
Other Academic Programs

Honors Program

Within Western Washington University's general mandate to provide an excellent education for undergraduate and graduate students, the Honors Program offers an academically challenging option for undergraduate students who have indicated the willingness and ability in high school or college to meet exacting standards and to do sophisticated work. Students enter the Honors Program directly from high school, as transfers from other institutions, or as already enrolled students at the university.

The program provides a broad range of courses in the general university requirements; it offers upper-level seminars in specialized topics; and it gives students the opportunity to work individually with faculty on a senior project in their majors. Honors classes are small: GUR sections enroll no more than 30 students,

while seminars usually are limited to a dozen, though in rare instances, the maximum is 15. Students work directly with individual faculty members on their senior projects; the instruction in these cases is one-on-one, usually in laboratory, conference, or studio settings.

Honors admits a maximum of 50 freshmen per year, with a total enrollment of about 160. It graduates about 25 students per year, a number that has been constant for the past four years. The program has a half-time director and a half-time secretary; it is governed by a five-member Honors Board, composed of faculty chosen from throughout the university. At least one of the board members must be from a college other than the College of Arts and Sciences. The program reports directly to the provost. Its annual budget exceeds \$100,000. Hon-

ors has received a good deal of national attention, including mention in *U.S. News and World Report's* annual issue on higher education. More recently, *Money Magazine* rated it as one of the two dozen best honors programs in the nation, an especially rewarding notice since the comparison groups included institutions such as the University of Michigan and the University of Arizona.

Admission

Honors recruits most of its students among high school seniors. The program mails a letter to selected students inviting them to apply on the basis of Washington State index numbers, which are based on grade-point averages and scores on standardized tests. Honors recruits among students at the top end of the scale, but it also seriously entertains all applicants and employs the same processes and standards in reviewing all candidates. The director makes all admission decisions.

The program does not use set formulas in admitting students. Rather, it looks at a number of factors in trying to determine an individual's suitability for Honors. These include a sample of written work and a letter of recommendation from a teacher or counselor that includes an evaluation of the student in eight separate categories and an opinion of the student's likely success in the program.

For college-level students, the program asks for the same materials, though transfer students' scores on standardized tests are generally not available. The program attaches considerable significance to a student's ability to work successfully at the college level. For the last several years, the scores and entering grade-point averages

of incoming high school students has held stable, with average SAT scores of about 1300 (on a mixture of scores on the old and re-centered scales) and grade points of between 3.8 and 3.9. The program always emphasizes that quantitative criteria are neither the only nor necessarily the most significant criteria.

Honors students are active in campus affairs in greater proportion to their numbers in the student body. They are conspicuous as resident advisors in the residence hall system, and they constitute roughly 20 percent of Summerstart advisors, though they comprise only about 1.5 percent of the student body. In the past three years, the program has produced one student body president and one vice president.

About 90 percent of the Honors student body come from the state of Washington, though the percentage of out-of-state students is higher in the program than in the university as a whole. About half major in the natural sciences, with pre-medicine, environmental science and biology being the most common, but all colleges and a wide variety of majors are represented in Honors. About half begin postgraduate study immediately upon completion of an undergraduate degree, while others enter later. Students in Honors have secured admission to graduate and professional programs at such institutions as the University of California at Berkeley, Yale University, the University of Pennsylvania, Stanford University, Columbia University, and Cornell University.

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Curriculum

Honors offers three distinct types of work:

- A wide variety of courses in the general university requirements;
- Specialized seminars and
- The opportunity for students to work one-on-one with professors in their disciplines on a senior project.

At the first-year level, Honors offers a year-long interdisciplinary humanities sequence required of all students who enter the program as freshmen. Those who begin as freshmen are also required to take any four additional Honors GUR courses. GUR offerings (100- and 200-level courses) cover a broad range of fields, including anthropology, physics, political science, philosophy, economics and psychology. As of December 1996, the director and board have discussed ways in which the GUR offerings might be broadened to include disciplines not currently represented in the curriculum, such as art history and more specialized literature courses. Since Honors science offerings are intended for non-science majors and since so many of the program's students are in the natural sciences, the board and director have also discussed alterations of Honors science offerings. Courses in physics, biology, and geology are currently included. These discussions may have reached a conclusion by the time that the accreditation team visits campus.

The program offers six or more seminars each year at the 300 level, which are thus appropriate for junior-level students, though sophomores, seniors, and very occasionally freshmen also take

them. The program solicits seminar proposals from individual faculty members each winter quarter, and the board makes selections before the close of the quarter. Generally, the board tries to achieve a balance among subject areas, i.e., at least one seminar from each of the three broad academic areas – the natural sciences, the humanities and the social sciences – but the quality of individual proposals is always the primary criterion for selection. If the board receives no submissions in a particular subject area that it deems of sufficiently high quality, it will fund proposals that it regards to be of the highest quality, regardless of subject area. Seminars change each year, and it is highly unlikely that a seminar would be offered in consecutive years, though the same instructor might teach different seminars in successive years. Titles of seminars in 1996-97 include *The 1960's: A Visit to the Museum of the Mind*, *The Epistemology of the Modern Novel*, and *Ethnic Minorities in Siberia: Their Past, Present and Future*.

Each student is required to complete a senior project. The title is intentional, as the program wants students to think about the range of senior experiences that may satisfy this requirement. The intent is for students do something as close as possible to professional-level work in their majors or allied fields on their projects. A long research paper, as indicated by the term "senior thesis," may be appropriate for many disciplines, but it is clearly not for others. Science majors usually spend a year in a laboratory working closely with their advisers, and frequently they become coauthors on published papers. A music major usually performs in a re-

cital, while an art major would most likely hold a show. Granting students this latitude has produced an especially large number of unusual and well-done projects. In the past four years, these have included an album by a student who was an English major and a music minor; translations by language majors from German, Chinese, and Punjabi into English; a liturgy by a student majoring in English who subsequently entered work in the lay ministry; lesson and unit plans in a variety of subjects by students in education; and a set of illustrations for a novel by a student in English.

A full description of the Honors curriculum and the senior project is in the exhibits.

Faculty

Faculty for the program come from all colleges and departments of the university. The director recruits faculty to teach in the GUR courses, while, as noted above, seminar faculty submit proposals which the Honors board vets. The director seeks GUR faculty whose excellence as classroom teachers is well established. The core of faculty who teach in the freshman sequence are part-time with the institution, but they are also excellent teachers. They receive teaching evaluations that are among the best in the university, and student response to them has been excellent. The director observes the classroom teaching of faculty teaching in the freshman sequence and of some of the other GUR faculty.

Activities

The program is vitally involved in the academic and cultural life of the institution. Honors, either

alone or in conjunction with other departments and programs, sponsors a variety of speakers on campus. In December 1996, Honors sponsored the opening ceremonies for the White Rose show, an exhibit on German-student resistance to Hitler, lent to the university by the Goethe Institute. The Honors Program office is one of the hubs for honor society activity on campus, and it handles most of the work for Phi Kappa Phi, the national academic honor society. It will likewise be the main contact point for the new chapter of Phi Eta Sigma, the national freshman honor society, installed in April 1997.

The future

Honors has several major long-term goals. The first is to expand the program to keep pace with the increased enrollment of highly qualified students. In addition, Honors hopes to improve graduation rates, to expand its fundraising efforts, to expand and update its curriculum, and to create closer ties with community college honors programs in the state.

Within the last seven years, Honors has doubled the size of its entering freshman class while increasing the number of graduates roughly tenfold. The program has been able to accomplish this expansion and increased graduation rate through a number of means. A modified curriculum has allowed students to make progress toward their degrees while doing work in the program. A slightly more aggressive recruitment effort quickly resulted in a larger student body. For a few years, increased space kept pace with the larger number of well-prepared, highly motivated students entering the university.

Honors is now facing a good deal of unmet demand. In the past three years, the pool from which the program recruits has grown dramatically. In 1994, 296 students with admissions indexes of 90 or above applied to Western and 68 enrolled. In 1996, the number applying had risen to 450, of whom 124 enrolled. Over the period since 1990, the increase is even more dramatic, though the data are not comparable, since changes in SAT scoring – the so-called re-centering – has changed the statistical base on which index numbers are calculated. During the same period, Honors enrollment has been static, since the program is now at the limit of its resources, and it is not possible to increase enrollments within the constraints of its current structures. It is worth noting here that students with admissions indexes of 90 and above who apply to the university and are also admitted to Honors attend Western at a much higher rate (68 percent) than those with identical statistical profiles who are not admitted to Honors (30 percent). It is clear that Honors is a significant attraction for highly qualified students.

Future growth might come from a combination of innovations and modifications, and the director and the board have discussed a number of possible related actions.

The program also wants to increase the graduation rate of its students. Good statistical evidence on rates of persistence or graduation is not available at either the national or state levels, but the information the director has obtained indicates that Western's rates compare quite well with other programs. Nationally, many programs have graduation rates of little more than 10 percent, while within the state of

Which students leave Honors?

The program loses students at three points:

- A small number leave during the first year – a veritable handful of the fifty or so who begin. That figure has remained constant for several years, and it is highly unlikely that there is a mechanism to improve this retention rate
- Some students do not complete the seminar requirement. Surveys have shown that some leave because they are not able to take seminars that are directly applicable to their majors or because the program does not allow them to apply seminars in their majors towards Honors requirements. This problem is easily remediable and change may be made by the time the accrediting team reads this report. Other curricular revisions, such as the reduction of required Honors GURs from four to three courses, exclusive of the freshman sequence, may coincidentally help retain students.
- The third point at which students leave the program occurs at the senior project. Students who complete all but this final stage usually cite a combination of reasons – too little space left in their schedules before graduation, simple exhaustion with the program or school or both, or the inability to formulate a senior project. To improve in the last of these areas, the program has moved more aggressively in the past two years to get students thinking earlier and more systematically about what they might do for their senior experience. Neither the director nor the board is willing to make compromises that dilute the quality of the senior experience, and it is unlikely that much else will be done to increase retention at this point.

A small number of students, far less than one per year on average, fail to meet the required academic standard, a grade-point average of 3.5 for the last 90 graded credits of university-level work.

Washington, 33 percent is well above average. At the same time, given the high retention rate at Western – almost 83 percent from the freshman to the sophomore year – it is possible to do a better job.

The director and the board are now engaged in discussions about curricular change. The measures they are contemplating include the revision of Honors science courses, the addition of new courses, and the possible reduction of the number of required GUR courses in Honors. These discussions began in fall 1996 and continued in succeeding quarters.

Honors has had modest success in the past raising funds. It will begin a concerted fundraising campaign as soon as personnel in the Western Foundation, the university's fundraising arm, give authorization. The director and the Foundation have begun activities necessary to move forward in this area. The program will begin a newsletter in 1997, which should aid in this endeavor.

Finally, Honors is in the second year of an effort to bring the state's community college honors programs into closer contact with those in four-year institutions. The intention is to create mechanisms that allow Honors students to move from community colleges to four-year institutions with a minimum of difficulty. In this connection, Western and Washington State University have begun an annual conference whose purposes are twofold: to help community colleges to establish their own honors programs, and to create specific agreements or structures that allow community college honors students to move directly into programs at four-year institutions. The conference has been running for two years, with evidence of modest success.

The Honors Program at Western is active and rests on a solid foundation. Obviously, there is room for improvement.

Women Studies

Women Studies offers an interdisciplinary, academic approach to the study of women's experiences and articulations. The program offers a self-designed undergraduate major through the College of Arts and Sciences and a 30-credit minor. At any given time, two or three students are enrolled in the major and 20 to 25 in the minor. The program also works with students in completing a women studies concentration as part of a general studies major and with Fairhaven students in a women studies concentration.

Core courses are funded by the Women Studies program, with supplementary courses from the anthropology, art, English, history, political science, psychology, sociology, and theatre arts departments and from Fairhaven College.

The program is directed by an associate professor of English at .25 FTE and is supported by a .5 FTE office assistant. The program reports to the vice provost for undergraduate and extended programs. Its annual budget is approximately \$16,500, funded through the provost's office.

Women Studies also provides campus-wide activities that bring attention to national and international women's issues. Such activities include student and faculty colloquia, invited speakers, poster exhibits, and regional feminist forums. In spring 1998, Women Studies will host the Sisters of Color International (SOICI) annual conference at Western.

The program is gaining visibility and the demand for Women Studies courses is increasing. For example, enrollment in WS 211 is capped at 30 students, and the fall quarter waiting list holds 15 to 20

students. The waiting list is usually somewhat smaller for winter and spring quarters.

Summer session

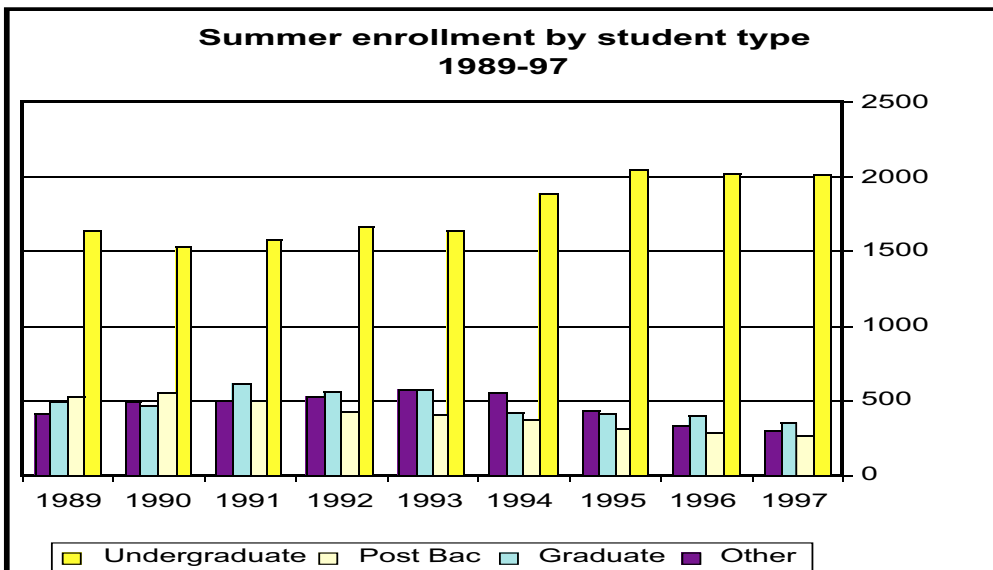
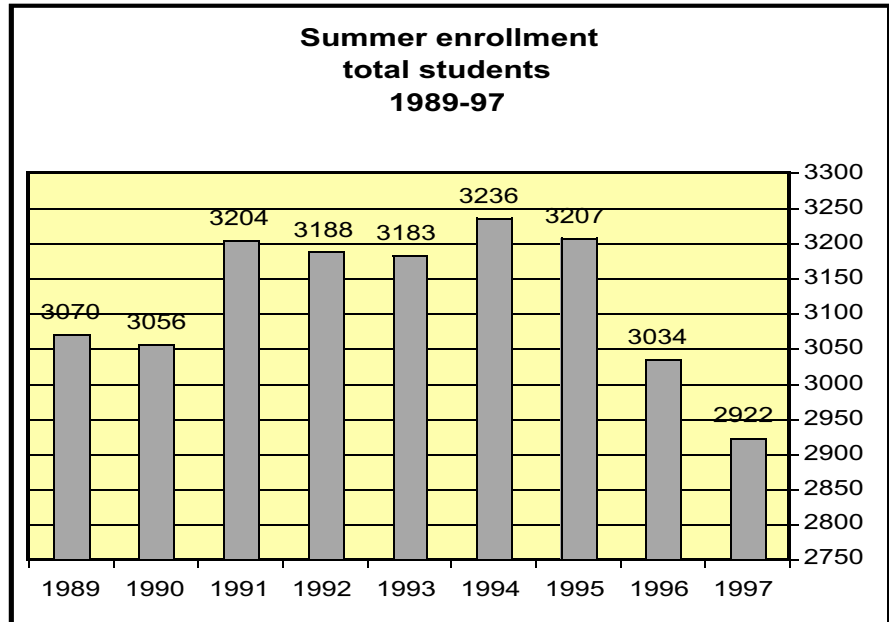
Western offers a summer session, which has been self-supporting since 1990, when state appropriations for summer session ceased. Since then, planning and administration have been the responsibility of the academic deans, with one of them serving as director.

Enrollment has been steady at about 3,000 students each year. The session serves both continuing undergraduates, who make up about two-thirds of the group, and professionals returning to work on master's degrees or continuing certification. Students pay tuition

on a per-credit basis and Western guarantees all courses listed in the timetable will be offered.

The deans and provost determined that summer session's purpose is threefold:

- Provide continuing students with courses and programs that expedite their completion of programs, offer advanced certification and degrees for K-12 teach-



ers and educators, allow for smaller, more interactive classes, and provide enrichment courses that support students' primary goals while broadening their higher-education experience.

- Provide non-matriculated students with opportunities to sample Western and its programs, engage in learning that supports their vocational or avocational lives, or enroll in courses that can be transferred to another institution.
- Provide community members and visitors, as well as students, with creative expression and aesthetic enjoyment through courses and programs in the arts, participation in Summer Stock, and creative academic offerings unique to the Western summer environment.

Western has been exploring whether to expand summer session into a regular academic quarter, which would allow the university to run on a year-round schedule. The Office of Survey Research

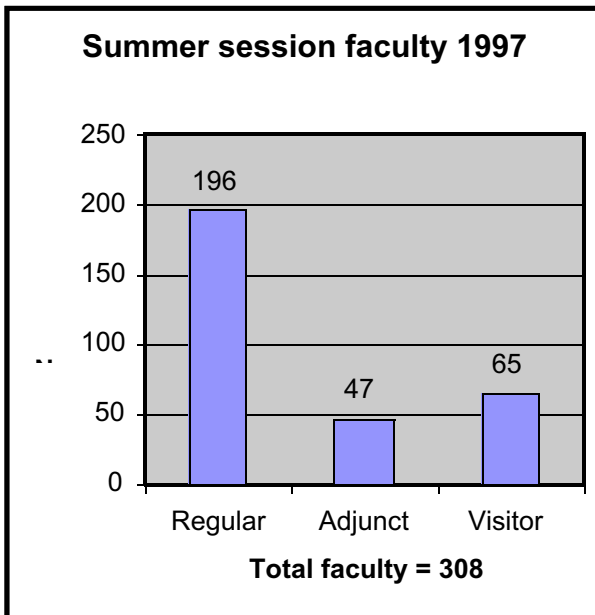
found some interest from students for this proposal, with significantly more saying they would attend such a summer quarter than attend summer sessions now.

A major draw for the students would be the ability to take classes toward their majors and to depend on a broad offering of core courses as well as general university requirements.

Faculty also showed support for an expanded summer session, but with provisos, such as pay being equal to other academic quarters and a choice allowed for taking off another quarter during the year for their unpaid activities related to research, reflection, and keeping current with advances in their field. Concern was expressed by tenured faculty that teaching four quarters annually would contribute to burnout and would lower teaching quality over the long term.

A second concern from this group was that summer session should have a core of regular faculty and not rely extensively on part-time or limited-term hires. Yet, the greatest interest in teaching during summer was expressed by faculty in limited-term or non-tenure-track positions. The distribution of faculty willing to teach a regular summer session was unequal among departments, raising doubt that a full curriculum across all areas could feasibly be offered.

Presently, the possibility of changing the nature of summer session is still discussed but is not actively pursued.



Students, faculty and activities

About two-thirds of summer-session instructors are regular Western faculty. Three-fourths of the students enrolling in a typical summer session are continuing from the previous spring quarter. Only about 10 percent are new to Western. In line with national trends, the majority are seniors – 41 percent – followed by juniors, at 21 percent of the total. Twelve percent are graduate students, a higher proportion than for other quarters. (See chart.)

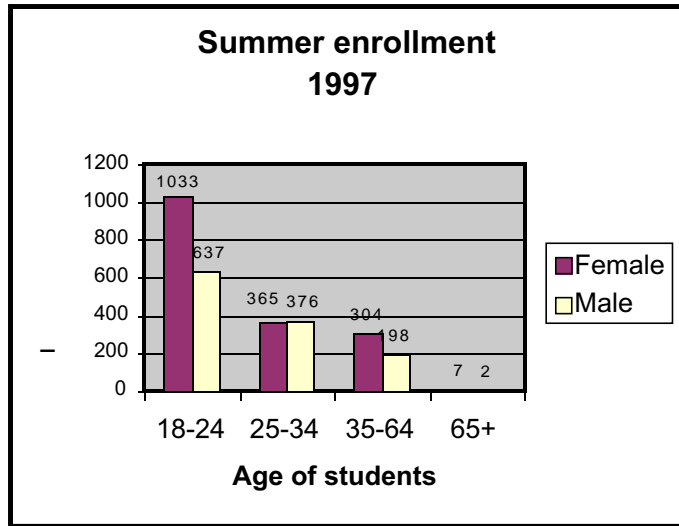
Some student activities are on-going, such as art shows and the campus newspaper and radio. Other activities, such as clubs organized under the auspices of the Associated Students Board, are not active during the summer. On the other hand, the theatre department’s Summer Stock is exclusively a summer activity.

Revenues earned by enrollment fees have been used for various services, such as keeping the childcare center open, maintaining health-care services, and adding to funds available for financial aid.

Budget cycle, profitability, and fees

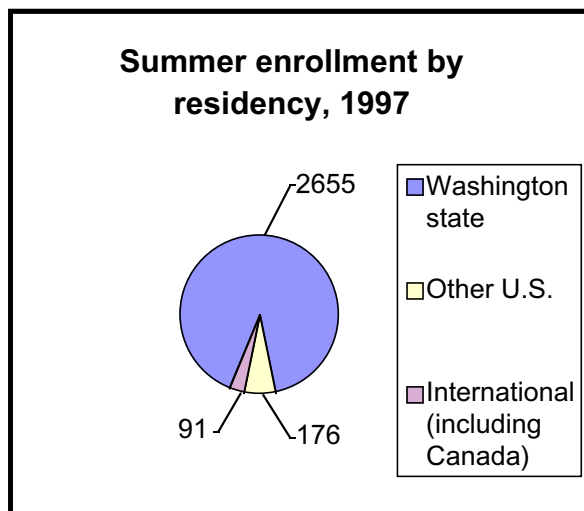
Over recent years, Western’s summer session has been profitable. Revenue produced above costs is split, with half going to the colleges and half to a reserve fund, which the provost can draw upon for special needs. For example, \$25,000 was distributed for student financial aid last year to increase available support.

The profitability of the 1997 summer session seems to have declined due to a cap placed on tuition at 10 credits. In previous



years, students had been paying more for each credit, with no cap. Last summer, this cap produced a slightly lower head count but slightly higher number of student credit hours, meaning fewer people attended yet they took more credits.

Faculty pay is capped at 25 percent of academic-year salary. Revenues generated do not cover some costs covered by state appropriations, such as office administration, custodial service, electricity, administrative salaries, etc.



The Board of Trustees sets the tuition fee for the coming summer at its December meeting each year. For summer 1997, the fee level was the same as for the preceding academic year; which allowed students to take another quarter before fall quarter's tuition increase. Fees for summer have been stable, with a three-year interval without an increase. Waivers allowing faculty and staff to take courses on a space-available basis are now available for the session.

Some noncredit offerings are available through a new effort with University Extended Programs. Select popular courses have been marketed to nontraditional students, allowing them to attend along with regular students, if the professors have agreed and if seats are available.