
WESTERN EDUCATIONAL LONGITUDINAL STUDY (WELS)
BASELINE SURVEY OF STUDENTS ENTERING AS FRESHMEN
IN THE FALL, 2008
REPORT 2009-05

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WESTERN EDUCATIONAL LONGITUDINAL STUDY (WELS) BASELINE SURVEY OF FRESHMEN ENTERING IN THE FALL, 2008

WELS BACKGROUND

The Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS) is a series of internal longitudinal surveys of all in-coming first-year and transfer students administered every two to three years. This study involves an initial assessment of students prior to entering Western and then a series of follow-ups at different points in their academic careers. The purpose of this study is threefold: (1) To assess student needs based on their self-reported characteristics, perceptions and concerns; (2) To provide data that can be used to better assess academic and co-curricular programs by providing baseline entry data that can be used as statistical controls in analyses to offset the inability to conduct randomized studies; and (3) To maintain an ongoing record of student knowledge acquisition, ability levels, and other general education outcomes to address concerns of accountability and accreditation.

The WELS is conducted by the Office of Survey Research (OSR) and uses a mixture of on-line and telephone survey methodologies. Since the data collected in these studies includes identifying information, these data can and are linked with data in student records, thus expanding their usefulness. Although WELS data cannot, like other national studies, be used for comparisons to other institutions, the surveys have more flexibility in content to allow them to be tailored to Western's needs.

WELS 2003 COHORT

The first WELS was administered in the summer, 2003, and included only in-coming freshmen (no transfers)¹. The baseline survey was developed as a result of meetings with various stakeholders across campus (the Provost's Office, student services, deans, the faculty senate, ATUS, etc.) as well as focus groups with students and a search for potentially useful items used on various national surveys. This baseline included 1580 out of 2225 incoming first year non-transfer students (a response rate of 71%). This cohort was then followed up at the end of their first quarter (fall, 2003: 42% response rate), the end of their first year (spring, 2004: 55% response rate), and the end of their second year (spring 2005: 70% response rate), and at the end of their third year (spring, 2006: 50% response rate). Each follow-up survey is designed to address pressing concerns about student needs, programming, and accountability and accreditation standards pertinent to the students' year in college. (For example, the first quarter follow-up of the 2003 cohort was focused on how well students make the adjustment to college; and the first and second year follow-ups focused on GURs; and the third year follow-up focused on majors.) Please see below for a list of reports on this cohort.

WELS 2005 COHORTS

A second series of WELS baseline surveys was initiated in the summer, 2005, and again included all incoming freshmen, and also a separate baseline survey was developed for transfer students. The baseline for the 2005 survey of freshmen included 1691 out of 2386 incoming students (a response rate of 71%). The baseline for the 2005 survey of transfers included 875 out of 1029 entering transfer students (a response rate of 85%). Please see below for the list of reports on the 2005 cohorts.

WELS 2007 COHORT

The third WELS baseline survey was initiated in the summer, 2007, and also included all in-coming freshmen, with or without college credit from high school, a total of 2392 students. There were 1484 online responses, and 302 phone responses, a total of 1786 (a 75% response rate). Survey topics included

¹Current definitions of the term "freshmen" include nowadays a small percentage of students who do not fit the traditional profile of a freshman. These include high school students who have earned Running Start and Advanced Placement (AP) credits. Technically, these students are entering college for the first-time, but may have earned as many as 90 college credits.

Summerstart, confidence in handling college transition logistics (Web4U, catalog, Degree Planning Guide, etc.), motivation and expectations, academic and social engagement and challenges while in high school, a current assessment of academic skills and competencies, academic priorities and study strategies, and issues related to health, wellness, and alcohol use. Please see below for the title of this report.

CURRENT SURVEY

This report presents findings from the fall, 2008, baseline survey of entering freshmen, with or without college credit from high school, a total of 2693 students. There were 1533 online responses and 608 phone responses, for an 80% response rate. By design, the 2008 WELS baseline survey of freshmen was shortened from previous year's WELS baseline surveys. Survey topics included Summerstart and summer preparation for college, high school engagement, academic self perception, and general college preparedness.

PREVIOUS WELS SURVEYS (NOTE: to download, go to: www.wvu.edu/socad/osr/wels.shtml)

To find out more about previous surveys of the 2003 freshmen WELS cohort, see the following reports:

- *Western Educational Longitudinal Study* (Report No. 2003-02).
- *Western Educational Longitudinal Study: Fall 2003 Freshmen Transition Survey*. Focus: A Research Summary, 8, (4), 1-8.
- *Western Educational Longitudinal Study: Spring, 2004, Follow-up of Freshmen Entering Fall, 2003* (Report No. 2004-01).
- *Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS): Spring, 2005, Follow-up of Freshmen Entering Fall, 2003* (Report No. 2006-01).
- *Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS): Spring, 2006, Follow-up of Freshmen Entering Fall, 2003* (Report No. 2008-01).
- *Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS): Spring, 2007, Follow-up of Freshmen Entering Fall, 2003* (Report No. 2008-04).

To find out more about previous surveys of the 2005 freshmen and transfer WELS cohorts see the following reports:

- *Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS) Fall, 2005, Baseline Survey of In-coming Transfers* (Report No. 2006-02).
- *Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS): Fall, 2005, Baseline Survey of In-coming Freshmen* (Report No. 2006-03).
- *Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS) Freshmen in Transition: Fall Quarter, 2005, In-coming Freshmen Surveyed at the End of Fall Quarter, 2005* (Report 2006-04).
- *Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS) Transfers in Transition: Fall Quarter, 2005, In-coming Transfers Surveyed at the End of Fall Quarter, 2005* (Report 2006-05).
- *Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS) Spring, 2006, Follow-up Survey of Students Who Had Entered as Transfers in the Fall, 2005* (Report 2008-02).
- *Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS) Spring, 2006, Follow-up Survey of Students Who Had Entered as Freshmen in the Fall, 2005* (Report 2008-03).
- *Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS) Spring, 2007, Follow-up Survey of Students Who Had Entered as Transfers in the Fall, 2005* (Report 2008-05).
- *Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS) Spring, 2007, Follow-up Survey of Students Who Had Entered as Freshmen in the Fall, 2005* (Report 2008-06).

To find out more about previous surveys of the 2007 freshmen WELS cohorts see the following report:

Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS) Baseline Survey of Freshmen Entering in the Fall, 2007 (Report 2008-07).

Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS) Baseline Survey
of Freshmen Entering in the Fall, 2008

Summer Preparations and Expectations						
Did you attend Summerstart? (N=2141)					Yes	No
					90%	10%
Prior to attending Summerstart (or taking the survey for respondents who did not attend Summerstart), to what extent did you do each of the following? (N=2141)						
		Not At All	Very Little	Somewhat	Quite A Bit	A Lot
	Visited the Academic Advising Center Website.	41%	25%	25%	7%	2%
	Visited the Academic Advising Center in person.	76%	13%	8%	3%	1%
	Read about Western's academic requirements in the University Catalog.	18%	18%	31%	24%	10%
	Familiarized yourself with the idea of academic credits at Western and how they apply to building a schedule of classes.	17%	19%	30%	23%	11%
	Read about at least one possible major field in the University Catalog.	11%	13%	22%	31%	23%
	Looked through the list of courses in the University Catalog.	14%	15%	26%	27%	18%
	Identified courses you might want to take using either the University Catalog, the Degree Planning Guide, or WWU Classfinder.	18%	15%	21%	22%	24%
	Obtained information about majors or courses from sources other than the University Catalog or Classfinder.	25%	24%	25%	17%	9%

Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS) Baseline Survey
of Freshmen Entering in the Fall, 2008

Summer Preparations and Expectations (cont.)							
How confident would you say you are about each of the following?							
	N	Not At All	Very Little	Somewhat	Quite A Bit	A Lot	
Understanding how to use Classfinder and the online Timetable to help you plan classes.	2116	6%	7%	19%	32%	36%	
Ability to select the right classes.	2111	2%	9%	31%	36%	22%	
Ability to retrieve personal and registration information from Web4U.	2113	3%	8%	24%	34%	31%	
Ability to add and drop classes using Web4U.	2093	6%	9%	18%	30%	37%	
Ability to find the information you need from the University Catalog.	2100	3%	7%	33%	35%	22%	
Ability to find the resources you need on campus to plan your academic career.	2095	3%	11%	37%	31%	17%	
Ability to interpret and understand the General University Requirements (if applicable).	2038	2%	6%	26%	38%	28%	
Understanding of how to track your GUR progress using the Degree Planning Guide.	2030	9%	15%	30%	26%	21%	
Understanding of the way that general and major-specific advising works at Western.	2106	7%	19%	41%	22%	11%	

Western Educational Longitudinal Study (WELS) Baseline Survey
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Summer Preparations and Expectations (cont.)

How likely is it that you will transfer from Western to another college or university before you graduate? (N=2129)

Extremely unlikely	30%						
Very unlikely	28%						
Somewhat unlikely	13%						
Uncertain	17%						
Somewhat likely	7%						
Very likely	3%						
Extremely likely	2%						

How long do you think it will take you to finish your bachelor's degree (not including any teaching or other additional internships that you might need to graduate)? (N=2132)

Less than 4 years	12%						
Exactly 4 years	55%						
4-5 years	26%						
5 or more years	1%						
Don't know	6%						

Compared to attending college this fall, how much would you have preferred to be... (N=2126)

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A lot	Quite a lot	A great deal
taking time off from school?	43%	27%	20%	6%	3%	1%	1%
going to school at a community college?	75%	14%	8%	2%	1%	1%	0%

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High School Engagement and Wellness

During your senior year in high school (including any community college classes you may have taken during that time), to what extent would you say that you did each of the following? (N=2123)

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A lot	Quite a lot	A great deal
Asked instructors to give you comments or criticisms about your work.	5%	12%	25%	21%	18%	11%	7%
Approached a teacher for help whenever you had difficulties in a course.	2%	7%	17%	22%	22%	15%	16%
Formed friendships based on shared academic activities or interests.	3%	6%	15%	22%	21%	16%	17%
If there was material you didn't understand, you asked about it in class.	2%	6%	19%	20%	21%	17%	15%
Talked about course material you were learning with someone else other than a teacher.	1%	5%	13%	20%	23%	21%	17%

During your senior year in high school, to what extent did you spend your time engaged in each of the following activities outside of school? (N=2172)

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A lot	Quite a lot	A great deal
Participating in organized family activities (recreational, religious, dining, etc.).	6%	17%	22%	19%	15%	11%	10%
Recreational internet use and computer/video game playing.	7%	19%	20%	19%	15%	10%	10%
Reading books for personal enjoyment.	10%	18%	22%	17%	14%	10%	10%
Recreational television watching.	8%	25%	27%	19%	11%	5%	4%

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High School Engagement and Wellness (cont.)

To what extent were you involved in academic clubs when you were in high school (e.g., language clubs, fine arts, honors society, etc.)? (N=2119)

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A lot	Quite a lot	A great deal
	13%	17%	20%	14%	13%	11%	12%

Senior year challenges (N=2119)

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A lot	Quite a lot	A great deal
During your senior year in high school how much difficulty did you have balancing the time and other demands of family, friends, school, and/or your workplace?	13%	31%	29%	14%	8%	5%	1%
To what extent would you say that you had difficulty meeting the expectations and obligations of your parents or other family members during your senior year in high school?	28%	34%	19%	10%	5%	2%	1%

During your senior year in high school how many days during a typical week would you say you...

	One or fewer	2	3	4	5	6	Almost Daily
got less than 8 hours of sleep? (N=2119)	12%	14%	16%	15%	19%	9%	16%
got at least 30 minutes of planned exercise? (N=2084)	14%	12%	14%	12%	16%	7%	25%

On a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 is "Never" and 7 is "Almost Always", how often would you say you felt each of the following ways during your senior year in high school? (N=2118)

	Never	2	3	4	5	6	Almost Always
Overwhelmed with academic work and other responsibilities?	6%	20%	25%	20%	15%	7%	5%
That you didn't fit in with your peers?	41%	30%	11%	7%	6%	3%	2%
That there was no one you could turn to?	61%	21%	8%	4%	3%	2%	1%

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Self Perceptions: Academic								
Compare yourself to all other first-year college students across the country. Try to provide an honest assessment of your knowledge and abilities that is specific to the area referred to, rather than an overall impression of yourself. (N=2109)								
	Well below average	Somewhat below average	Slightly below average	About average	Slightly above average	Somewhat above average	Well above average	
Writing skills and effectiveness.	0%	1%	6%	26%	30%	27%	9%	
Oral communication and public speaking skills.	1%	5%	13%	28%	23%	20%	9%	
Ability to critically evaluate written information.	0%	2%	10%	30%	28%	22%	7%	
Ability to define research or analysis problems in such a way that you can see clearly what steps you need to take to solve them.	0%	2%	8%	34%	32%	19%	5%	
Ability to work and learn independently without being given directions.	0%	1%	6%	24%	29%	27%	12%	
Ability to work cooperatively in a group, no matter who is in it, to successfully solve problems.	0%	1%	4%	22%	30%	32%	12%	
Ability to understand and apply formal scientific principles and methods to solve problems.	1%	3%	13%	36%	25%	17%	6%	
Ability to understand and apply quantitative or mathematical/statistical principles and methods to solve problems.	2%	6%	16%	28%	23%	18%	8%	
Knowledge and understanding of different cultures and philosophies.	1%	3%	11%	26%	27%	22%	10%	
Knowledge and understanding of how humans impact the environment.	0%	1%	6%	26%	30%	25%	11%	
Ability to work effectively with technology, especially computers.	1%	2%	8%	29%	26%	22%	12%	
Leadership skills and the ability to manage the work of others.	0%	1%	6%	24%	29%	27%	13%	
Knowledge of the dynamics of social relationships and organizations.	0%	1%	7%	29%	31%	23%	8%	
Ability to use library resources, such as reference books, online databases, etc.	0%	2%	9%	33%	29%	19%	7%	
Ability to organize the results of library research into a research paper.	0%	2%	8%	34%	29%	20%	6%	
Knowledge and understanding of plagiarism and your ability to avoid it.	0%	0%	2%	16%	20%	30%	31%	

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Self Perceptions: Academic (cont.)

To what extent would you say each of the following statements accurately describes your approach and your work in academic courses? (N=2153)

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A lot	Quite a lot	A great deal
I prefer material that really challenges me so I can learn new things.	0%	4%	22%	25%	24%	16%	8%
It is important to me that I get better grades than most other students.	6%	13%	23%	20%	17%	13%	8%
The most satisfying thing for me in a course is trying to understand the content as thoroughly as possible regardless of what grade I get.	2%	8%	21%	21%	22%	15%	11%
The most important thing for me right now is my overall grade point average, so my main concern in my classes is getting good grades.	4%	12%	23%	23%	19%	12%	8%

The following statements have to do with the way you approach your classes and study for important exams. When you are taking classes, to what extent do you... (N=2105)

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A lot	Quite a lot	A great deal
find yourself thinking about other things and as a result miss important points being made in class or in a reading?	4%	31%	31%	17%	10%	5%	1%
ask yourself questions to make sure you understand the material you have been reading or studying in a class?	2%	14%	27%	27%	19%	9%	2%
try to do school work on your own, without help from anyone, even if you are having trouble learning the material?	3%	15%	28%	23%	18%	10%	3%
ask a student in your class for help when you don't understand something?	1%	6%	20%	28%	24%	14%	6%
work with others from a class to complete your individual assignments?	5%	20%	27%	23%	15%	8%	2%
find it hard to stick to a study schedule?	10%	26%	26%	16%	12%	6%	3%
go through the readings and your class notes and try to find the most important ideas?	1%	9%	20%	27%	24%	14%	5%
make sure you kept up with the weekly readings and assignments?	1%	4%	14%	23%	24%	21%	13%

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Self Perceptions: Academic (cont.)

To what extent would you agree or disagree that each of the following is a true or accurate statement about the kind of person you are? (N=2099)

	Strongly disagree	2	3	Neither agree nor disagree	4	5	Strongly agree
When a course is difficult, I tend to give up or only study the easy parts.	30%	35%	16%	11%	7%	1%	0%
I work hard to do well in a class even if I do not like what we are doing.	1%	4%	11%	11%	30%	28%	16%
I'm certain I can master the skills being taught in my classes.	1%	2%	6%	21%	32%	27%	12%
I always expect that I will to do very well in my classes.	1%	3%	8%	18%	33%	25%	12%

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College Preparedness, Concern, and Motivation

Below is a list of statements about the student culture at Western. Please read each statement and tell us to what extent you agree or disagree that each is true based on impressions you have formed thus far.
(N=2097)

	Strongly disagree	2	3	Neither agree nor disagree	4	5	Strongly agree
Life in the residence halls is clearly separate from life in the classroom.	2%	6%	16%	32%	23%	13%	8%
There is a lot of drinking and pot smoking (or other drug use) at Western.	7%	13%	15%	32%	22%	8%	3%
Many students at Western have friendships with others of different race/ethnicity.	0%	1%	2%	15%	24%	31%	26%

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about how to succeed at Western? (N=2095)

	Strongly disagree	2	3	Neither agree nor disagree	4	5	Strongly agree
In order to succeed at Western a student needs to do at least 2 hours of work for every hour that they have of class time.	1%	4%	9%	23%	25%	23%	15%
To do their best, a student needs to complete all assigned readings before each class when they are due.	0%	1%	3%	8%	24%	31%	33%
Participating in a lot of outside activities during the days prior to an exam should not interfere with doing well on the exam.	4%	13%	19%	27%	18%	12%	6%
It's possible to occasionally skip class and still do your best in a course.	9%	15%	19%	24%	21%	9%	3%
To do well in a course all you need is to do the minimum work required.	33%	35%	19%	8%	3%	1%	1%
It is important to plan and start assignments weeks before they are due.	2%	5%	9%	21%	28%	21%	15%

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College Preparedness, Concern, and Motivation (cont.)								
Thinking about the upcoming school year, how concerned are you about each of the following? (N=2140)								
	Not Concerned	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely Concerned	
Being able to attend all your classes regularly.	41%	29%	11%	7%	6%	3%	3%	
Meeting family expectations for, or interference with, your academic work.	28%	26%	14%	14%	10%	5%	2%	
Fitting in with others and making friends at Western.	22%	21%	17%	15%	13%	8%	5%	
Managing stress and other sources of emotional upset.	10%	16%	19%	18%	18%	12%	7%	