

Viking Launch Program Evaluation: 2012-2013

This report summarizes satisfaction, retention and fiscal data for Viking Launch for the period 2012-2013. Satisfaction data is reported for the 2013 cohort; retention data for the 2012 cohort.

Program Overview

Western's fall early start program for first-year students, Viking Launch brings students to campus a week early for extended orientation activities and immersive lab and field-based academic seminars, designed to "launch" students into academic and career tracks. Seminars include courses in chemistry, journalism, neuroscience, environmental sustainability, education, marine biology, and creative and technical writing. Viking Launch serves the first-year mission to help new students

- Understand the intellectual, moral, civic, and personal purposes of their liberal arts education;
- Negotiate successfully the academic and personal opportunities and challenges of their first year;
- Connect to Western faculty and the larger campus community.

Impact on Student Satisfaction and Achievement

Assessment and retention data remain positive for Viking Launch. 100% of surveyed students in the 2013 cohort (n=30) report they would recommend the program to other freshmen and that the program improved their academic preparedness. First-year to sophomore retention for VL students was slightly higher than predicted by academic index and slightly higher than average, despite the high percentage of non-resident students (who are retained at lower-than average rates). Consequently, the impact on student satisfaction and achievement appears positive.

Here are representative answers from this year's students to the question "Would you recommend VL to other students?"

YES! The experience, the friends, the faculty, and the service learning staff were amazing! Everything was fun and I went into my freshman year more prepared than I ever dreamed.

Yes but be prepared for it to be hard and definitely an "experience"

Definitely. Helped me create a connection with other viking launch students and let me get a chance to explore the campus before it was overwhelmingly busy with a ton of students.

YES!!!! It was a great way to get adapted, meet people, know more about wwu and Bellingham. the main point was just having a set community before anyone else had even arrived

YES! It was very interactive, exciting, and informative.

Yes. It gave me a chance to ease into college life without being thrown into a full schedule right away. I also made some of the most amazing friends I could have hoped for and really bonded with them over that week.

Yes, This was a good start for any freshman. It allows you to make new friends and get a better grasp on the College curriculum. I would recommend this program to anyone.

Impact on Retention and Student Performance

As has held true since the onset of the program, VL students were much more likely to be non-resident. This seems the most notable feature of the program and may be part of the reason why non-resident enrollment has risen for us as an institution.

Fall to winter retention was higher for VL students than non-VL students even though non-resident status is a risk factor for non-retention at Western. Similarly, VL students earned higher fall grades, were markedly less likely to be on academic warning and slightly less apt to withdraw from a course.

| Fall 2012 New Freshmen by Viking Launch attendance | | | |
|--|------|--------|-------|
| | VL | not VL | Total |
| All New Freshmen | 57 | 2631 | 2688 |
| Non-Resident | 22 | 320 | 342 |
| % Non-Resident | 39% | 12% | 13% |
| First Generation | 11 | 803 | 814 |
| % First Generation | 19% | 31% | 30% |
| Average AI | 55.8 | 55.3 | 55.3 |
| Avg Fall Hrs Attempted | 14.3 | 14.3 | 14.3 |
| Avg Fall Hrs Earned | 13.7 | 13.1 | 13.1 |
| Average Fall GPA | 2.96 | 2.78 | 2.79 |
| Fall Academic Warning | 3 | 375 | 378 |
| % Fall Warning | 5% | 14% | 14% |
| Withdraw at least 1 course | 3 | 216 | 219 |
| % Withdraw | 5% | 8% | 8% |
| Retained to Winter | 56 | 2535 | 2591 |
| % Retained | 98% | 96% | 96% |

Impact on Tuition Revenue

Admission personnel report that VL is useful in recruiting non-residents to Western and has increased tuition revenue via this mechanism. Moreover, the return on investment for the Marine Science Scholars program, which grew out of Viking Launch, is estimated at \$250,000.00 a year. Consequently, the overall fiscal impact of the program is positive.

Fiscal Sustainability

Extended Education finds that VL is not fiscally viable within its current structure. Price increases have reduced enrollments such that tuition may no longer cover costs. In addition, participation must be large enough to justify staff time. They recommend lowering the price by \$150.00 in order to increase participation and enroll at least 100 students. Overhead for the program is very low. Extended Education charges \$50.00 a student for its services. University Residences provides a discount, housing students for 7 nights and charging for 5. Participating Resident Advisors and Resident Directors are not compensated.

Possible Solutions

Reduce the seminars from 2 credits to 1, increasing extra-curricular activities while reducing class time.

Increase all enrollment caps to 17.

Cancel all courses enrolling fewer than 10 students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven L. VanderStaay". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Steven L. VanderStaay
Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education