

## **Improve the Total Experience**

### **Campus Conversations**

#### **Collaborate Session**

**9/24/15 4:00-5:30**

Question: What do you think about when you think of the total student experience?

- Students come to college for their career paths but they also come to meet new people. They are in the next phase of life and looking for what that is. They want to experience what they have dreamed or seen what college life is about.
- This goes beyond academic preparation for the classroom. Students are learning how to be an adult while having a safety net without parents there. Part of the experience is the learning process.
- For some students the experience is a cultural change. Thinking in terms of academic goals students join clubs, fraternities/sororities, etc.
- I think of cohesion and institutional departure. What makes students leave? Is it something that happens in the classroom that they can't get past? What is it that they can't get past? Are we reaching out to students enough? Cohesion is the person reaching out knowing how to get that person back on track. What is that?
- Success in both academic and outside classrooms is part of the total student experience. How can they be successful academically and professionally? What kind of experience can we bring to them so they can handle it better? Are we giving them the skills to talk and approach people? How do we help them be successful?
- Helping students to identify and develop who they are (Who am I?) is part of the total college experience that helps them turn into young adults.
- Full range of opportunities and challenges that broaden and deepen students not just for jobs but for life and academic communities that they are involved in. Intelligence plus character-that is the true goal of education.

Question: How does Western compare to other institutions?

- Western offers smaller class sizes and project based learning. Our size enables us to provide a unique experience.
- Cultural experience for rural students from the western part of the state that have never been out of their counties or seen someone who isn't a Christian or someone of a different race.

Question: Does each WCU student enjoy a total student experience or do some students have narrower experiences-how diverse should these be?

- Exposure to the university. Getting along with others. Commuter students who may not have the same opportunities to live with other people that are different from them. How do we help them develop skills to deal with difficult situations?
- For some students this is their first time away from home and they are trying to find their way. We can help and mold them.
- Do we owe it to our students to give the whole student experience? We need to educate them in a way that it's a learning experience so they can take ownership. This is part of the Western way. They are part of a caring community that extends hands a little more than they may be accustomed to. By explaining and letting them know the reasons behind certain decisions, we are assisting them to have a learning experience.
- Providing a range of different opportunities. Push them out of their comfort zone.

- The important thing is making sure that opportunities are made available. When the opportunity is there we are offering that to people. We are there to provide opportunity when it's available.
- Not every student is looking for the same experience. It's an a la carte experience that you can create your own experience while having structures in place to help make choices.

Question: Do they understand opportunities? How do you resolve that?

- USI classes are resources and opportunities that they may have. We need to do a better job addressing our sophomores and juniors by letting them know about resources and missed opportunities. How can we reconnect them to the university?
- We don't want to homogenize the student experience. We need to provide some sort of comparable experience to the students exclusively at the Biltmore Park site. How do we make sure that they have access to the range of opportunities? Space currently at Biltmore Park is sparse. We ran out of space. We found out that a lot of students are split between the Cullowhee campus and Biltmore Park site. There is a proposal to Provost Office to provide more exclusive services this summer at Biltmore Park. We are working on addressing this issue. The goal is to have a health and wellness wing there. We think that this will help address some of their needs.
- Don't forget about the online students. Online students will be different because they don't pay the health fee. Sometimes it's a matter of communication and understanding.
- Biltmore Park strategic plan. The implementation plan is finalized and we will start implementing that plan.
- We have two different conversations about education. Western may be trying to ride both bicycles. Some students will want just the classes and not the whole experience; in particular non-traditional students.
- There is disparity among the departments in terms of student engagement in the community. There are two student experiences within departments. It's difficult to engage students. We are not in an urban area to handle this. What does Western have planned to handle this?
- Faculty have to figure out how to provide content to this generation and realize that students don't want the content as much as the experience. This is a moving target. Even though we can change how we are instructing students, the minute we think we are where they are, they have moved. Each semester it's something new and will be different. As long as we know and recognize that this is a moving target and are doing what we can. It can be hard and frustrating to get them there in the confines of the system.
- In terms of community engagement and service learning we try to advise students to watch them grow. It's tough because we have 50 students to advise and we all have different ways to do different things.
- Faculty/student mentorship is very crucial and we don't have a good way to reward people for mentorship. Students get great experience out of that. How do we make substantial impressions on students given current faculty workload? Having more team taught courses enhances the student learning experience but the allocating work load, student credit hours, and logistics can be very difficult.

Question: Are there any bureaucratic/administrative hurdles?

- Faculty credentials in terms of team teaching.
- Banner runs the show. Team teaching is problematic because you have to figure out your way around hurdles. If you do a "gentlemen's agreement" it's hard for the university to document

what's going on because the system doesn't allow you to do it. Banner is being updated. Will that be capable in the upgrade?

- Good things are constrained by the systems in place and how they are used.
- There has been a predominant shift to students with behavioral health issues and students that have major medical issues. The health population of our students isn't what it was 8 years ago. Economic times affected student health. This just isn't Western, it's all college campuses. In context of student experience it changes expectations. So many students have financial pressure predominant in their mind. How does that manifest in the classroom? There is more awareness of student problems. You now learn all this information about the student upfront. We have a cultural dependency on health care.
- How do you deal with accommodation of student work schedules? I tell my students to talk to fellow classmates and to come to my office during office hours.
- Drop any assumptions about students. You have to approach students in a different way.

Question: Does everyone believe that they are valued for their contribution to the growth of WCU and the success of our students, staff, faculty, and alumni?

- How do we encourage value? Do we do a good job? What can we do better? We do a lot of things but we don't have a good way to recognize these efforts. It would be much better if the administration could recognize efforts. We need to try to preserve some aspect of small class size and one-on-one attention. Faculty haven't been able to tell their stories. Smaller class sizes are better but we have to show better efficiency metrics. We have to be better at telling our stories because the current climate wants to see numbers. We as faculty have to be better at expressing our stories and having common language; whether it's data or telling the story, how do we document what we say what we do? We are pushed up against the fact that we get money by growing. We need to look at who we are/who we want to be and into the statics of the state funding model and how we balance in student experience and outcomes.

Question: How do we gauge the student experience? How do students feel about their experience? Alumni contributions? How can we demonstrate, document, and report that student experience?

- We have to figure out what we want to know.
- We do exit interviews in the departments when students graduate. We ask about perception of the learning outcomes in the program. What do you do with that information? It's our internal assessment in looking at how to change certain things in the program to make it better. It is part of our program review.
- What has been the impact of enrollment growth in student affairs departments? Are there pressure points? There has been a growth in the seriousness and magnitude of issues that students are coming in with. Some of the things I've noticed over the past few years is that they are so free with sharing everything. We have felt like we have had some down time in the summer but with the growing summer enrollments, from the student affairs perspective, we will have to accommodate growth financially by changing 9/10 month positions to 11/12 month positions. The general issue is how you deal with burn out. There is pressure for larger classrooms and doing more with less. How does my staff feel valued? We are trying to measure our effectiveness and measure how well we educate.