LEARNING STARTS AT APPLICATION

Building Community & Belonging during Student Onboarding
Presenters

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Belonging in College
Learning as Social Process
Belonging Interventions: How They Work

Psychological Interventions

Stories from upper-year peers about adverse experiences in college:

1. Normal
   a. Common
   b. Cause by transition / not person

2. Temporary
Learning as Social Process

Cumulative First Year GPA
(Controls for gender, first-gen, SAT/ACT, high school class rank)

Achievement Gap Reduction
Raw Means: 35%
Adjusted means: 53%

Walton & Cohen, 2007 & 2011
Building WGU’s Enrollment Community
How can we engage applicants in meaningful, relevant conversations before and during the enrollment process?
Key Benefits of Enrollment Community

Resolving Technical Challenges

● Enrollment Counselors work by day; adults ask questions at night.

● High volume makes it difficult to provide timely, personalized answers.

Meeting Applicants’ Social Needs

● Without a sense of belonging, applicants are less motivated to enroll.

● Prospective students want to hear from alumni with similar stories.

Scalable, peer-to-peer interaction drives enthusiasm & provides support at a low cost.
User-Centered Research Design

Gauged Applicant Preferences

- Applicants prefer information from WGU students and alumni.
- Heavy reliance on Enrollment Counselors, but there are often delays.
- Those with existing ties to WGU students more likely to enroll.

Collaborated with InScribe

- Participants nudged via portal widgets and personalized notifications.
- Moderators answer questions; Alumni offer empathy and affirmation.
- Intuitive platform efficiently sorts and displays the most vital resources.
Community Structure

Main Forum
- General Enrollment

Separate Channels
- IT College
- Health College
- Business College
- Teachers College

4,000 applicants funneled to community

WGU Chat Team
Answered questions on broad range of topics, including transcripts, credits, and costs.

Alumni Ambassadors
Shared personal stories that resonated with applicants in similar life phases.
Community Homepage

WGU Applicants Connect

Find an answer or resource...
Browse by topic...
Start a Conversation

Channels

WGU General Enrollment
College of I.T.

Explore the open channels — join any that interest you.

College of Business
Ask questions and connect with mentors and peers from the College of Business.

College of Health Professions
Ask questions and connect with mentors and peers from the College of Health.

Teachers College
Ask questions and connect with mentors and peers from the Teachers College.

JOIN
JOIN
JOIN

OLC Online Learning Consortium
MERLOT
OLC Innovate Education Reimagined
Early Results & Lessons Learned
Social Benefits of Community

- Helps distant students build peer connections early in enrollment process.
- Provides authentic feedback.
- Offers alumni an informal, rewarding way to engage with WGU.

What I wish I knew before enrolling in WGU!

Chris Alleyne (WGU Alumni), Sep 28, 2020

5 comments, 1,133 views, 7 likes
Community engagement grew from zero to 15,000 views within first five weeks.

Several posts had 4,000+ views.

Most common conversation topics:
- Transcripts & credits (30,974 views)
- Alumni experiences (16,616 views)
Active Participants Matriculate at Higher Rates
Net Promoter Score

52
Regular Enrollment

v.

59
Community Participants
Most Popular Topics

- Transcripts and Transfer Credit: 30,974
- The WGU Experience: 16,616
- Getting Started with Enrollment: 14,016
- Financing Your Education: 13,091
- Alumni Experiences: 8,995
- Intake Interview: 4,484
- Enrollment Counselor: 3,041
- Technology: 1,594
- Military: 1,499
- Which degree should I get?: 1,369
- Program Pre-reqs: 131
- Connect with the WGU Student Community: 91
- Certifications and Outside Testing: 34
Insights Into Enrollment Process

Short-Term Insights

- Enrollment Counselors identified students who needed immediate interventions.
- Peer-to-peer support accelerated as community grew.

Long-Term Insights

- Identified need for more transcript & credit support (or reorganization of existing resources).
- How to balance the dual purpose (tactical + aspirational) of the community?
- How to harness alumni enthusiasm?
Q & A
Want to Learn More?

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