

## **Study Background**

The WIN program was established 10 years ago to serve a unique student population—student athletes. Each academic year, WIN provides tutorial and counseling services to approximately six to seven hundred student athletes. For student athletes, academic success is defined as maintaining academic eligibility to participate in sports and transfer to a university. Students must maintain at least a 2.0 grade point average in order to compete on their respective athletic teams. The program also provides necessary counseling services in order to equip student athletes with an educational “game plan” to graduate and transfer in the required period of time, which is generally a two-year period.

## **Purpose**

Because the program strives to provide quality support to student athletes, program assessments are essential. Previous assessments have examined students’ perception of the WIN program’s efficacy in regards to tutoring and counseling. Although these quantitative studies were beneficial and offered valuable information about the WIN Program, they restricted student responses to a set of pre-outlined answers.

Therefore, the WIN staff sought to build on the previous survey results to gain a deeper awareness of the attitudes and opinions of the students who attend WIN. With the assistance of the Research and Institutional Effectiveness Office and the Physical Education Division, three focus groups were organized to gather students’ input on the WIN program’s services as they relate to their academic lives. The overarching questions posed to the focus group participants were:

1. How does the WIN program benefit student athletes’ study skills?
2. Additionally, how have counseling and tutorial services influenced students athletes’ academic success?

As a result of the focus groups, the WIN program will be able to identify ways in which services can be improved to better serve student athletes.

## **Methods**

### *Participants*

A total of 45 students attended one of the three focus groups. The ideal sample for this study would comprise an even proportion of males and females as well as representation from each of the major athletic teams. Tables 1 and 2 outline the demographic composition of the study participants.

As indicated in Table 1, the distribution of the sample in regards to sex is fairly proportionate. When disaggregated by day of participation (see Table 2), however, the sex composition is less balanced. Despite this limitation, an even number of men’s and women’s teams were represented across the three focus groups. Higher numbers of students who played football (20.0%), women’s soccer (15.6%), softball (13.3%), and women’s golf (13.3%) participated in

the study. Among the least participatory were members of women’s track and field (2.2%) and basketball (4.4%).

Table 1. Demographics of WIN Sample

		Frequency	Percent
<i>Gender</i>			
	Male	21	46.7%
	Female	24	53.3%
	Total	45	100.0%
<i>Athletic Team</i>			
	Baseball	4	8.9%
	Basketball	2	4.4%
	Football	9	20.0%
	Men's Track and Field	3	6.7%
	Men's Water Polo	3	6.7%
	Softball	6	13.3%
	Women's Golf	6	13.3%
	Women's Soccer	7	15.6%
	Women's Track and Field	1	2.2%
	Women's Volleyball	4	8.9%
	Total	45	100.0%

Table 2. Demographics of WIN Sample by Day

		Day 1		Day 2		Day 3	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
<i>Gender</i>							
	Male	5	25.0%	7	43.8%	9	100.0%
	Female	15	75.0%	9	56.3%	-	-
	Total	20	100.0%	16	100.0%	9	100.0%
<i>Athletic Team</i>							
	Baseball	-	-	4	25.0%	-	-
	Basketball	2	10.0%	-	-	-	-
	Football	-	-	-	-	9	100.0%
	Men's Track and Field	-	-	3	18.8%	-	-
	Men's Water Polo	3	15.0%	-	-	-	-
	Softball	6	30.0%	-	-	-	-
	Women's Golf	2	10.0%	4	25.0%	-	-
	Women's Soccer	4	20.0%	3	18.8%	-	-
	Women's Track and Field	-	-	1	6.3%	-	-
	Women's Volleyball	3	15.0%	1	6.3%	-	-
	Total	20	100.0%	16	100.0%	9	100.0%

### *Procedure*

With the assistance of the Physical Education Division managers and coaches, student athletes who were enrolled in WIN were invited to participate in the December 2010 focus groups. Coaches were informed of the study, relayed this information to the students, and directed willing students to the project's contact. Of the 32 self-selected students who volunteered to participate, 20 (62.5%) attended Day One or Day Two. An additional 16 student athletes who learned about the focus groups through teammates and coaches also attended one of these two days. At the end of Day Two, it was determined that the largest population of students utilizing the WIN, the football team, had not participated in the focus groups. Thus, the first two focus groups did not produce a representative sample. Consequently, active recruitment of football players ensued and this effort yielded nine additional participants from the football team for Day Three.

For all three focus groups, an Adult Basic Education staff member who had no affiliation with the WIN Program acted as the facilitator. All participants of the focus groups were informed by the facilitator that the study will assess the WIN program's benefit on student athletes' study skills and overall academic success. Because of the students' connection with the WIN program and the sensitivity of the topics discussed, anonymity was guaranteed to all participants. Sign-in sheets were utilized only to record demographic characteristics as outlined in Tables 1 and 2. Students were encouraged to openly express their honest opinions, regardless of the positive or negative nature of their feedback. All comments were transcribed without participants' names.

### *Measure*

During the focus groups, students were asked 13 open-ended and one close-ended question (see Appendix A) related to their experiences at the WIN, with tutors, and with WIN counselors. The close-ended question incorporated a Likert scale where "0" represented "Not Informed At All" and "10" represented "Very Informed." The benefit of this method of data collection is students' ability to express their opinions outside a pre-defined set of responses, as commonly seen in questionnaires. Instead, student athletes are able to voice their opinions without restriction, given the time constraint.

A limitation to this methodology, however, is a smaller sample size. Less students are able and/or willing to take an hour out of their day to participate in a focus group. More students, on the other hand, are willing to take a five-minute survey. As a result, findings from focus groups are less generalizable to the greater population. However, focus groups provide a greater wealth of information in comparison to quantitative methods.

## **Results**

### *The WIN Program*

Across all three focus groups, the student athletes participate in the WIN program not merely because it is mandatory but for the reason that they benefit from the many services provided by the program. Participants of the three focus groups emphasized their appreciation of the array of

free resources available to students. As one participant simply stated: “Everything you need is there—tutors, computers, books.” With these resources at their disposal, participants are able to complete their homework and improve their grades while maintaining eligibility to play their respective sports. One participant, for example, stated: “It helps me keep my grades up.” The availability of computers and books also allows students to complete homework assignments without the distractions encountered when studying at home. All participants agreed that these resources have saved them money during their time at Mt. SAC. Students nodded their heads in agreement when one student stated that availability of textbooks are helpful because “a lot of us don’t have them for our classes.”

Because athletes from many different sports teams participate in the program, some students find it useful to collaborate with other student athletes and create study groups. Participants agreed with the following comment: “You can study with people who have the same classes as you. You can help each other out.” Studying in groups allows them to put their minds together and tackle difficult assignments as a team. Other students, however, prefer to work alone, and thus appreciate the quiet environment provided by WIN. WIN is not as quiet as the library, but it provides a comfortable level of quietness for students to complete their homework without distractions. During peak hours, several participants noted that they “learned how to study even when distracted, like when it gets rowdy because there are a lot of students.” Another resource appreciated by students include counseling services. When planning for their next semester and eventual graduation, students value the athlete-specific counseling services provided through WIN. As one student stated: “On campus, sometimes you get different [education] plans. At the WIN, counselors know what student athletes need.” Counseling services offered through WIN, therefore, are tailored for the needs of student athletes. Class schedules are appropriately created to accommodate the workload students are able to complete during the different seasons.

In addition to the list of resources provided by WIN, participants also recognized the unique environment provided by the program. The WIN program offers not merely an alternative, quiet facility but also a friendly environment where student athletes can study. Participants agreed with one student, who stated: “The staff is friendly and courteous.” Similarly in another focus group, one student stated: “It’s more personal. They ask how you’re doing in class and what you need them to help with.” The personable staff members are welcoming, so students are not hesitant to approach staff for help. As one student eloquently stated: “WIN has a more motivating environment.” Because of WIN’s unique environment and team of staff members, students consequently feel motivated in their studies.

The focus group participants unanimously described WIN’s services as invaluable, but they also agreed on the program’s limitations. Space was described as the primary shortcoming. One participant stated: “If it’s over capacity, we have to wait outside,” while another participant elaborated with the following: “If they maximize space, the hours wouldn’t be as affected. People won’t be pressed for time and won’t have to leave right away for class.” Because of the limited capacity, participants have little time to study and concurrently complete their required hours because of time spent on the waiting list. Consequently, they experienced difficulty when completing required hours due to limited availability of space in WIN. Frequent over capacity and class schedules prevents students from easily completing their required hours.

The program's hours of operation also presents a challenge to some students as they complete their hours. Other participants agreed when one student stated: "Not everyone can fill their hour quota. We have to put a minimum of 2 hours per week, but it's only open 4 days a week...If it's over capacity, we have to wait outside." Many of the student athletes stated that they have greater availability in the evenings and on Fridays, but WIN is closed during these times. As a result, students struggle to find time to complete their hours. The current location of WIN also creates a burden to the students, since it is not near the main campus or practice fields. Because of its geographic location, students must suspend their studying at the WIN in order to commute back to the main campus for classes.

### *Tutorial Services*

Focus group participants who have utilized the tutors spoke highly of the tutors because they feel the tutors relate to the students. Participants agreed when one student stated: "Tutor A knows everything!" Students feel that this tutor has provided invaluable assistance with homework and projects. They reported that the tutors overall are supportive and understand that, as student athletes, they manage multiple roles. They described the tutors as more personable than other tutors they have encountered. "They make you feel comfortable. They have been through school and understand." Participants view the tutors as one of their peers and relate with them, which makes the students feel comfortable when asking questions. One student, on the contrary, stated: "I asked for help in math and the tutors told me to ask my teacher for help, so I don't like going to WIN for tutoring." This occurrence, however, was an anomaly from other participants' experiences. Because this particular student was exceptionally advanced in mathematics, WIN tutors were unable to provide assistance. Overall, focus group participants provided positive feedback about their experiences with WIN tutors, especially with individual tutors. However, many students expressed the need for more tutors since the ratio of student athletes to tutors is 5 to 1, according to the students.

Furthermore, participants expressed positive changes in their study habits and skills as a result of WIN. The tutors and staff have taught the students some essential study habits needed throughout their college education and beyond. The following statement explicates one of the ways in which WIN has changed students' study habits: "I get home late from games and practices. It's nice to set up time to get work done at WIN. I can prioritize and manage my time." Despite their busy schedules, participants stated that they have developed the habit of scheduling time to study. Instead of procrastinating, students claimed that they have improved in completing their assignments in a more timely manner. Students' study skills have also been positively influenced by coming to WIN. As one participant stated: "They help me look through my papers and find my own mistakes...I learned through the tutors how to catch my own mistakes." WIN tutors have provided this particular student with a skill essential throughout his/her studies. Additionally, students said that they were able to improve their study habits and skills not only due to tutors intervention but also through learning new techniques by observing peers.

Participants reported that partly because of study skills they acquired from attending WIN, their overall attitudes toward school and studying improved. Some students believe their attitudes took a drastic turn toward the positive. One participant recounted the following: "In high school,

I hated studying. Now I find myself studying more and being late to something else because I'm studying. I get bored in the library, but WIN motivates me." WIN was a driving factor in influencing this student to view studying in a positive light. Another student expressed a similar story of success: "I went to Fullerton College last year and didn't have as much help. Once I transferred to Mt. SAC, I became more motivated. I work harder and actually like studying now. I'm more disciplined and feel more confident because of WIN." As detailed previously, both the friendly environment and the invaluable resources motivated this student to strive in academics. Not all participants expressed such a strong change in attitude, but they generally stated that they enjoy studying more and feel more confident knowing that the WIN tutors are available to assist them. Participants agreed with one student, who stated: "Tutors are there to motivate you, and so you motivate yourself." Staff members at WIN have created a fostering environment that instills confidence in students' studies, an area that many participants reported a previous insecurity.

When asked how WIN differs from other tutorial services provided by Mt. SAC, all the participants agreed that WIN is unique. As one participant stated: "WIN has friendlier and more patient tutors." WIN tutors are also more patient in explaining a problem step-by-step. Other tutorial services do not answer questions in detail and appear more businesslike. This was confirmed by one participant, who said: "I work as a tutor on campus and we're only allowed 15 minutes to each student. We give them a hint and then move on to the next students. It's all business." Additionally, other tutorial services provide assistance with only specific subjects, such as solely math at the MARC. Contrary to this, "WIN has diversity." In this context, the student is referring to diversity in regards to the array of subjects tutors assist with. However, diversity also relates to the student population that seeks services at the WIN. Being student athletes, they often feel out of place at other tutorial services. Some participants elaborated, stating that other tutorial services do not relate with student athletes and "look down on [them]." WIN, however, provides an inviting environment where students from a wide range of sports teams coningle.

As mentioned previously, WIN is unique in that the tutors help students with a variety of subjects. Some participants agreed with one student's comment, who stated: "Some tutors are better at other subjects and their hours vary...So when you want a specific subject the tutor might not be there." Consequently, some students feel limited by tutors' schedules and the absence of subject-specific tutors at all times. Despite this downside, however, participants on the whole value the fact that WIN tutors can help with a variety of different subjects. Several participants recognized the efforts of one tutor in particular. Similar responses followed one student's statement of: "Tutor A is bomb!" Overall, the participants view WIN as a resource-rich program that is beneficial to all student athletes.

### *Counseling Services*

Participants also expressed appreciation for the convenience and quality of counseling provided by the adjunct WIN counselor, funded by BSI funds. One participant stated: "The counselor always has a solution." If a solution is unknown, she will immediately take necessary steps to find a solution for the students. When participants need to meet with the counselor (e.g. regarding education plans), appointments are readily available, and students value the fact that walk-in meetings are welcome. As stated by one student: "Counselors on campus take a long

time to schedule an appointment.” WIN counselors, however, are accommodating to student athletes’ schedules. Additionally, the adjunct counselor was described by participants as being empathetic and highly knowledgeable of the challenges facing student athletes. Participants expressed their appreciation for her ability to create education plans specific to student athletes’ needs. One student stated: “I wish there were more people like [her] who offers a broad range of information.” Being student athletes, these participants value WIN’s counseling services because of their unique academic needs .

Overall, counseling services are helpful to the students, but they addressed the need to bridge the gap in providing students with pertinent information. Several students expressed frustration as they detailed their experiences in creating an education plan. One student affirmed: “I have been here for two years and just got an ed plan this year,” and other participants described similar experiences. Upon admittance into Mt. SAC, students need an education plan in order to strategize their two years at the college. Participants of the focus groups, however, revealed a shortcoming in this service. Some participants indicated that encouragement from a counselor to take elective classes freshman year caused delays in the transfer process. “We took too many P.E. classes and now we’re stuck...” Another student elaborated, stating: “You think you’re on track but then come spring the counselor tells you that you aren’t and you feel that it’s impossible.” Students consequently must concurrently complete many challenging course instead of across two years in order to transfer in a timely manner. Participants emphasized the need for creating education plans freshman year and thoroughly informing freshmen about transfer requirements to ensure transfer to a 4-year college within two years.

In connection with transferring, students stated the need for information regarding transfer requirements for a majors other than Kinesiology. During orientations, transfer requirements were outlined for only Kinesiology. Many students were encouraged to pursue Kinesiology due to its minimal academic rigor, as proposed by the counselor. As a result, many students did not benefit from the orientation session. One student elaborated, stating: “Just because we’re athletes doesn’t mean we want to do kinesiology.” Several participants contended that student athletes are capable of academic challenges, and the counselor should recognize students’ interests rather than dissuade them. One student avowed: “I wanted to go to UC Davis, so the counselor said, ‘It’s hard to get in there. Let me get you into Cal Poly, Pomona instead.’ ” Participants want counselors to not only provide them with basic information needed to graduate and transfer, but they also want counselors to address them as students, not merely athletes. As students, participants stressed the need for counselors to provide encouragement and direct students to allow them to accomplish their personal goals.

Despite counseling services’ limitations, the participants value the services available at their disposal. In addition to the counselors, WIN staff members have also assisted participants with registration for classes. Peers also provide participants with insight on which professors to take. Overall, participants praised the WIN for its invaluable services. As one participants proclaimed: “We love the WIN!”

### **Strengths and Limitations**

Previous assessments have revealed similar results, but this qualitative study produced in depth opinions about how WIN has benefitted their academic lives. When reviewing these results, there are some limitations that must be noted. Because the three focus groups comprised of a small number of student athletes who participate in the WIN program, their opinions may not be representative of all student athletes. There were many common opinions expressed across the three focus groups. However, there was not an even representation of the different sports across the three focus groups. The overrepresentation of one sport at a particular focus group may influence the direction of others' opinions. Additionally, participation was voluntary, and students who participated may have different opinions compared to non-participants. A self-selected sample does not provide a representative sample of all student-athletes, and this must be carefully considered when generalizing findings to the population.

### **Conclusion**

The results of this assessment revealed that student athletes believe they are benefitting from the WIN program. Tutorial services, in particular, have promoted the development of good study habits and skills that students can utilize throughout their college education. Additionally, counseling services providing through Basic Skills funding have bestowed students with the required information to successfully graduate from Mt. SAC. Ultimately, these two services positively influenced the students' academic success. Due to these findings and suggestions made by participants, WIN staff is able to devise strategies on how to better serve student athletes in the future.

### **Appendix**

1. Why do you come to WIN?
  - a. What do you like best about the WIN?
  - b. What do you like the least about the WIN?
  - c. What would you like to see improved about the WIN?
2. What is it like to work with the WIN tutors?
  - a. How coming to WIN changed your study habits/skills?
  - b. How has WIN influenced your attitudes toward studying?
  - c. How does WIN differ from other tutorial services provided by Mt. SAC?
  - d. Scenario: You meet a team member who is thinking about coming to WIN for tutoring. How would you “sell” the WIN program to your team member?
3. Tell us about your experiences working with the WIN counselors?
  - a. What types of things have the counselors told you about graduation and transfer requirements? What else would you like to know?
  - b. On a scale of 0 to 10 with 0 being Not Informed At All and 10 being Very Informed, how informed have the counselors made you feel about graduation requirements? About transfer requirements?
  - c. What else would you like to say about the counseling services in the WIN Program?
4. Do you have any final comments you would like to share about WIN?