 26.3% indicated they had spent sixteen or more hours a week studying or doing homework. Seniors in 1995 spent even less time studying than seniors in 1993, when 33.2% indicated they had spent sixteen or more hours studying or doing homework. (See Figure 4.)

### Hours Spent Per Week Studying or Working for Pay



As hard as they might have worked and studied, 1995 seniors did not *just* work or study. The percentages of respondents spending between six and fifteen hours a week on activities other than working or studying were as follows: 77.3% socializing with friends; 36.5% watching TV; and 34.6% exercising or playing sports.

### WHICH COLLEGE EXPERIENCES WERE SATISFACTORY AND WHICH WERE NOT

Senior Survey respondents were overwhelmingly “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with their courses in their major field (91.7%). Respondents were also quite satisfied with their overall college experience (85.5%) and with their interaction with other students (81.5%). Moreover, nearly three-quarters of 1995 seniors indicated satisfaction with the over quality of instruction at Western (74.3%), their social science courses (72.1%), and their opportunity to talk to professors. (See Table 1.)

Table 1: Percentage of Senior Survey Respondents Noting College Experience as “very satisfactory” or “satisfactory”

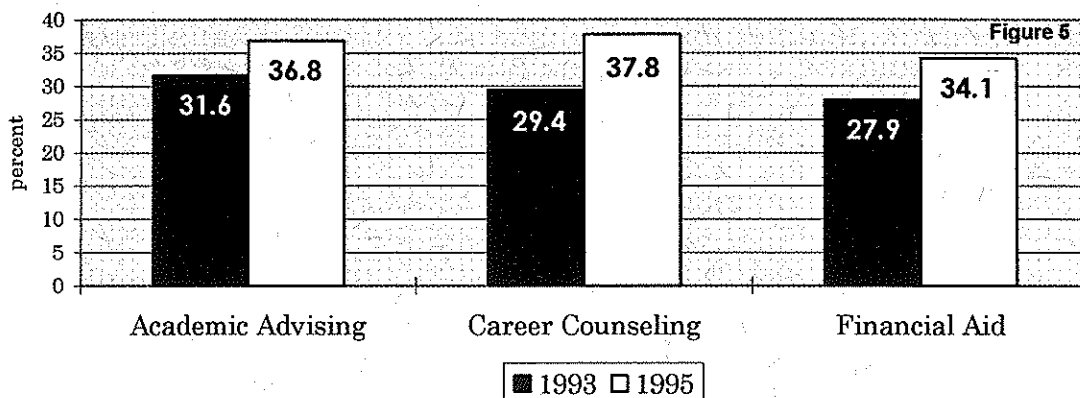
|                                 | 1993 Seniors | 1995 Seniors |
|---------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Courses in major field          | 88.1         | 91.7         |
| Overall college experience      | 83.3         | 85.5         |
| Interaction with other students | 82.8         | 81.5         |

The areas traditionally receiving less enthusiastic student response rates are also those areas where student expectations often exceed the parameters a given service can offer. Student satisfaction with academic advising, for instance, has been shown to hinge directly on the specificity of a student’s question. The more direct the question, the higher the satisfaction; the more vague the question, the less the satisfaction. (See *OIAT Report 1993-02: Academic Advising at Western: Some Feedback from Alumni.*) Similarly, services such as career counseling and financial aid run into areas of student concern which are often unreconcilable from an administrative standpoint.

It is within such administrative limitations that findings from the 1995 Senior Survey shed a positive light on Western's ability to provide good service even in those service areas where good service will always be difficult to provide. The percentage of seniors satisfied with academic advising rose from 31.6% in 1993's survey of seniors to 36.8% in 1995's survey of seniors; moreover, the percentage of seniors satisfied with career counseling/advising rose from 29.4% to 37.8%, and with financial aid services from 27.9% to 34.1%. Though attributable to any number of circumstances, it is probably no coincidence that these improved figures follow in the stead of vigorous survey research campaigns that have, since 1989, gathered opinion from a variety of sources, including freshmen, seniors, non-returning former Western students, and Western alumni. (See Figure 5.)

Survey of 1991 Frosh as 1995 Seniors:

### Three Experiences Noted as Satisfactory or Very Satisfactory



One area of dissatisfaction that is quite likely attributable to cutbacks in the higher education budget was student satisfaction with class size, which fell from 61.8% in 1993 to 51.5% in 1995. Though a thorough majority of seniors indicated they would probably or definitely enroll at Western again (85.2%), it may be that the dissatisfaction with class size contributed to the higher percentage of seniors indicating that they would probably or definitely not enroll at Western again (which rose from 7.5% in 1993 to 10.5% in 1995).

### WITHIN NARROW BOUNDS, SENIORS REPORT MUCH STRONGER ABILITIES

The percentage of survey respondents reporting a much stronger knowledge in a particular field in their senior year compared to their freshman year was a robust 73.2%. The percentage reporting a much stronger general knowledge, 48.0%, was considerably less. The percentages fell even more dramatically for critical thinking skills (30.1%), problem-solving skills (24.2%), and writing skills (20.9%).

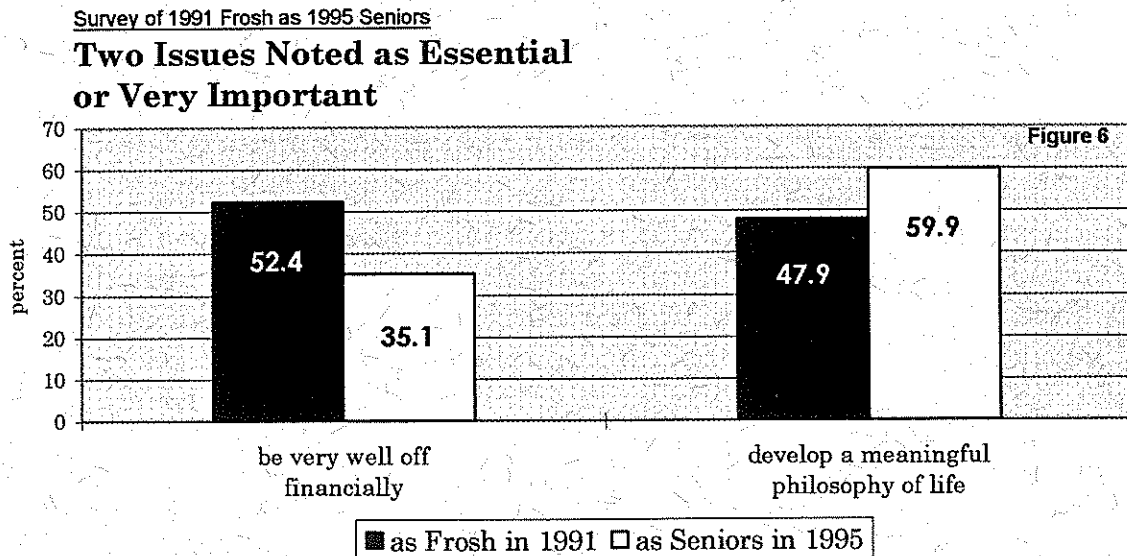
The low percentages of seniors reporting "much stronger" skills in at least two of the learning areas considered important by the University (critical thinking and problem solving) may be a function of perception. Knowledge specific to a major is probably more easily recognized by students than concepts of higher-ordered thinking. Yet the University may want to ponder these low figures. Is the curricula becoming too inundated with specificity? Are life-long learning skills being subjugated to current technologies mastery? That only 20.9%

reported much stronger writing skills may also raise some concerns. If the University considers good writing skills fundamental to the character of an educated man or woman, why don't most (or even all) Western students consider their writing skills much stronger after attending four years worth of Western classes? Have they come from their high schools so well prepared in this area that Western's chance of strongly influencing their writing skills is undermined?

In a related set of findings, survey respondents' self-ratings across a list of abilities indicated very little change between the freshman and senior years. For instance, as freshmen 78.1% of survey respondents rated their academic ability above average or in the highest 10% of their class. As seniors, this figure was 76.2%, which, statistically, indicates negligible change. A similar trend of negligible change in self-ratings was noted for the entire list of abilities, including for artistic ability, intellectual self-confidence, and writing abilities. This may not be a very startling discovery. Since students are asked to compare themselves to their peers, only if their college peers were of lesser abilities than their high school peers would you expect to see self-ratings increase. This circumstance would be unlikely at Western, given the increasingly rigorous admittance standards that have been tracked in the last several years.

### FOR SENIORS, LIFE OBJECTIVES CHANGE: LESS CONCERN FOR MONEY, MORE CONCERN FOR PEOPLE

As noted in the OIAT's first Senior Survey (*Report 1994-01, the 1993 College Student Survey: A Longitudinal Study of 1989 CIRP Participants*), four years after entering Western seniors view certain basic life objectives differently than they had as freshmen. For instance, as freshmen 52.4% of all survey respondents noted as "essential" or "very important" that they be very well off financially; as seniors, only 35.1% noted the importance of being very well off financially. On the other hand, as freshmen 47.9% noted as "essential" or "very important" that they develop a philosophy, while as seniors 59.9% noted the importance of developing a philosophy of life. (See Figure 6.)



Seniors also developed an increased sense of altruism. While as freshmen 62.3% noted as "essential" or "very important" to help others in difficulty, as seniors 71.5% noted the

importance of helping others in difficulty. This figure is also up from the findings for seniors from 1993, which was 67.0%. Similarly, seniors were more likely than they were as freshmen to note as “essential” or “very important” to influence the political structure (18.7% as frosh vs. 22.5% as seniors), influence social values (41.5% as frosh vs. 52.6% as seniors), and participate in community action programs (27.2% as frosh vs. 30.5% as seniors).

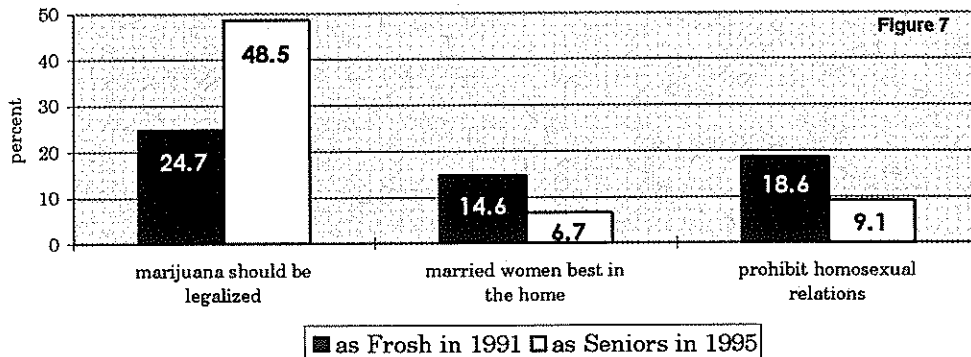
### POLITICALLY SENIORS MORE LIBERAL THAN THEY WERE AS FRESHMEN

As freshmen, 34.0% of survey respondents indicated their political orientation as liberal; as seniors, 45.3% indicated they were liberal. Most of the change took place as a middle-of-the-roaders (48.3% as freshmen) took a stronger stance (only 34.8% reported a middle-of-the-road political orientation as seniors). The percentage of respondents indicated a conservative political orientation changed very little (16.3% as freshmen vs. 15.9% as seniors).

Responses to specific political issues also indicated a decidedly liberal bent. For instance, as freshmen 75.9% of survey respondents agreed strongly or somewhat that abortion should be legal, a figure that increased to 82.7% as seniors. Other issues marking an increased liberal viewpoint included (the percentage agreeing strongly or somewhat): marijuana should be legalized (24.7% as freshmen vs. 48.5% as seniors); married women are best in the home (14.6% as freshmen vs. 6.7% as seniors); and homosexual relations should be prohibited (18.6% as freshmen vs. 9.1% as seniors). (See Figure 7.)

Survey of 1991 Frosh as 1995 Seniors

#### For Three Issues, Percentage of Respondents Agreeing Strongly or Somewhat



### ISSUES OF VOLUNTEERISM AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

Volunteering and/or providing community service has, in recent years, become a stronger focus in the lives of many Western students. (See OIAT Report 1994-05: *Community Service Activity by WWU Students: Its Extent, Nature, and Impact on the Surrounding Community*.) Indeed, 66.4% of all 1995 Senior Survey respondents reported that they had performed volunteer work. In spite of their busy schedules of working for pay, attending classes, and studying, survey respondents found time for volunteering, even if only for an hour or less (21.3%). Another 16.6% were able to volunteer an hour or two a week, while 20.9% found time to volunteer three hours or more a week.



The most popular forms of volunteer work included: tutoring or teaching (44.7%); conservation activities (33.2%); and providing childcare (26.0%). Though often the volunteer activity was part of a class or course (37.1%), or part of a college-sponsored activity (27.9%), more often the volunteer activity was done independently of any college group (59.8%). Outside of the university environment, volunteer activities were most frequently performed at elementary or secondary schools (33.1%); through church or other religious organizations (25.9%); and other private organizations (19.5%).

The duration of volunteer/community service activities varied widely, from less than one month (19.1%) to seven to nine months (11.6%). Yet some activities appeared to be ongoing. Nearly a quarter of survey respondents that performed volunteer services indicated that the activity's duration was for more than twelve months (24.9%). Survey respondents volunteered their time primarily to help other people (84.2%), but also to feel a sense of personal satisfaction (60.9%) and to improve the community (59.1%).

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