



Anticipating the Unanticipated: Suggestions and resources for preventing and responding to student complaints, crises, and behavioral and health concerns

This issue of Praxis is designed to help you “anticipate the unanticipated” with two sets of resources.

First, we provide suggestions for syllabus components that can prevent and mitigate the kinds of student difficulties—typically rare, occasionally legal, always awkward—that can result in complaints and grievances.

Next we provide advice from Prevention and Wellness Services, Counseling Services, the Student Health Center, and the Dean of Students regarding what to do and who to call for a range of student behavior and health issues. The goal here is to call your attention to offices and services to contact and refer students to if you encounter students with problems that extend beyond the academic scope.

Our intent is to be helpful rather than alarming. At Western 95% of all classes run smoothly. No one complains, has a personal crisis, plagiarizes, files a grievance, or turns to a faculty member for therapeutic or legal advice. However, while the instances of such difficulties have not increased, complications surrounding them have. In addition, faculty have asked for more guidance regarding what to do and who to call when they have concerns for the health and well being of students. For the 5% of classes in which such issues arise, we offer this Praxis. (Please note our “Quick Links” to the right.)

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QUICK LINKS

UNIVERSITY POLICE EMERGENCY:
650-3911

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UNIVERSITY POLICE NON-EMERGENCY:
650-3555

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HEALTH CENTER:
650-3400

www.western.edu/chw/student_health

•

ALCOHOL & OTHER DRUG ISSUES:
650-3643

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VIOLENCE, PHYSICAL AND/OR SEXUAL
ABUSE ISSUES:
650-7982

•

24-HOUR HELP LINE:
650-3700

•

SAFE CAMPUS:
650-7233

•

COUNSELING CENTER:
650-3164
www.western.edu/chw

•

DEAN OF STUDENTS:
650-3706

www.western.edu/dos/contact_us.shtml



A WELL-PREPARED SYLLABUS CAN “HAVE YOUR BACK”

A syllabus serves many functions. In addition to answering basic questions about course logistics, responsibilities, and grading, a well-conceived syllabus sets academic and behavioral standards for students while documenting your department’s adherence to state and accreditation guidelines. In this way a well-prepared syllabus prevents problems, clarifies what students should do if a problem arises, and “has your back” should a larger or unforeseen problem arise.

This doesn’t mean you need to turn your syllabus into a tome. Instead, you need to simply cite or provide the following information:

GRADING METHOD

A clear, explicit statement of evaluation processes and measurements assures students that grading is fair, reduces misunderstandings and objections, and protects your authority. If, for instance, attendance is a component of grading, be sure the syllabus says so. Otherwise the “A” student who only shows up for exams has grounds for objecting to his “B.” In addition, be sure to include statements regarding extra credit, make-up tests, and deadlines.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Clarifying the particulars, processes and rationale for student responsibilities regarding attendance, due dates, homework, presentations, and participation will thin your in-box, prevent objections, and help students meet deadlines.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES (SLOs)

Students, accreditors, the State of Washington, and the federal government expect a syllabus to state what students will learn or be able to do upon completion of a course. Many departments have established course objectives that can be listed. If not, simply note 1-2 suitable departmental outcomes met by your course. These are available on each department’s web site. In addition, GUR courses should note which of the 11 GUR competencies the course meets. These can be found at:

catalog.wvu.edu > University Graduation Requirements > GURs

Examples:

- Geo 212: Upon completion of this course you should be able to describe how plate tectonics has influenced continental evolution and deposition (course SLO #2).

- Eng 238: Upon completion of this course you should be able to analyze and communicate ideas effectively in oral, written, and visual forms (GUR competency #1).

ACADEMIC (Dis)HONESTY AND STUDENT BEHAVIOR

Students are held to Western’s Academic Honesty Policy and Procedure, and the Students Rights and Responsibilities code, whether or not you cite them in your syllabus. However, citing these policies underscores your authority and reduces the likelihood that you will have to deal with disruptive behavior or academic dishonesty. Finally, because most students are unaware that common practices, such as using a language translator or submitting the same paper in different classes, are considered plagiarism, cautioning about such practices goes far toward preventing them.

Example:

“In this course I will uphold all aspects of Western’s Academic Honesty Policy and Procedure, and Student Rights and Responsibilities Code. These are published in the Western catalog in Appendix C, *University Academic Policies*.”

To educate students about plagiarism, some faculty direct students to these sites:

Plagiarism Policies & Guidelines: libguides.wvu.edu/plagiarism

Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism: libguides.wvu.edu/data/files4/129465/plagiarism

The Student’s Guide to Avoiding Plagiarism: www.wvu.edu/soc/guides.shtml

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) does not require faculty to include a reasonable accommodation statement in their syllabus. However, difficulties can occur if a student requests a disability accommodation late, or if he or she fails to provide proper documentation. And the inclusion of a brief statement has proved helpful for faculty who have received complaints about their willingness to support documented accommodations. The following statement is sufficient:

Reasonable accommodation for persons with documented disabilities should be established within the first week of class and arranged through Disability Resources for Students: telephone 650-3083; email drs@wvu.edu; and on the web at <http://www.wvu.edu/depts/drs/>



STUDENT SERVICES

Statements like the following can reduce difficulties by matching students with assistance as early as possible:

Western encourages students to seek assistance and support at the onset of an illness, difficulty, or crisis.

- In the case of a medical concern or question, please contact the Health Center: 650-3400 or wwu.edu/chw/student_health/
- In the case of an emotional or psychological concern or question, please contact the Counseling Center: 650-3400 or wwu.edu/chw/
- In the case of a health and safety concern, please contact the University Police: 650-3555 or ps.wwu.edu/default.aspx
- In the case of a family or personal crisis or emergency, please contact the Dean of Students: 650-3775 or wwu.edu/dos/contact_us.shtml

FLEXIBILITY STATEMENT

A flexibility statement is a safeguard worth considering. Something along these lines might serve

you well in a quarter that goes unexpectedly awry—positively or negatively—for whatever reasons:

“This syllabus is subject to change. Changes, if any, will be announced in class. Students will be held responsible for all changes.”

OTHER RESOURCES FOR CONSTRUCTING A SYLLABUS

Course syllabus guidelines at the Center for Instructional Innovation and Assessment (CIIA):

pandora.cii.wwu.edu/cii/resources/teaching_tips/syllabus_guidelines.asp

Harvard’s syllabus advice:

isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k1985&pageid=icb.page29695

A history of the syllabus:

isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic58495/syllabushistory.html

Books available at the CIIA:

The Course Syllabus: A Learning-Centered Approach.

The Graphic Syllabus and the Outcomes Map: Communicating Your Course.

For more information, contact the Center for Instructional Innovation and Assessment @ 650-7210, or visit: pandora.cii.wwu.edu/cii/resources/teaching_tips/syllabus_guidelines.asp



**PARTNERS FOR A SAFE & HEALTHY WESTERN:
HEALTH & WELLNESS SERVICES**

Western faculty are likely aware that alcohol abuse, drug use, and violence can negatively affect a student’s ability to succeed academically. During the course of a term, faculty may notice changes in a student’s classroom behavior that may indicate alcohol abuse; moreover, faculty are likely to be one of the first points of contact for a student who has experienced sexual assault, relationship violence, or stalking. Faculty may not, however, be comfortable addressing these problems or making a referral if a problem is identified.

Help in these areas is available through Western’s Prevention and Wellness Services. Indeed, two referral services can be easily accessed:

- For alcohol and other drug issues, call 650-3643 to reach Western’s Alcohol and Drug Consultation and Assessment Services (ADCAS). ADCAS offers confidential consultations to help faculty assist Western students.

NOTE: ADCAS also offers students confidential assessment of personal substance use patterns; individual discussion of personal use issues or concerns about friends, family members, partners, or roommates; and referral to appropriate support, counseling or treatment resources.

- For violence, physical and/or sexual abuse issues, call 650-7982 to reach Crime and Sexual Assault Support Services (CASAS). CASAS, too, offers confidential consultations to help faculty assist Western students.



NOTE: In addition, CASAS offers confidential support, advocacy services, and resources to Western students through a 24-Hour Help Line: 650-3700.

Some faculty may choose to be a student’s initial source of information and support when dealing with these issues. If so, here are some suggestions about how to help.

ALCOHOL & OTHER DRUG ISSUES

Possible indicators of an alcohol and/or drug issue may include:

- Declining academic performance.
- Frequently turning in assignments late, or not at all.
- Frequently arriving late to class, or not at all.
- Missing classes, especially early morning.
- Declining or erratic class participation.
- Problematic behavior in group work situations, possibly reported to you by other group members.
- Attending class “hung over” or very tired.
- Drastic mood changes.

While these signs may alert you to the possibility of alcohol and/or drug abuse, they are not exclusively indicators of such problems. They may also indicate an impact created due to use by a friend or family member, or by some other significant problematic event. Whichever case, these indicators may prompt you to initiate a supportive conversation with the student.

Talking With Students

- Ask to talk with the student privately.
- Tell the student that you are concerned and use concrete examples of behavior(s) to describe those concerns.
- Tell the student that professional, confidential resources exist on campus to assist him or her.
- Refer the student to ADCAS, Old Main 560C.
- To ensure follow through, during your meeting with the student call 650-3643 to arrange an appointment.
- Ask the student to commit to keeping the appointment; follow-up with the student later.

At any time, faculty may call 650-3643 for consultation with a professional on how to proceed.

What Students Can Expect From ADCAS

- Confidential discussion with a professional trained to address alcohol and drug issues and problems.

- Respectful environment.
- Useful, nonjudgmental information.
- Assessment of individual alcohol and/or drug risk.
- Individualized personal feedback on alcohol and/or drug use patterns and consequences.
- Skills training to reduce risks related to current and future choices about alcohol and/or drug use, or strategies to assist coping with the substance use by a friend or family member.
- Referral to appropriate campus and community resources, including support and treatment options.
- Students are also reassured that they will not be forced or required to do anything, and, regardless of the substance use choices, police are not notified.
- For all services, the primary focus is on decreasing unwanted/unexpected outcomes and maintaining personal safety.

SEXUAL ASSAULT, RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE OR STALKING

Again, if you are not comfortable discussing these issues, please refer the student to the CASAS 24-hour help line at 650-3700. If, on the other hand, you choose to be the student’s initial source of information and support, here are some suggestions about how to help.

Warning Signs

- An abrupt attendance problem.
- A sudden change in classroom participation.
- Missing assignments.
- Signs of bruising or injuries.
- Appears fearful, depressed, anxious, vigilant.
- Leaves the room or cries during discussions related to abuse.
- Friends report that she/he is in a “bad” relationship.
- She/he has frequent, unexplained medical appointments.

What You Can Do

- Be supportive and non-judgmental.
- Listen with concern.
- Validate the student’s feelings and concerns. Do not dismiss his/her reactions or experiences.
- Provide information, options and referrals.
- Avoid making decisions or choices for the student.
- Do whatever you can to insure the student’s continued safety.



What You Can Expect

When someone is victimized, several key issues surface:

- Concerns about confidentiality.
- Fears for personal safety.
- Health concerns.
- Loss of a sense of control.

Concerns About Confidentiality

- Explain the limits of confidentiality, if any, as defined by your position in your department.
- Let the student know that no records of reports of sexual assault, relationship violence, and/or stalking are kept in permanent academic records.

Fears for Personal Safety

- Ask if the student has a safe place to stay. If not, CASAS can assist with changing rooms or finding temporary housing.
- CASAS can help students victimized by relationship violence, stalking, harassment, sexual assault or fear of reprisal create a Safety Plan.

Health Concerns

- In the case of a sexual assault that occurred within the last 72 hours, students can go to St. Joseph’s Hospital or the Student Health Center for a forensic exam.

- If it is after the 72-hour period, students are encouraged to seek follow-up health care at the Student Health Center for physical injuries, a general physical exam, and testing for sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy, and HIV.

Regaining a Sense of Control

Encourage the student to contact CASAS for crisis intervention, advocacy, and support in understanding, evaluating, and choosing available resources, including: individual advocacy, academic support, support groups, Judicial Affairs options, reporting options, medical concerns, financial services, safety issues, and accompaniment to legal and/or medical appointments.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES TO RAISE AWARENESS

In addition to assisting students who may have problems, faculty members have a unique opportunity to raise awareness about violence and sexual assault and alcohol and/or drugs in course material. For example, a psychology class could discuss the impact of alcohol abuse on family dynamics, or a business class could discuss measures to take when domestic violence begins to affect employees at work.

If you would like to discuss integrating these issues into course material or discuss Western’s prevention approaches, or if you would like to schedule a presentation addressing these issues, or if you would like information about campus and community resources, call:

Director of Prevention & Wellness Services/ ADCAS Manager • Elva Giddings 650-3643
CASAS Case Manager • Devlin O’Donnell 650-7982



PARTNERS FOR A SAFE & HEALTHY WESTERN: COUNSELING SERVICES

As a faculty member you may have a vantage point that allows you to see changes in a student’s behavior that indicate the student is struggling with significant personal concerns. Your relationship with the student may offer the opportunity to connect students with the campus services that can most help them. The staff

of the Counseling Center (650-3164) can assist you in guiding the student toward the appropriate campus resources.

The psychologists and mental health counselors in the Counseling Center are experienced with issues common to students, such as depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, eating or body image concerns, as well as significant family issues that take students’ attention away from academics. We are also experienced in helping faculty and staff think through



In emergency situations, or situations where you are concerned about your safety or the safety of others, call University Police immediately by dialing 650-3911 from a campus phone or (360) 650-3911 from a cell phone.

how to respond to a student whose behavior or decline in academic performance raises concern for you.

Some signs of distress students may exhibit are: Uncharacteristic neglect of academic work, excessive absences, appearance of being alcohol or drug affected, frequently crying, irritability, inappropriate comments in class discussion, physical or verbal aggression, disturbing content in assignments, reference to personal or family problems that interfere with ability to concentrate, or pervasive pessimism or hopelessness.

Any of these behaviors may indicate the student is struggling with concerns for which Western offers services for support and assistance.

TALKING WITH THE STUDENT

- Set up a time to talk when you and the student can have some uninterrupted time and a place where your conversation is not going to be overheard.
- Specifically state your reason for concern. Emphasize your concern about the behavior you have observed rather than criticism. (For example: “You haven’t been in class and you are late with the assignment. I’m concerned about you.” OR “You have seemed really distracted the past few weeks. That makes me wonder if something serious is on your mind.”)
- Listen carefully to understand the situation from the student’s perspective. Refrain from making judgmental or critical comments. Reiterate your concern and desire to help the student connect with services that can best assist the student with his/her specific concerns.
- If what the student tells you gives you cause for concern about suicide, it is very reasonable to ask specifically about suicide risk. This will not cause someone to be at greater risk. It will remind them of your concern. (e.g., “What you are saying about feeling so discouraged about so many things in your life causes me to wonder if you are having thoughts of suicide?”) If the student indicates that suicide has been on his/her mind, an immediate

call to the Counseling Center (650-3164) to set up an “urgent” appointment is appropriate. In such a case it will be helpful if you can walk the student over to the Counseling Center (Old Main 540).

- Even if a student is not suicidal, the Counseling Center can be a helpful resource. Remind the student that the service is free and confidential. Our service is so confidential we cannot even let the faculty member who referred the student know that the student has kept the appointment without explicit written permission from the student.
- Set up a time to have a follow-up conversation with the student to check on what he/she has done to access help as well as how the student is doing since you last spoke.

TIPS FOR REFERRING A STUDENT TO THE COUNSELING CENTER

- Find out if the student is aware of counseling and other relevant support resources (Academic and Career Development Services, disAbility Resources, Student Health Center, etc.) on campus.
- Ask if they would like more information. See our webpage: www.wvu.edu/counseling/.
- Encourage the student to call the Counseling Center to make an appointment. (650-3164; M-F, 8:30-5:00) You may also offer to call the Counseling Center while you and the student are talking so you are sure the student makes the appointment. Make sure the student writes down the date and time of the appointment as well as location of the Counseling Center (540 Old Main).
- If the student has shared information with you that you believe would be helpful for the Counseling Center to know, please call us later to give us the pertinent information. If the student has spoken to you about potential harm, it is very important that you share that information with the Counseling Center. Keep in mind that we cannot communicate with you unless the student gives us written permission to do so. Our webpage has more information on confidentiality and its limits.

If a counseling emergency arises when the Counseling Center is closed, you may call University Police dispatch at 650-3555 to consult with an on-call counselor.



IF A STUDENT IS RELUCTANT TO SEEK HELP

- Be direct in letting the student know you believe a counselor would be of help in this situation.
- If the student says he/she does not want to speak with a counselor, it may be helpful to ask about the student’s perceptions, fears, or concerns.
- If you know other students who have had a good experience with counseling, that may be helpful to share with the student.
- Let the student know that it is acceptable to schedule a single appointment to find out more about what counseling has to offer.

Any time you have a concern about a student, you may consult with professionals in the Counseling Center and /or Dean of Students Office. If the student’s behavior is disruptive or disturbing, it is important that you inform the Dean’s office so appropriate intervention and follow-up can be initiated when needed.

ADDITIONAL SERVICES OF THE COUNSELING CENTER

- The Counseling Center offers individual, couple, and group counseling, as well as educational services designed to help students improve their lives through healthier relationships, better communication, greater understanding of self, strategies for self-care, and making choices that are more consistent with their educational and personal goals.
- We also assist students by referring them to other services on campus and to community resources that can offer more specialized or longer-term help with problems and concerns.
- We work closely with the Student Health Center (650-3400) when psychiatric evaluation, psychotropic medication or medical attention is needed.
- Our counseling staff includes psychologists, mental health counselors, and masters and doctoral level trainees who work under the supervision of our professional staff.

Western’s Counseling Center is accredited by the International Association for Counseling Services and is a member of the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers.



PARTNERS FOR A SAFE & HEALTHY WESTERN: STUDENT HEALTH CENTER

The Student Health Center is a primary care medical clinic with a specialty in college health. We provide a broad range of affordable health care to eligible students. Our team of physicians, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, and support staff work to educate and assist students with preventive health care, as well as evaluate, diagnose and treat physical and mental health concerns, illnesses and injuries, thereby minimizing their impact on academic progress.

“We want to help students be well, get well, and stay well—life long.”

The Health Center is available to all students currently enrolled with six or more credits on Western’s Bellingham campus. A student registered for three-to-five credits has the option to pay the Counseling, Health and Wellness fee and be seen during a quarter. We are unable to see former students or students on leave, dependents of students, Western faculty or staff, or Whatcom Community College students living on Western’s campus.

The mandatory, quarterly Health Services Fee provides eligible students with unlimited access to the Center, without charge for office visits. Same-day appointments are available; these are especially accessible before 10 AM.



Free over-the-counter medications and first aid supplies are available. Unfortunately, for prescription medications dispensed at the Center, equipment, lab tests and special procedures, fees are assessed.

We no longer provide on campus ADHD evaluations for diagnosis, but will treat and monitor students on stimulant and non-stimulant ADHD medications. We are able to do drug screening in the clinic if needed.

We do online screening for depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation and actively address urgent issues that are uncovered by that screening.

The Student Health Center maintains a thorough and easily navigated web site (www.edu/chw/student_health/). From this site students can find information

on clinical services, the measles requirement, insurance and billing, flu shots, as well as many other health-related topics. You can also find many useful links, including symptom questionnaires, self assessment surveys, "Ask the Doc," and a virtual visit.

An after-hours telephone nurse consultation service is available to students at no charge. Just call: 1-800-607-5501.

A much valued service of the Student Health Center is the Travel Clinic, a good example of the kind of resource of particular interest to our academic community. The Travel Clinic offers pre-travel counseling, post-travel care, immunizations and health advice to Western students planning to

travel to developing countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, Africa and eastern Europe. The clinic is a Washington State Department of Health designated center for yellow fever vaccine.

STUDENT HEALTH CENTER

2001 Bill McDonald Parkway
(Public Safety Building)

Clinic Hours

Academic Year = 8:30 to 4:00 (Thursdays = 9:30 to 4:00)
Summer = M-F 8:30 to noon & 1:00 to 4:00
(Note: Closed for medical care during the breaks between quarters.)

Telephone = 650-3400

Web site = www.edu/chw/student_health/



**PARTNERS FOR A SAFE & HEALTHY WESTERN:
DEAN OF STUDENTS OFFICE**

We all have a lot of contact with students, both in and out of the classroom. Over the course of a year, it's quite likely that you may encounter students in distress, in crisis, or who otherwise raise concerns. When those situations arise, the Dean of Students Office can help.

Both the Dean of Students, Ted Pratt, and the Associate Dean of Students, Sherry Mallory, are available to

consult with faculty on a range of issues, including but not limited to:

- Student conduct policies and procedures.
- Disruptive or disturbing student behavior.
- Support for students dealing with personal or family crises.
- General concerns about student behavior.

Staff in the Dean of Students Office are also available to assist students with advice on university policies and procedures, referrals to campus and community



resources, non-medical emergency leaves of absence, hardship withdrawals, and problem-solving within the university system.

- Concerns about student behavior may also be directed to Safe Campus hotline. The Safe Campus hotline is staffed 24 hours a day, and can be reached at 650-SAFE (7233).
- In emergency situations, or situations where you are concerned about your safety or the safety of others, call University Police immediately by dialing 650-3911 from a campus phone or (360) 650-3911 from a cell phone.

A special note regarding the Counseling Center: In cases where a student’s behavior is disruptive or disturbing, a referral to Western’s Counseling Center (650-3164) is often appropriate. It may not, however, be sufficient. In those situations, faculty are encouraged to also notify the Dean of Students Office. Confidentiality laws prohibit the Counseling Center from revealing whether the student you referred actually attended counseling, or from sharing information with others on campus, without the student’s explicit permission. Notifying the Dean of Students Office helps staff create a more complete picture of the student’s situation (including information that may be provided by others on- or off-campus), review new information as it emerges, and develop plans for intervention and follow-up (when necessary).

A special note about FERPA: There is often confusion about the limitations and allowances of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) in conjunction with reports of concerning student

behavior. FERPA relates only to the privacy of educational records; reporting observable behavior is not prohibited. If you are concerned about a personal interaction you’ve had with a student or a concerning behavior you’ve observed, you are encouraged to report and/or consult with appropriate colleagues, including the Dean of Students Office.

A relatively new consultative resource available to faculty who are concerned about a student is the Network Group. The group—chaired by the Associate Dean of Students—meets on a weekly basis to assess student behavior that is concerning and/or unusual, and to develop plans for intervention and follow-up (when necessary). Standing members of the Network Group include the Dean of Students, Director of the Counseling Center, Director of the Health Center, Chief of University Police, Associate Director of Residence Life, Student Conduct Officer, Director of disAbility Resources for Students, and Coordinator of Crime and Sexual Assault Support Services. If you have any questions about the Network Group, or would like to request consultation on a specific student concern, contact Sherry Mallory at 650-2484 or sherry.mallory@wwu.edu.

The Dean of Students Office is open Monday-Friday from 8AM to 5PM. The main office phone is 650-3706. You are welcome to contact Ted Pratt, Dean of Students, directly at 650-3121, or Associate Dean of Students, Sherry Mallory, directly at 650-2484. After hours, Ted and Sherry can be reached by e-mail at ted.pratt@wwu.edu or sherry.mallory@wwu.edu.

“What’s a Professor to Do?”

This brochure out of the University of California, Irvine, has excellent tips for addressing rude and disruptive classroom behavior. It is really quite well done and very informative. You can download it at:

www.counseling.uci.edu/pdf/uci_disrupt_behav.pdf

Steve VanderStaay and Gary McKinney prepared this Praxis, with writing and editorial support from Justina Brown, Nancy Corbin, Emily Gibson, Elva Giddings, and Sherry Mallory.



Praxis is published throughout the academic year by the Office of the Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education. Praxis promotes the exchange of ideas and provides information on upcoming events and topical issues in teaching and learning at the undergraduate level.

Office of the Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education
Western Washington University • 516 High Street • Bellingham, WA 98225-9033
Phone: 360-650-3409 • Email: gary.mckinney@wwu.edu • Praxis web site: www.wwu.edu/depts/vpue/praxis.shtml