

VIKING LAUNCH: A SELF-SUSTAINING ACADEMIC FIRST-YEAR PROGRAM

Seeking to expand its Academic First-Year Programs over a period of sharply declining state-support, Western Washington University sought models of self-sustaining programs to help it achieve its first year mission to help students

Understand the purpose and value of their liberal arts education.

Successfully negotiate the challenges and opportunities of their first year.

Connect to Western faculty, staff and students.

In addition, and informed by our assessment processes, we sought to help students to explore academic major opportunities earlier.

Fall early start programs emerged as the most viable means of creating a self-sustaining first year program. We looked particularly closely at the University of Washington discovery seminars, which offer 5 credit courses the month before school begins each fall on a self-sustaining summer school model. To explore the possibility of a fall early start program, the Vice Provost met with University Residences, faculty involved in existing summer programs, and Extended Education. University Residences, which saw opportunities for extended orientation activities in the model, became an early supporter, as did faculty experienced in offering intensive field and lab-based courses.

Because WWU is essentially closed the month before classes begin, a month long session on the model of the UW was considered unfeasible. However, a week-long program on the model of our high-school "College Quest," program was considered feasible. This has been piloted for the last four years.

Expected outcomes included increased retention and course readiness. Actual outcomes included extremely high student satisfaction, and retention improvement for non-resident students. Unexpected outcomes were striking and largely favorable but did have fiscal and enrollment consequences. These included

- Heightened non-resident enrollment.
- Faculty engagement in first-year initiatives and programs.
- Improved usage of university resources.
- Heightened attention to marquee programs.
- Spin-off programs.
- Over-enrollment in programs at capacity.
- Student leadership and behavior problems.
- Tuition revenue.

Conclusion: Self-sustaining early-fall start programs, based on a summer school tuition model, are a promising means to expand first-year programming and of increasing faculty engagement in first-year initiatives. However, such programming requires careful coordination with University Residences and may yield unexpected results.

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