



# Westcliff University Education Access Plan 2021



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## **Westcliff University Education Access Plan 2021**

Westcliff University's Institutional Mission is to Educate, Inspire, and Empower students from around the world to achieve personal and professional success by providing practical, innovative, high-quality campus and online programs. The University is committed to delivering a quality educational experience with increased access and degree attainment to students in California, across the United States, and throughout the world. Westcliff University does so with an innovative approach to both teaching and learning and prides itself on providing educational opportunities to a diverse group of students globally.

### **Access to Quality Education**

#### ***Diversity in Education***

Westcliff University's student population comes from more than 100 countries around the world (Chart 1). The institution ensures that students from underrepresented groups including female students, students from low income countries, and minority students have access to its quality education. Students, regardless of their background, have equal opportunity to obtain an education at Westcliff University. The student population at the College of Law (WSCL) is made up of over 50% diverse students, and the 2020-2021 class was ranked 11th in the nation for racial and ethnic student diversity by US News. The WSCL faculty were ranked 7th most diverse in the nation by the Princeton Review. These efforts help diversify the legal profession and assure that underrepresented communities have better access to legal representation.

The University does not unlawfully discriminate in its admissions or educational policies on the basis of race, age, color, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender, or national and ethnic origin. To encourage students to participate in education and create a more inclusive world in their field of study, the University offers various scholarships that assist incoming students in low income countries, females students, minorities students, etc. (For a list of scholarships and awards, please refer to the [university's scholarship website](#)). In academic year 2021-22, the amount of institutional scholarships awarded to students doubles the amount awarded in academic year 2020-21. Of these scholarships, 55% are awarded to students of color, 45% of them are awarded to female students, and 17% are awarded to students from developing countries. Diversity and need-based scholarships were provided to incoming law students at WSCL in order to maintain high levels of diversity among the student body.



Figure 1: Countries Represented by Westcliff University's Students



### ***Culturally Responsive Curriculum***

Expert Ladson-Billings (1994) states that culturally responsive (or relevant) pedagogy “empowers students, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically, by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 382). It is important to note that the purpose of culturally responsive instruction is to integrate the demographics of the current students with the content. Westcliff University designs curriculum for all courses following a culturally responsive rubric. The course materials are designed to provide opportunities for students to work together cooperatively or

share their learning experiences, strengths, backgrounds, interests and needs with the instructors and each other. Westcliff curriculum allows individual learners to express their learning in various ways, accounting for multiple learning styles. Additionally, course materials are provided in several different formats to ensure equitable access.

***First-generation students***

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 over one-third of the overall student population. The proportion of first-generation students at the university was 37.9% in 2021, an increase of 4 percent from the previous year (Figure 2). Of the first generation students, 41% are female. Approximately 54% of new students who started their education at Westcliff University in 2021 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 American Indian/Alaskan Native, Black, Hispanic, Middle East and North Africa, Pacific Islander or two or more race students are on an upward trend from 2018 to 2021.

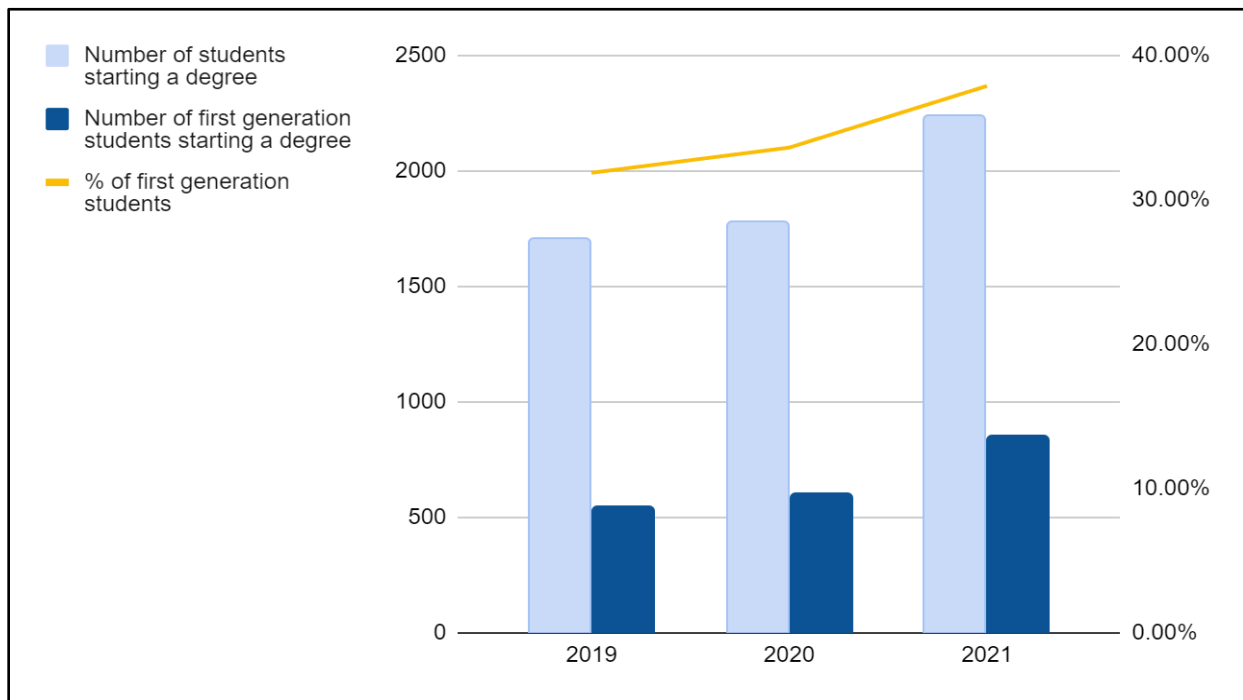


Figure 2: Number and percentage of first-generation students starting a degree at Westcliff

### ***Westcliff in Nepal***

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 reform of the education system. The University has formed a relationship with the Nepali Ministry of Education to deliver world class education at bachelor and graduate levels in Nepal. 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. The proportion of female students starting a degree in Nepal remains consistently at 40% from 2018 to 2021. 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.

### **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 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. To assist doctoral students in their research endeavors, the Doctoral Writing Center offers comprehensive resources to support the process of designing and planning the dissertation, programs to facilitate the development and productivity of chapter completions, and consultations with doctoral writing specialists to guide the clarity and cohesion of the work.

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 burden
- English language proficiency

Westcliff University has a very diverse student population. As of December 31, 2021, the university has students enrolled from 98 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 2021. (For more information, please visit <http://ir.westcliff.edu/demographics/>). At the College of Law, the proportion of female students in the 2022 incoming class is 55%. (For more information, please visit the Law school website at <https://www.wsulaw.edu/prospective-students/at-a-glance/>)

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. The 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.

According to data from an internal study, the Department of Institutional Research identified that English language proficiency has a significant impact on student performance in their first course. The University has designed the Reimagining English as an Additional Language (REAL) Program "to prepare prospective international students for their new academic environments (online, hybrid, or on-campus) by providing a smooth transition from achieving the expected English language proficiency levels required to participate in their program of choice to becoming a successful professional in their chosen field of study." The program's objectives are to provide students with English language instruction to gain the necessary language skills for academic purposes, to help students become more familiar with higher educational culture, and to prepare students for the demands of online or on-ground university-level study in English, especially in a higher education institution. During the initial semesters, Westcliff University has instituted a 25% scholarship to help contribute to the world community during the COVID pandemic. This 25% scholarship was issued in the REAL Intensive English Program to a total of

six (6) students throughout three (3) different sessions. The scholarship was issued a total of eleven (11) times, and a collective \$2,500 was saved by students, with each student earning an average scholarship of \$416. Westcliff University maintains the offer of this 25% scholarship to our students in the REAL program in hopes of affecting positive change and a progressive response to the pandemic as it continues to negatively affect all people around the world.

In May of 2020, Westcliff received notice that the University would be provided with \$199,036 by the US Department of Education as part of the CARES Act in response to the pandemic. The conditions of this relief included at least 50% of the funds being awarded directly to students. Westcliff University not only provided 100% of the funds directly to students, the University also more than matched the CARES Act by awarding additional funds in excess of \$200,000 to students from University reserves. Within three weeks, nearly 700 students were awarded aid based on their financial circumstances and hardships they expressed in an application process. Applications were scored based on how severely the pandemic had impacted them or those who they were financially dependent upon (in the form of unemployment, reduction in hours, loss of funding sources, etc.), and students received up to \$1,300 toward their tuition or in the form of a check or direct deposit for immediate use.

In 2021 the U.S. Congress passed the Consolidated Appropriations Act that included the supplemental Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act to assist institutions of higher education in dealing with budget shortfalls related to the COVID pandemic. This new COVID stimulus bill included \$23 billion for higher education institutions and students, using the same Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) model established in 2020 with the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act. There was a total of \$411,600 awarded to Westcliff from the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF II) as part of the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021. The university used 100% of HEERF II funds as relief to students in need in the form of tuition assistance and direct payment. In a recent study, the Department of Institutional Research found that students' academic performance and student satisfaction rates improved during the pandemic in comparison with the same period last year.

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/>. As Westcliff observes from the data that students often find challenges in learning quantitative courses, the University has restructured its programs to incorporate quantitative skills courses in the first year of the program. 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/>. Even though female graduation rates are higher than male graduation rates, the University noticed that

the number of female graduates is less than male graduates, especially in STEM fields. To encourage female students to pursue STEM programs, the College of Technology has initiated action plans to partner with external organizations to extend financial resources and career opportunities to female students. In 2021, the College of Technology faculty has initial first steps to establish the partnership with the Women in Tech organization.

### **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. 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 Writing Center provides asynchronous reviews of papers which means students do not have to be present to have their assignment reviewed. Writing center specialists come from a wide array of backgrounds and expertise in how to support students in whatever writing type students send. The Doctoral Writing Center offers comprehensive resources to support the process of designing and planning the dissertation, programs to facilitate the development and productivity of chapter completions, and consultations with doctoral writing specialists to guide the clarity and cohesion of the work.

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

### ***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 University Innovation Hub***

The Innovation Hub enhances student experiences with resources that generate opportunities within and beyond Westcliff University curriculum and instruction, while also creating unique opportunities for the greater community. With three key focus areas of 1) fostering an entrepreneurial mindset and culture throughout students' educational experiences, 2) transforming the processes of learning and teaching to engage students like never before and 3) leveraging the cutting edge of technology to drive student outcomes and advance industries, the Innovation Hub's programs deliver a range of forward-thinking solutions from a business incubator that is integrated within the curriculum, to training devised for augmenting faculty instructional approaches and tech programs designed to prepare students for today's most in-demand jobs.

### ***Mental Health support and other resources***

Being a student can be challenging and it can be frustrating when personal problems surface; or when students are feeling stressed, maybe near burn-out, and it is unclear where to turn for help. Westcliff University has conducted a survey to our students to get feedback on their mental health and well-being and results show that students are facing challenges such as anxiety, social isolation, depression, trouble concentrating, etc. Additionally, students have shared through the survey that they would like additional support such as access to counseling services, student support groups, and extracurricular activities.

Westcliff University has partnered with a third party service, IMPACT Student Life Assistance Program, to offer confidential support to students. Through this program, professional support is available on an unlimited basis, offering you support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Counseling (in-person, video, phone, or chat) is also available, with up to 3 sessions included per concern. Additional services include financial counseling, legal assistance, identity theft prevention and recovery services, resource and referral services for child and eldercare, life/wellness coaching, and medical advocacy. In an effort to provide on-going support and engage students to take self-care, the Student Affairs team provides monthly reminders, resources, and/or activities to engage students to connect and tune in to their mental health.

### ***Non-profit Partnerships***

In 2021, Westcliff started partnerships with Mission Academy, Innovation High School and Women in Tech to expand access to education to those in need. Mission Academy is a tuition-free, public charter school that provides a rigorous and personalized curriculum in a highly interactive learning environment for students in grades 6 through 12. At Mission Academy, students are able to earn a fully-accredited high school diploma that is transferable to a community college, university, the military, as well as prepare them to go directly into the workforce. Orange County Innovation High School's goal is to successfully prepare students for work or college readiness through the integrated personalized program of job readiness coursework and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partnerships. Orange County Innovation High School believes that students must be ready to work with others from diverse backgrounds, adapt to changes and lead others through transformational processes. Women in Tech® is an international non-profit organization on a mission to promote girls' and women's empowerment around the world. They are a Global Movement with chapters in 6 continents and create impact through action to build skills and confidence, setting women up for success. The organization focuses on 4 primary areas that are a call for action: Education, Business, Social Inclusion, and Advocacy. The aim is to educate, equip and empower women and girls with the necessary skills and confidence to succeed in STEM careers.

### **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.

### References

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