

First-generation students often face significant challenges in obtaining higher education and achieving academic success (Caltadi et al, 2018). Through global outreach activities, scholarship initiatives, and affordable tuition, the University offers first-generation students and students from low income countries such as Nepal the opportunity to pursue a U.S. education.

As a result of Westcliff University outreach efforts, the University's admission data shows that the proportion of first generation students who are accepted to Westcliff remains consistently at one-third of the overall student population. The proportion of first-generation students at the university was 32% in 2019. Of the first generation students, 41% are female. Approximately 61% of new students who started their education at Westcliff University in 2019 come from low income or lower middle income countries. In addition, Westcliff University extends outreach activities and support to recruit students from other underrepresented groups such as Hispanic and American Indian students. The number of new Hispanic students increased by fivefold in 2019.

Westcliff makes a significant impact in Nepal - one of the least developed countries in Asia and ranked 149th out of 189 countries in the 2019 UN Human Development Index (United Nations, 2019). The contemporary Nepali education system is relatively young. In the 1950s, only wealthy elites and members of the royal family had access to education and women were discouraged from obtaining education. Considerable progress followed in 1971 with the reform of the education system.

Westcliff University has formed a relationship with the Nepali Ministry of Education to deliver world class education at bachelor and graduate levels in Nepal. The University provides financial assistance and academic support to Nepali students. Besides the general scholarships for students in its Nepali campuses, need-based scholarships are awarded to students from marginalized communities and poor families in Nepal. In 2019, there were 24 need-based scholarships awarded to Nepali students from low-income families.

Understanding the challenges of female students in Nepal, different scholarship and award programs are designed to encourage female applicants; for example, the Sonja Poudel Women Entrepreneurship and Leadership Award for Nepali female students applying to the MBA program. As shown in Chart 1 below, the female to male ratio of Nepali new students and overall new students starting a degree at Westcliff University increased by 6% from 2018 to 2019 (Chart 2).

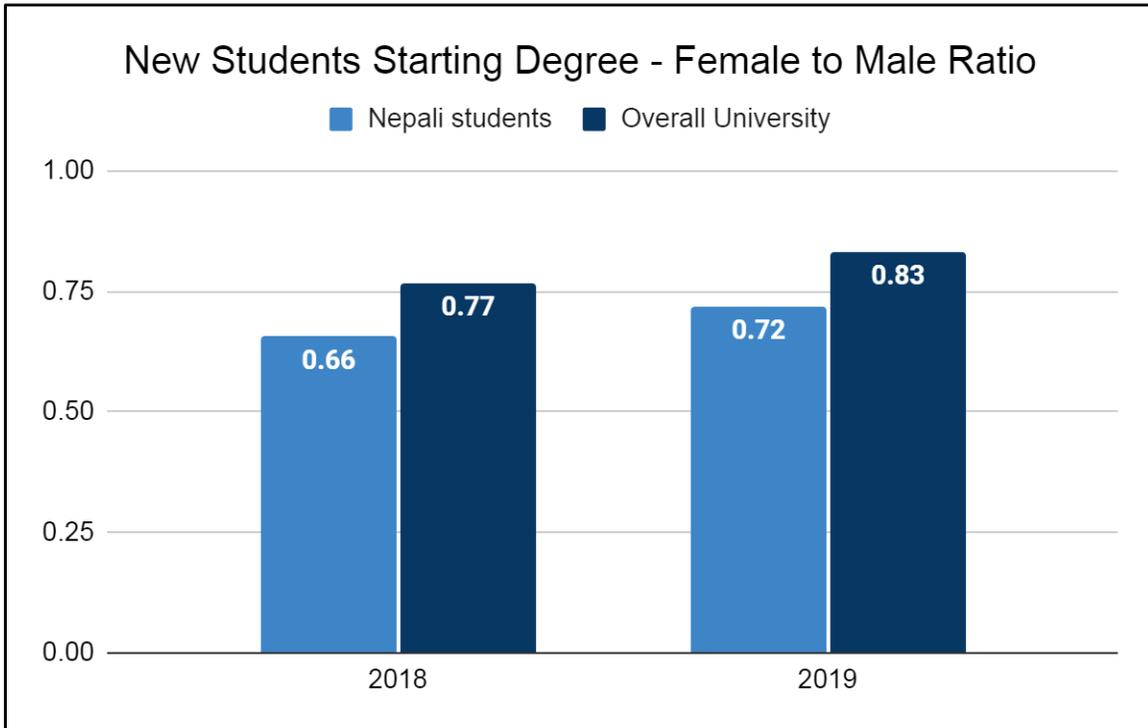


Chart 2: New Students Female to Male Ratio

Student Performance and Academic Success

Westcliff University commits that all students, regardless of background, have an equal opportunity to succeed during their studies at the University. Additionally, the University also provides additional support to specific groups of students to address certain needs.

Westcliff maintains the University Writing Center as a resource for students to have their papers edited by an expert prior to submitting a final draft for grading. The University also has an Academic Resource Center (ARC) which provides both in-person and virtual tutoring by faculty and students on the content covered in the curriculum. While these services are available to all students, they are particularly useful for international students and first generation students which are two populations that make up a significant amount of Westcliff's diverse student body. Westcliff is dedicated to supporting these students with such resources as they have historically benefited from them to successfully achieve program learning outcomes.

The University understands that there are a number of factors, including external events that could impact students' academic performance. Westcliff applies a data-driven approach to track student success and provide early intervention to assist students academically.

The Department of Institutional Research collects risk-indicator data during the application process and uses this data to conduct predictive analyses of student performance. The risk indicators include:

- First-generation
- Gender
- Race/Ethnicity
- Marital status
- Employment (whether or not students are working during their study)
- Financial

Westcliff University has a very diverse student population. As of December 31, 2019, the university has students enrolled from 85 countries around the world. Of those students, approximately 80% are non-traditional and mature students above the age of 21. Female students accounted for 45% of the student population at the end of 2019. (For more information, please visit <http://ir.westcliff.edu/demographics/>)

The University's Department of Institutional Research tracks students' performance throughout their academic careers at Westcliff. The Department analyzes students' academic performance data related to risk indicators to identify students who need support. Once student needs are identified, Student Services Advisors reach out to students to better understand their situations and identify potential solutions. Westcliff University has extensive resources to help students improve academically, including academic advising, tutoring services, the University Writing Center, etc. Students with medical or mental health issues are provided with the necessary accommodations to support them in the pursuit of success.. Additionally, students with ADA or Title IX concerns can schedule a one-on-one meeting with the Dean of Student Affairs, who also serves as the Title IX Coordinator and ADA Coordinator. In case financial challenges arise, the Student Services Advisor will refer students to the proper department (Financial Aid or Billing) for further assistance. During the pandemic, scholarships from the Westcliff University COVID-19 Relief Fund were awarded to more than 500 students who faced financial hardship as a result of the pandemic.

In a recent study, the Department of Institutional Research revealed that students' academic performance and student satisfaction rates improved during the pandemic in comparison with the same period last year.

A significant portion of students studying for bachelor's degrees are athletic students who play college sports while studying. Westcliff University's "data-driven decision making" culture

is effective in preparing class schedules that meet students’ needs. For example, in the Fall 2019 semester, the University’s Department of Institutional Research – in collaboration with Faculty and Program Services – gathered information and created a chart that visualized games, practice times, and class schedules of 25 athletes. The chart solved scheduling conflicts with games, allowing student athletes to attend classes while maintaining an athletic schedule.

Students’ program learning outcomes are assessed through seven core competencies: critical thinking, ethics, information literacy, oral communication, written communication, interpersonal communication, and quantitative reasoning. For more information, please visit <http://ir.westcliff.edu/assessments/> (Chart 3). Graduation rates are measured closely at all program levels and are disaggregated by age, gender, and race. For example, the University observes that female students often achieve higher graduation rates than male students. For more information, please visit <http://ir.westcliff.edu/graduationrate/>.

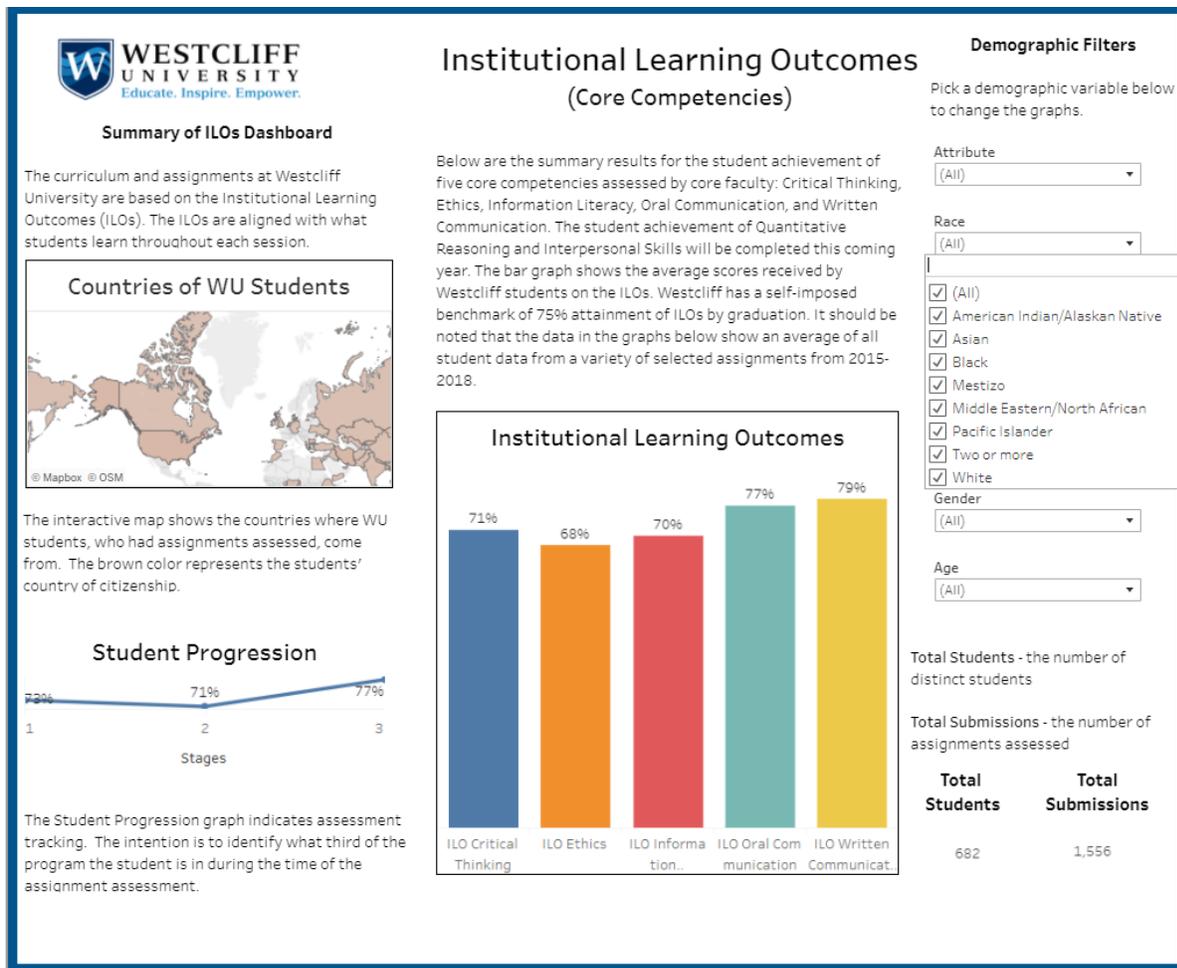


Chart 3: A snapshot of Students Learning Outcomes Dashboard

Westcliff University Action Plan to Enhance Education Access and Quality of Education

As a diverse University which welcomes all students regardless of background, Westcliff University will continue its outreach efforts and collaborative activities that expand education access to students in low income countries. Campus facilities and academic resources are continuously assessed and updated to expand access and improve success in students' academic journeys. In addition, the University is expanding its resources to encourage more students from underrepresented groups to pursue higher education, STEM, and entrepreneurship.

The Academic Resource Center

The Westcliff University Academic Resource Center (ARC) provides students with a quiet and welcoming space on campus to work on course assignments and receive the support of writing and content specialists. The ARC room has computers and textbooks available for student use. Online students can access writing and content specialists via an online portal, and meetings are held virtually between specialist and student.

Writing and Content Specialists are available to assist with students on the following:

- Write a paper
- Learn to use proper APA formatting
- Learn to conduct effective research on LIRN
- Other needs pertaining to writing
- Review coursework before submitting
- Review specific course-related content for clarification
- Brainstorm for upcoming assignments
- Check out general education textbooks
- Schedule 1-1 meetings with a specialist

The ARC is open and staffed by specialists Sunday through Friday, and appointments can be made online or in person. Walk-ins are also accommodated based on specialist availability.

The Online Writing Center

The Online Writing Center provides students with an expert review of their written work with feedback they can use to make edits prior to assignment submission. Students access the Writing Center through their Global Access Portal (GAP), and specific and detailed feedback is provided to them within 48 hours of submission. In the 2019-2020 school year, 2,224 written assignments were submitted to the Writing Center for review.

Active Learning Classroom

Whereas traditional or conventional learning is typically associated with passive students listening to an expert lecture, active learning is a collective reference to a series of specific approaches, generally associated with team based learning, collaborative problem solving, paired discussions, etc.

To foster an effective, innovative and collaborative learning environment which improves students' academic performance, Westcliff University dedicates four classrooms in its new campus to promote active learning activities.

Career Services

Besides academic resources, Westcliff University prepares students with the tools and skills that will help them excel as a professional. The University's Career Services department is constantly working hard to partner with potential employers, faculty, and alumni to innovate and expand resources for student access. In addition, international students can meet one on one with Designated School Officials to explore the possibility of participating in Curricular Practical Training (CPT) or Optional Practical Training (OPT) internships.

Westcliff Innovation Hub

The Innovation Hub will continue to connect students and the greater community with a diverse range of successful, innovative leaders in various fields through the Distinguished Speaker Series. Besides that, the Innovation Hub offers one-on-one mentorship and coaching services to all students through its Entrepreneur in Residence program.

Conclusion

Westcliff University is committed to offering equal opportunity and quality education for all students regardless of background, at all stages of their academic careers. This includes a commitment to maintaining our diversified student population, fostering an inclusive learning environment, and providing customized academic support appropriate to the needs of our diverse student body.

Appendix 1:

Westcliff STEM Scholarships

This scholarship awards incoming students with interest in STEM programs including the MSIT, MSCS, MSEM and the new coding bootcamp program.

Westcliff University COVID 19 Relief Fund

To assist students in pursuing higher education during the pandemic, the University awards incoming and current students with scholarships based on their needs.

Diversity Excellence Scholarship (DES)

Diversity and inclusion are at the core of our philosophy. The diversity excellence scholarship recognizes the academic, co-curricular and extra-curricular achievement of students contributing to the varied experience of Westcliff University in its Nepal campuses. DES is a partial and full college of waivers for students identifying themselves as minorities and with a proven record of excellence.

Sonja Poudel Women Entrepreneurship and Leadership Award

The award recognizes the entrepreneurial and leadership spirit of a female student joining our MBA program in Nepal. It is a year-long 50% waiver on tuition fees

Continual Excellence Award

We recognize the academic, co-curricular, and extracurricular achievement of our incoming students. The continual excellence award partially waives college fees for students with extraordinary recommendations from coordinators of their previous academic program.

Public Service Award

We understand that public service is an example of exceptional volunteerism for the greater good of society. Our public service award provides partial tuition waivers to recognize the work of our students involved in public service and nonprofit organizations in Nepal. The scholarship also honors the service of professionals involved in public service and nonprofit organizations by providing scholarships to their children.



References:

Cataldi, E., Bennett, C. T. & Chen, X. (February 2018). U.S. Department of Education. Stats in Brief. First Generation Students: College Access, Persistence and Postbachelor's Outcomes.

United Nations. (2019). Human Development Reports. Retrieved November 22, 2020, from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/2019-human-development-index-ranking>