Beat: Admin and Student Gov.

Headline: Events at Westminster University aim to focus on student needs.

Byline: James Knight

Story: Westminster University focuses campus events on inclusivity and student well- being, according to Janet Reyes, the associate director of student engagement and belonging.

“My number one priority is to acknowledge, embrace, and honor students' authentic selves,” Reyes said. “That allows us to create a more welcoming community where students feel seen, heard, included, and respected.”

Another key goal of campus events is to get students more connected to happenings at Westminster which could prepare them for future success, according to Dr. Glenn Smith, the vice president of student affairs and athletics.

“Students who are connected and engaged are the most successful academically, socially and developmentally,” Smith said.

The opportunity to meet new people and make connections is one thing that encourages some students to attend events, according to Jackson Ames, a first-year finance major. Ames said that social desires are one thing that pushes him to attend events.

“Mainly just wanting to meet new people. There's tons of people coming from all across the state. So it's been pretty fun to meet everyone who's traveled here,” said Ames.

Kim Hendrickson, a sophmore psychology major, had very different motives for attending events.

“Honestly, if there's food involved, I think I'll be there.” Hendrickson said. “I don't know specific events but when there's food, I think people are more likely to go,”

With a wide variety of student interests, as highlighted by Hendrickson and Ames, an obstacle in terms of planning student events is the budget, according to Student Affairs Vice President Glenn Smith .

“I hate to put it this way, but it boils down to funding,” Smith said.

Despite these limitations, Smith says that there are always goals associated with events. For example, helping students make good wellness choices.

“In our wellness area, we want everyone to make better health choices and things like that. So we are helping counseling folks.” said Smith.

Some obstacles that may keep students from attending events are scheduling conflicts and struggles to balance other obligations, according to Belle Brown, a third-year neuroscience major.

“I've got a pretty rigorous schedule, and I'm also doing volunteering and stuff on the side and start training to be an EMT,” said Brown.

Brown also said if events were more relatable it would encourage them to attend more.

“Having events that are more relevant to us, rather than just having a speaker come in and talk. “Brown said. “We all experience stuff differently and whatever they're going to preach may or may not be applicable to you”.

Brown said they also feel like the overall engagement with student events has decreased over time as a result of student’s not having time or not wanting to come.

Despite these challenges, feedback is still widely used in planning events, according to Associate Director of Student Engagement, Janet Reyes.

“It's essential to take into account the voices from faculty and staff,” said Reyes. “You can do this different or you can do this event in another way. And that helps me improve my events. So for me receiving that feedback is so essential.”

Glenn Smith also spoke on the importance of student feedback in terms of the planning process.

“There's direct feedback sometimes, but sometimes it's just the fact you plan something and nobody shows up,” Smith said. “That's pretty good feedback.”

Smith also said that an event's success is often predictable beforehand based on student interest .

“It's an ongoing dialogue, but again, honestly, students vote with their feet," said Smith "either they’re there or they’re not and we usually know beforehand if it's gonna bomb or do well.”

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