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## Project Management 9330Y: Academic Success Program Evaluation

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## Executive Summary

Western's Academic Success Program for athletes provides academic support and resources to aid with the transition to university life. The main purpose of our research was to determine the efficacy of the current program in providing adequate support to student athletes and examine other niche student groups that could potentially benefit from a similar support program.

The main source of research on the efficacy of the current Academic Success program was a survey of athletes from all years. A total of 66 athletes responded to the survey. Some of the major takeaways from the survey include that 68% of the respondents never attended study hall. Many of those that did not attend weren't aware that study hall existed, many had difficulties attending due to the hours and some believed it was not helpful, partially due to the lack of program-specific help. Many students gave specific recommendations for improvements they would like to see including more one-on-one tutoring and help for a wider variety of courses.

Using this feedback, we developed recommendations for improvements that could be made for the Academic Success Program. Some of these recommendations fall into the same categories listed by students above, such as more one-on-one help and diverse mentors with more flexible hours. One recommendation is to join the SAAMP and Academic Success Program which we believe could increase study hall attendance and provide students with more individual mentorship. Other suggestions include having a more motivating study hall location and increasing awareness of resources and upcoming events.

To determine niche student group current support, online research was done to compile the different resources the niche student groups had. In addition, in-person interviews were conducted with available students from some of the niche student groups in order to assess their knowledge and use of resources and determine where they believe improvements could be made. The niche student groups identified include mature students, women in engineering, indigenous students, students with disabilities, graduate students and international students. Each of these groups has varying levels of support, but some overall recommendations include having residence leaders as contact points for referring these students to resources and having ongoing communication with these students throughout the year to pass along resources.

With the recommendations outlined in the report, we believe that the Academic Success Program could better tackle the needs of student athletes and encourage more students to take advantage of the program. In addition, the information gathered on niche student groups can be used for the expansion of the Academic Success Program to provide better resources for these students in the future.

## Introduction

Western University's Academic Support and Engagement Department provide services to students to promote their academic and personal growth [1]. This department celebrates the diversity of the university's student population and aims to provide specific programs to meet the needs of unique student groups. Currently, the department provides the following five programs: Assessible Education, which ensures academic programs can be easily assessed by students of different ability; Learning Development, which provides one-on-one counselling to alleviate academic stress; Transition, Leadership & Enrichment, which provides support to new students in their transition into university life; and Writing Support, which offers individual and group programs to enhance students' written and verbal communication skills.

Within the Transition, Leadership & Enrichment team, there are currently nine programs available for first year students to enhance their university experience. Examples include the Society of Off-Campus Students (SOCS), Out-of-Province Students Association (OPSA), Society of Mature Students (SMS), Accessibility Mentorship Program (AMP), and Academic Success Program (ASP) for athletes.

The Academic Success Program functions in partnership with Sports and Recreation Services and the Mustang Athletic Student's Council to provide academic and transitional support to incoming student athletes. The program provides presentations in the fall for students about study skills, weekly study hall, where students can drop-in to obtain course-specific help, and academic check-ins, which is when athletes meet with an Academic Success Program coordinator to establish and monitor their academic goals [2].

The Academic Success Program is interested in expanding its academic mentorship outside of student athletes. This expansion will involve implementing a "hub and spoke" model, which provides core services in the hub, along with services in each spoke that are tailored to different niche student groups.

### Purpose of the Report

Currently, the efficacy of the Academic Success Program in providing adequate support to student athletes is unknown. Questions also remain pertaining to what niche student groups exist in Western University, as well as how these groups are currently supported. More broadly, the Academic Support and Engagement Department is interested in identifying program elements integral for students' academic success. Thus, the aim of this report is to explore and generate recommendations for the following three questions:

1. How effective is the Academic Success Program for current student athletes?
2. What niche student groups exist in Western University and how are they currently supported?
3. What are key components of an effective academic success program?

## Methodology

### Efficacy of the Academic Success Program for current student athletes

We sought to explore student athletes' perception of the efficacy of the Academic Success Program. An online anonymized survey consisting of multiple choice and open-ended questions was administered using Qualtrics to current Western University student athletes. Answers from a total of 66 respondents were recorded. The same open-ended responses were thematically analyzed with attention placed on responses that were frequently repeated.

### Niche student groups and how they are supported

Niche student groups were identified through referencing Western University's club directory and department websites. The size of each niche group was estimated using admission statistics from 2018 and beyond. Next, individual impromptu semi-structured interviews were conducted in-person with students on the Western University campus. The interviews addressed the following components:

- Niche student groups
- How student is currently being supported
- What the student likes about this support
- What could be improved/what support the student wished they had
- If the student is aware of the Academic Success Program at Western:
  - What components students like about the program
  - What components students feel could be improved

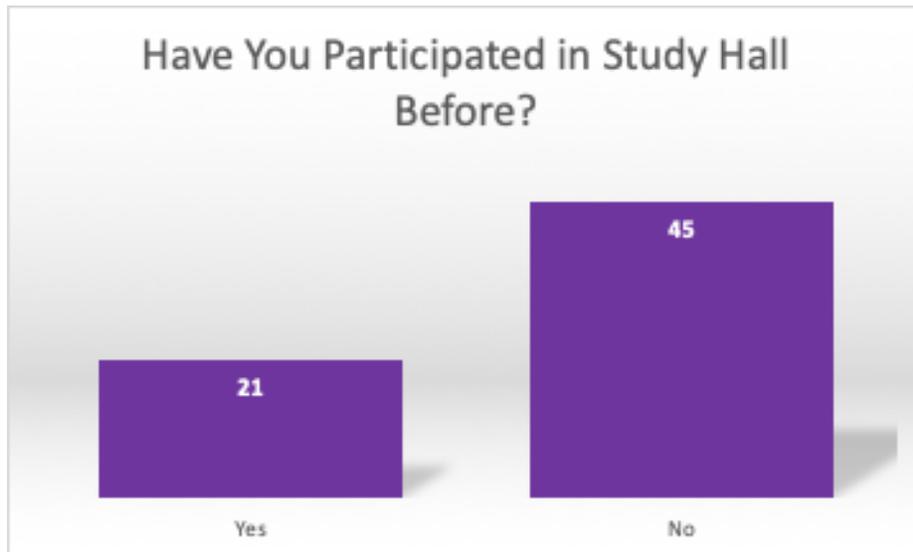
A total of seven students were interviewed. Responses were analyzed for common themes.

### Elements of a Productive Academic Success Program

We conducted online research looking at the program structure of academic support programs offered in other universities in Canada. We corroborated these findings with the results obtained from the student athlete surveys and in-person interviews of niche student groups.

## Results

We conducted a Qualtrics survey of 66 student athletes on Western's campus and found results for several aspects of the Academic Success Program.

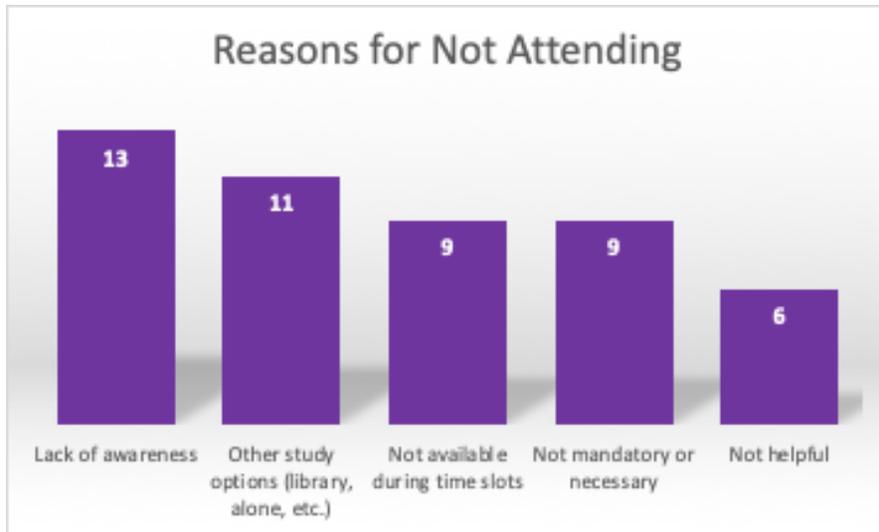


**Figure 1: Survey results for participation in Study Hall.**

Based on our survey results, we found that only 21 out of 66 respondents had attended Study Hall in the past or were currently attending it. This is only 32% of respondents, whereas 68% of respondents had never attended. Out of the 66 participants who completed the survey, 19 were in their first year on a Western varsity team, 18 were in their second year, 22 were in their third year and 7 were 4 or more years. A very similar distribution was seen for year of current program. Almost all students were in their undergraduate degree, apart from three students.

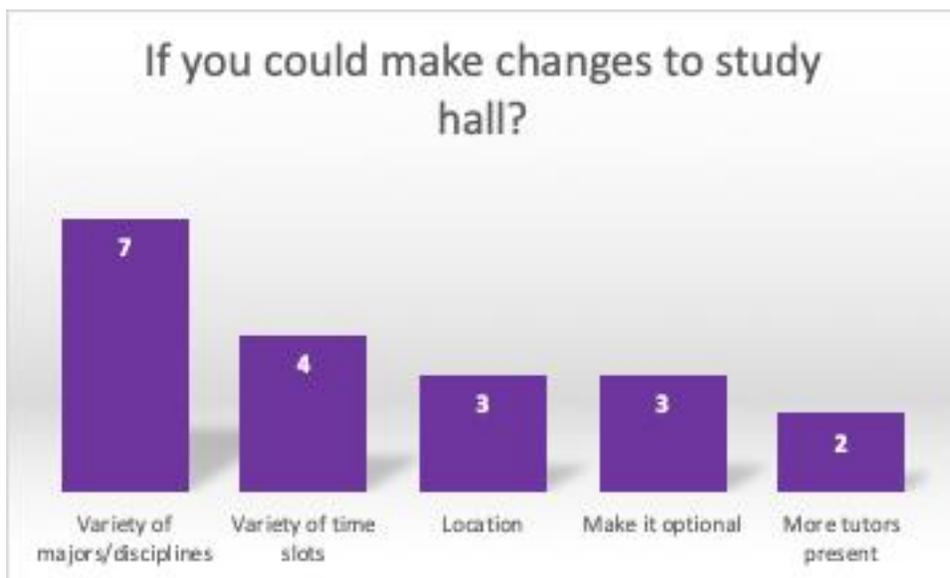
Of the 21 students who did attend Study Hall, 24% of students felt that Study Hall was not useful, 38% of students said it was somewhat useful, 29% felt it was useful, and 10% of students found that Study Hall was very useful.

The next question posed to students was, "What was your reason for not attending Study Hall?"



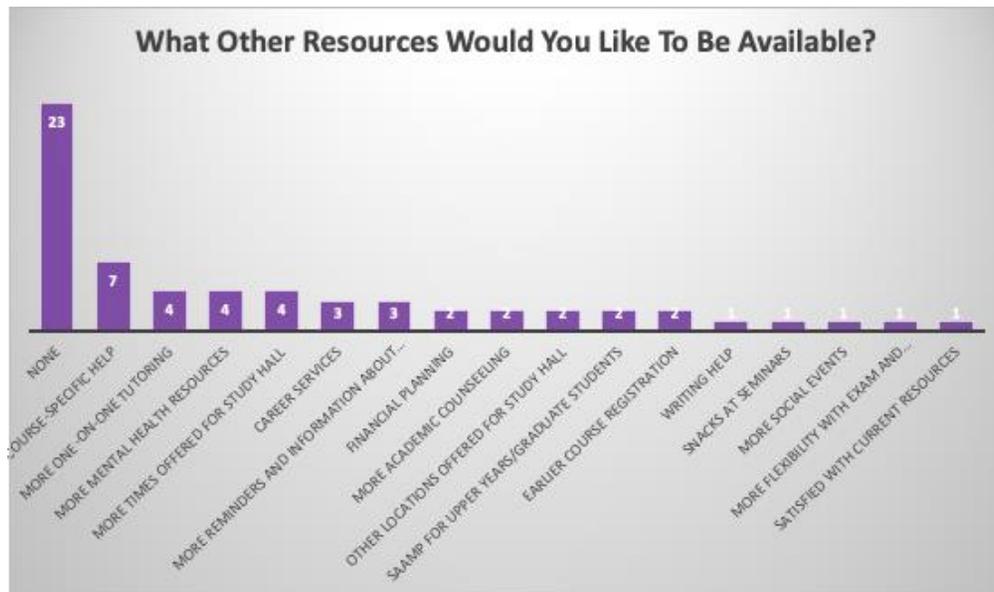
**Figure 2: Survey results of reasons for not attending Study Hall**

For those who did not attend, 28% of students were not aware that Study Hall was a resource available to student athletes. 24% of students felt that other study options (library, residence study rooms, etc.) were preferable to Study Hall. 20% of students felt that Study Hall was not a viable option due to scheduling conflicts. Another 20% thought that Study Hall was not mandatory or felt that it was not necessary for success. Lastly, 13% of students felt that Study Hall was not a helpful resource and chose not to attend. This option was expressed primarily by students from smaller programs like engineering and law.



**Figure 3: Survey results for recommendations of changes to Study Hall**

Our survey results showed a number of recommendations from students for Study Hall. 37% of students would prefer that more subjects, disciplines, and majors were covered during Study Hall. 21% of students also wished for more time slots, owing to scheduling conflicts. 16% of students would prefer a different location for Study Hall (we noticed a number of complaints regarding lack of windows, basement rooms, etc.). Another 16% would prefer the program to be optional; many felt that high academic achievers and upper year students should be exempt from Study Hall. Lastly, 10% of students requested more tutors be present during Study Hall.



**Figure 4: Survey results for requests for other resources**

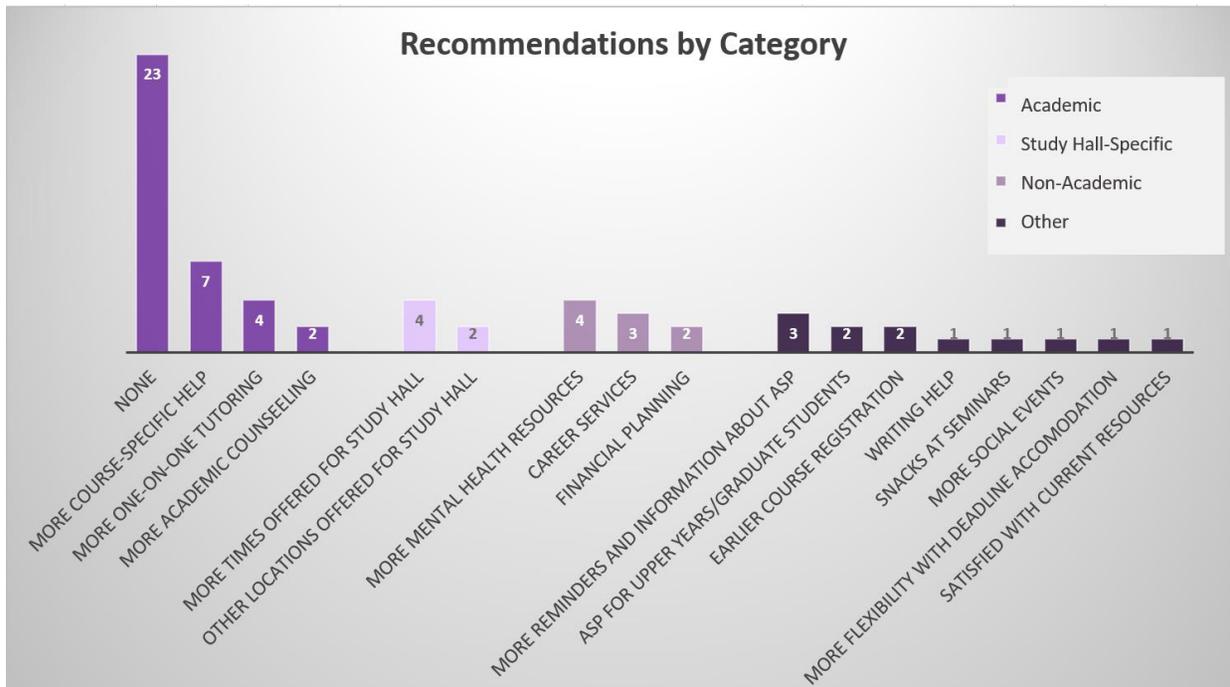
In the last component of the survey to current student athletes, we asked respondents if there were any other resources that they wish were available to them on campus. We received a total of 66 responses to this question, of which 35% of students indicated that they did not have any suggestions (Figure 4).

In terms of academic resources, seven students (10%) mentioned that they wanted help on a greater variety of course subjects (Figure 5). For example, one participant reported wanting more specific mentorship in kinesiology and another participant indicated the need for programs for students in Western’s affiliate schools. As well, four students (6%) reported a need for more one-on-one tutoring, and another two students (3%) reported the need for more academic counselling. Thus, respondents acknowledged the benefits of these academic resources offered in the Academic Success Program but they wanted more variety of subject matter help as well as more individualized support.

Interestingly, six students focused their responses on improving study hall. Four students indicated that they wanted more times for study hall that work with their schedules. As well, two students mentioned that they would like more locations for study hall to be held, such as at the Recreation Centre.

In terms of non-academic resources, four students (6%) reported they wanted more mental health resources, another three students (5%) mentioned the need for career services, and another two students indicated that they wanted more financial planning services.

Overall, the students' responses suggest that there may be an overarching lack of awareness of the variety of resources offered to both student athletes and to all Western students. For instance, three respondents recommended that more reminders and information for student athletes should be provided. Suggestions include increasing the number of email reminders or forming a group chat via text or social media to send reminders for upcoming events. Respondents also indicated that they would benefit from an easily assessable in-person session where they could learn about all the available resources and ask questions.



**Figure 5. Student athletes' recommendations categorized by type.**

## Recommendations for Athlete Academic Success Program

### Joining SAAMP and Academic Success Program

One way to help some of the lack of academic-specific resources for student athletes could be through bridging the gap between SAAMP and the Academic Success Program. SAAMP mentors are usually matched with mentees within their own academic programs. If mentors checked-in with mentees at study hall once a week or once every two weeks, and provided academic help when needed, it could help fill the gap that many students brought up in the surveys. In addition, by checking in at study hall, it would make students more aware of study hall and encourage them to go.

### Study Hall Location

A common response amongst students when asked what they would change about study hall was the location. There were multiple responses that mentioned the study room being “windowless” and bleak, which discouraged students from attending. One way to improve the attendance of study hall is to have a designated study space that is exclusive to athletes and is open 24/7. There should be posted hours on the door which outline when mentors will be present throughout the week. Having an exclusive study space will motivate athletes to attend study hall and foster a sense of support.

### Co-Curricular Record

One possible improvement to the Academic Success Program is to improve the Co-Curricular Record achievement aspect. A digital attendance system at workshops where students scan their Western Student Card upon arrival would simplify the tracking process and eliminate the added responsibility for students to submit a hard copy of an attendance card by a deadline. This added responsibility of keeping and submitting the attendance card may be hindering students from participating. Another recommendation is to add a Co-Curricular Record achievement which rewards students for attending study hall (ie. 50 hours of study hall). This achievement would incentivize students to attend study hall and demonstrate time management skills and commitment to academics on the Co-Curricular Record.

### Diverse Mentors and Flexible Hours

Students from the survey requested that the mentors attending study hall be from more diverse academic backgrounds to better accommodate student’s academic needs. A lot of the available help is geared towards first year medical science or biology students. The program could be improved by providing more help for courses such as statistics, psychology, computer science, engineering, and/or calculus and providing them during more flexible study times. If there are a limited number of student athletes in these courses, referring students to course-specific support provided by non-athletes may also be beneficial.

### More One-on-One Help

Six student athletes mentioned that they would like more individualized help for course work or for academic counselling. One student even mentioned their desire to become a mentor for incoming student athletes, but they were not aware of how to do so. Thus, student athletes with a strong academic standing can be encouraged by staff to apply to become a mentor for the

next school year. Retention of mentors for subsequent years may be increased through recognition of their work on the Co-Curricular Record and through holding a social event for mentors and mentees to celebrate the mentors' time and effort. Mentors can be encouraged to follow-up with their mentees throughout the year because seeing the growth of their mentees can be personally rewarding.

#### Educate and Refer Students to Other Resources

Nine student athletes indicated their desire for financial services, mental health support, and career services. Many of these resources are available on campus but are not directly provided by the Academic Success Program. Thus, greater emphasis can be placed on educating student athletes on where they can access these non-academic resources. This referral process can take place in-person upon visiting the Academic Success Centre, where students can ask questions and learn about the resources offered in Western. Alternatively, because many incoming students interact regularly with their Sophs and RAs, these upper year students can receive more education on the available resources so that they can then educate and refer their students to appropriate help.

#### Improve Awareness of Resources and Upcoming Events

Increasing awareness of available resources to all student athletes can be done through more frequent emails. These emails can provide brief descriptions of the resources available in Western, as well as links to learn more about each resource. These emails can be sent at the beginning of the fall and winter semester—when students are preparing for the new term—as well as before midterms and finals when students may require more academic and psychological support. Accessibility of this information can be further improved by establishing a group chat on Facebook and sending reminders to students through this platform.

## Niche Student Groups

Following niche student groups who needs academic support were identified with the use of Western University's club directory.

- Student athletes (current target for Academic Success Program)
- Indigenous students
- LGBTQ+ students
- Students with disabilities
- International students
- Graduate students
- Mature students
- Women in Engineering
- Pre-lvey Students
- Pre-Med Students

### Current Support Available for Niche Student Groups

#### Mature Students

Mature students at UWO are supported by the Society of Mature Students (SMS). SMS aims to meet the unique needs for mature students and offers programs to make connections with other mature students, to learn about specific services related to mature students and to offer academic support. SMS also offers mentorship programs for mature students where an upper year student is assigned to provide academic and social support for mature students. There is also an orientation program offered by SMS to provide support in campus programs, aid in course selection, course registration, and campus tours.[3]

#### Women in the Engineering Field

Women in the Engineering Field are currently supported by the Women in Engineering (WIE) student group at UWO. This groups aims to offer social and academic support for future and current female engineering students. There are many social events offered by the WIE such as Trivia Night, WIE annual brunch, Big Sister - Little Sister kick-off events etc. [7] However, there is no academic support that is specifically tailored to women in the engineering field.

#### Indigenous students

Indigenous students are supported mainly by two different student groups. Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE) offers support through peer-based support networks and facilitates transition, retention, and completion of Indigenous students in graduate studies. Indigenous Student Association (ISA) maintains a sense of community amongst the students and offers programs, events, and workshops to educate Western's Campus about Indigenous peoples, their nations, and their distinct cultures. These groups and services specifically help students in spreading awareness and maintaining a sense of community.[6] However, there is no academic support that is specifically tailored to indigenous students.

### Student with Disabilities

Students work collaboratively with the Services for Students with Disabilities in the Student Development Centre to get accommodation when needed. Additionally, undergraduate and graduate students with learning disabilities and attention disorders can work with the learning strategist and get help in multiple areas. Learning strategists currently help students with psychoeducational assessments and allow students to better understand their unique pattern of cognitive strengths and weaknesses. Students can also get help in reading, studying, learning new information, note-taking, essay writing, and exam writing. [9] However, there is no peer to peer help available or specific course help was being offered for students with disabilities.

### Graduate students

Over 6000 grad students every year are supported by the society of graduate students (SOGS) across more than 60 departments on campus. SOG's assist the students with health & dental plan, Offering academic, financial, and social/cultural support to members etc. They are also supported through Pal center, individual counselling and presentation and workshops specific for graduate students. [8] Currently western has over 70 masters and 50 doctoral programs where the students are offered different support by their department.

### International Students

International students have the highest support available among all the niche student groups. Currently numerous programs and services are offered by International and Exchange student center to support International students. The International Peer Connection (IPC) program is a peer guide programs which matches an international student with Western students called Peer Guides. Peer guides acts as a mentor and provides support such as acting as guides, inform about events, connecting to Western and London activities, services and resources etc. English Conversation Program (ECP) is also offered to international students whose first language is not English. ECP helps students in improving their spoken English and to increase confidence in using conversational English. [6]

### LGBTTIQQ2SA+ Students

There are many psychological services, and support groups offered on-campus for LGBTTIQQ2SA+ Students. These resources include Equity and Human Rights Services, pride library, sexuality and gender research group, trans care team, western queer Caucus, women's studies and feminist resource, ally Western, and pride Western. Following services support students in with psychological Services resources and making informed decisions.[5] LGBTTIQQ2SA+ Students currently have no support for specific academic support available.

### Niche Student Group Interview Results

After interviewing seven students on the Western University campus, we conducted qualitative analysis to identify re-occurring themes in students' responses. We interviewed five graduate-international students, one business student, and one pre-medical student.

For the graduate-international respondents, we observed that there were a variety of resources and supports available but the frequency of usage of these resources was dependent on the

individual. Three of the five graduate students indicated that they liked the support provided by Western's international support program in terms of answering their questions and providing adequate guidance. Two participants expressed their enthusiasm towards certain social events, such as Global Café, a weekly gathering where students from around the world can meet and practice English. However, students also acknowledged the stress associated with needing to find work within their 1 to 3-year work permit deadline. These participants indicated that employers may be hesitant to hire students with work permits. Thus, they wished that they had more guidance on how to find work placements given their unique circumstances as international students. Interestingly, when participants were asked whether they were aware of the Western Academic Success Program, none of the students indicated that they knew of the program. However, four of the five respondents mentioned their use of services offered by the Academic Success Centre, such as writing support, the peer support program, and leadership education workshops. These findings highlight the gaps in awareness among international students surrounding their knowledge of academic supports in Western. In fact, one participant noted that information about resources on campus was made available at the beginning of the year but there was a lack of information about resources available throughout the rest of the year.

The business student and pre-medical student—both of whom are completing their undergraduate degrees—indicated the social and emotional benefits of having upper-year Sophs or being a Soph in Western residence. Therefore, the personable and readily available support provided by upper-year residence leaders is a potential avenue that may be used to educate new students on academic, financial, and psychological resources provided by Western University.

## Recommendations for Niche Student Group Expansion

### Residence Leaders as Contact Points for Resource Referral

Provide training and resources for residence advisors, employees, dons, and in-residence Sophs so they can provide adequate information on academic support, career services, and financial help to first-year students living in Western's residences. This strategy takes advantage of the personable and frequent interactions that occur between students and residence leaders, allowing students to receive personalized help throughout the school year. As well, by introducing first year students to these resources, this provides a strong foundation should these students require these resources in future years.

### Career Support for International Students with Work Permits

We have found that international students must follow certain regulations and require a work permit to work in Canada. We can expand services at the Careers & Experience Centre to have them work jointly with the Academic Success Program to provide international students with more information on obtaining work visas, to find employment programs that are tailored to the needs of new immigrants, and to provide individualized and group career counselling.

## Providing Resource Information Throughout the Year

More information about the available resources can be sent via email and during in-person “floor meetings” for first year students in residence. This information can be provided during the beginning of each semester, as well as a few weeks before midterms and finals, so that students become familiar with these resources and how they can access them.

## Graduate Student Writing Group

An organized writing space can be provided for graduate students in the process of writing and defending their dissertation. This group can be created to help students maintain a consistent writing schedule and to commit to regular writing.

## Key Components of an Effective Academic Success Program

The following components are integral to an effective academic success program and are common program features amongst other Ontario universities.

### General Program Success

- Flexible study hall hours
- Diverse study mentors
- Designated study area for students
- Option for students to request a mentor who has recently done well in a specific course
- Continuous feedback and check-in points

### Student-Athlete Success

- Drop-in or by-appointment support with a Learning Strategist
- Drop-in academic advising for course selection, program transfers, graduation plans, and course drop decisions
- Mandatory workshop series early during first semester (time management, reading and note taking strategies, midterm preparation, research skills)
- Designated study space which can be used by all athletes at any time
- All new athletes are required to attend 4 hours of study hall on a weekly basis
- All first-year athletes are paired with an academic mentor who they meet with weekly to develop a time management plan and for help with schoolwork
  - Mentors are matched with mentees based on academic discipline
- All athletes with a GPA below 2.67\* are required to attend 2 hours of study hall per week during supervised times
- All athletes with a GPA below 1.67 after first semester are required to attend 2-hour sessions on a weekly basis led by the Learning Strategist

\*Some Ontario universities list the cut-off GPA as 2.00

## Recommendations for our ASP based on Key Components

### Virtual Study Hall

One component that has been discussed as a potential improvement for the Academic Success Program is virtual study hall. Although there seems to be many benefits of a virtual study session including flexible hours and on-demand academic help, our survey results showed that not many students were interested or open to this kind of learning. It should be noted that the sample size of the survey may not be fully representative of the desired population, as only 66 responses were recorded. Therefore, it is worth further exploring the option of virtual study hall and fully explaining the potential programming to students in order to accurately assess interest.

### Study Sessions

Another component of the Academic Success Program can include specialized study sessions for students who are on academic probation, struggling academically and need to raise their GPA. This is crucial as students with low GPA can be placed on probation and can be asked to withdraw for a minimum of twelve months. Individualized study sessions for academically struggling students assist them in improving their academic performance. The study sessions can be tailored to the student needs to help them understand their strengths and weakness and areas of challenge and help them develop the skills they need to succeed academically. During the study sessions students can also be assigned to peer mentors or counsellors and get support in specific courses that they find challenging. The students must be provided with the on-going support throughout the term to help them succeed academically.

### Academic Transition Seminars

The transition from high school to university can be stressful and difficult for most students. An academic transition seminar tailored for new students can help with the new transition and allow for personal growth and skill-building. Although Western already offers student-athlete workshops on effective-note taking, multiple choice exam taking etc., these transition seminars could be focused more on identify student's weakness, strengths, possible challenges and creating a specific plan to help them succeed in their program. They could be tailored to students in different programs and conducted in group sessions or in one-on-one meetings such as on a bi-weekly basis. During the seminars an academic student mentor or counsellor can work with the students and help them develop key academic and personal skills, help create academic goals and help them navigate the first-year transition to university. Overall, academic transition seminars can provide ongoing support in reaching their academic and personal goals for new students.

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