

How can colleges prepare students for the “real world”? Every month, juniors and seniors at Walla Walla College (WWC) in College Place, Washington, can attend workshops designed to offer them practical skills such as balancing a checkbook, purchasing a home, and maintaining a strong spiritual life.

These meetings, appropriately titled “Real World Workshops,” are organized and hosted by WWC’s Office of Village Student Life, a relatively new department designed to cater to the needs of the college’s large off-campus population. Currently, five workshops are presented each quarter on a variety of topics. Some topics are repeated so students can fit them into their busy schedules, and more popular topics are presented on two consecutive nights.



Paddy McCoy, Walla Walla College Director of Village Student Life and author of this article, presents a workshop on Maintaining Your Spiritual Connection.

Life-Skills

Workshops

Prepare Students for the “Real World”

The workshops focus on a variety of life-skills topics that will become increasingly more important for students after graduation. Examples include: Starting and Living by a Budget, Maintaining a Spiritual Life in a Fast-Paced World, The Ins and Outs of Insurance, Understanding Your College Loans and Repayment Options, Purchasing an Automobile or Home, Transitioning to the Real World, Tax Preparation, Better Relating or Your Money Back, Financial Investing, and Planning a Wedding on a Budget.

Speakers for the workshops include college faculty and staff, as well as other local experts in these fields who are recommended by WWC’s School of Business. This connection ensures that the seminars are offered by experts with a Christian perspective; an important factor since many of them involve personal finances, and a presenter includes a line item for “tithe and offerings” in his or her example of a budget.

Jerry Hanson, owner of Walla Walla Insurance Services and a graduate of La Sierra University, presented a 60-minute insurance workshop in February 2006. In response to his experience, Hanson said: “Students were very interested and asked the right kinds of questions.” Though Hanson sells insurance in the community, he says his main goal in leading this workshop was to equip students with the necessary tools to make more informed decisions about the many facets of insurance.

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At the end of each workshop, students are offered a variety of refreshments. During this “community-building” aspect of the evening, they are asked to fill out a brief survey on the effectiveness of that night’s presentation. Using that information, new topics have

been scheduled, and presentations have improved.

Overall, WWC student response to the workshops has been very positive. Stephanie Onthank, an elementary education major, said, “I really enjoy the workshops. They’re very helpful and informative.” Onthank recently married and

By Padraic McCoy



Loren Dickinson, professor emeritus at WWC, presents a workshop on Better Relating or Your Money Back.

admits that she now has concerns she hadn't had to think about before. The workshops are helping prepare her for life.

Though the attendance has varied between six and 36, those who do attend are typically very interested in the particular topic and come equipped with lots of questions. The workshops are not required, and students do not receive any extra credit toward any classes if they attend. Often, faculty and staff attend as well, especially for topics such as improving communication skills, stress management, and finances.

June Ferguson, vice president for student administration at Walla Walla College, sees the workshops as vital part of the school's philosophy of tending to the "whole person." She hopes that by attending these workshops, "students will be better prepared for those everyday challenges that life brings." She also believes that "we in student life can champion the way for our brothers and sisters in academia to provide more intentional opportunities for students to apply



what they are learning in their curriculum into real-life situations."

The college offers a variety of other workshops, as well. For example, the student activities department works directly with student association leaders to plan a variety of seminars for students who will hold leadership roles the following school year. In addition, resident assistants also can attend workshops on topics helpful to their jobs, such as conflict management, counseling skills, and emergency response preparation.

The Village Student Life office plans to continue to offer programs that equip students for life after college, as well as assist off-campus students with their special needs. With the Lord's guidance, they are confident that they'll succeed. ✍



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Paddy McCoy and two WWC students plan 2006-2007 workshops.



Local financial advisor Sam Wells shows students where to invest their money for the highest return.



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