

## Why is campus so boring?

As a senior, I've attended a lot of parties off campus in my four years, both out of desperation and curiosity, especially when no opportunities appeared on campus.

They're held in small houses or apartments with either too many or too few people, no food or drinks, and a decent chance of the cops showing up. People either walk or drive there with their own drinks after pre-gaming at their places, then stand around the house for a couple of hours.

Other than a good theme or funny drunk people, it's boring.

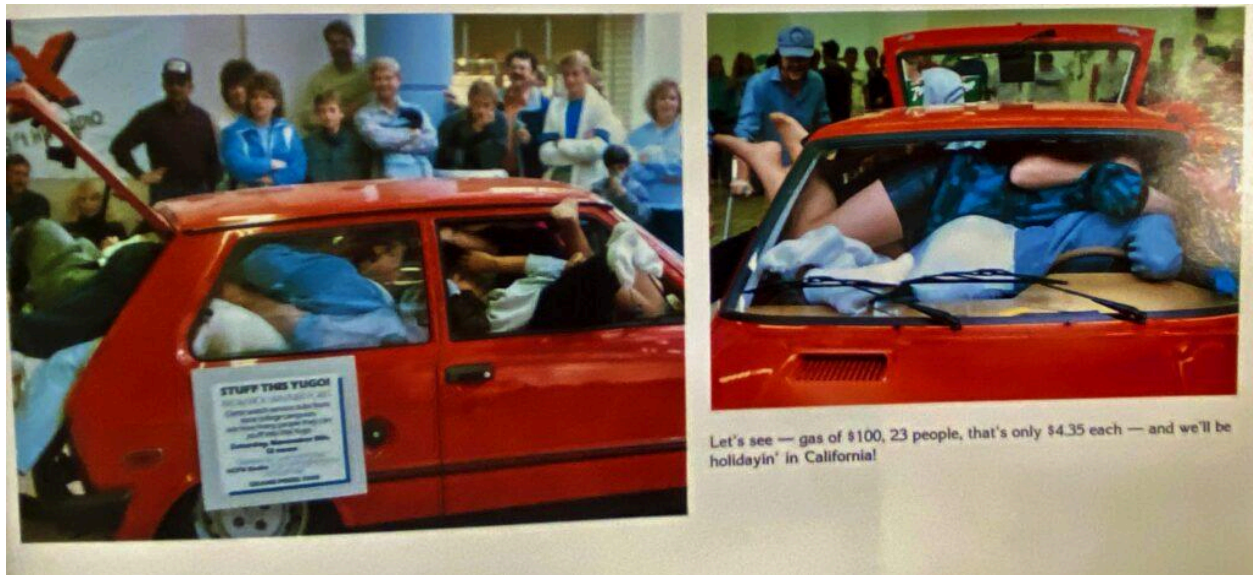
So when I learned that Westminster used to be a party school, with festivals, I immediately felt jealous of past students. There were visiting singers and comedians, discounted Sundance tickets, and themed dances held at hotels or on campus with cheap tickets, food, drink and lots of space,

Why couldn't we have that? In my four years here, I could only remember one roller rink night that came close to these types of events.

From as early as [1875](#) to as recent as the 2010s, Westminster University had a packed campus calendar, filled with events focused on informal fun for students.

What set us apart as a school was that our parties served alcohol and were often open-invite to other university students.

“I don’t think the U can even serve drinks at any of their functions — that’s what makes this pretty kick-ass,” said Carter Frandsen, a University of Utah graduate attending Westminster’s Halloween party, in a [2003 Forum article](#).



*Westminster students in the '80s stuff themselves in a car for a competition. Themed dances are only the tip of the iceberg of all the different activities there were. Photo courtesy of Westminster's 1986 yearbook.*

The [campus calendar](#) today is filled with rock-climbing hours, sports games, choir or dance performances, school resource functions, discussion panels, or family tours, but rarely events on weekends or nights. No parties.

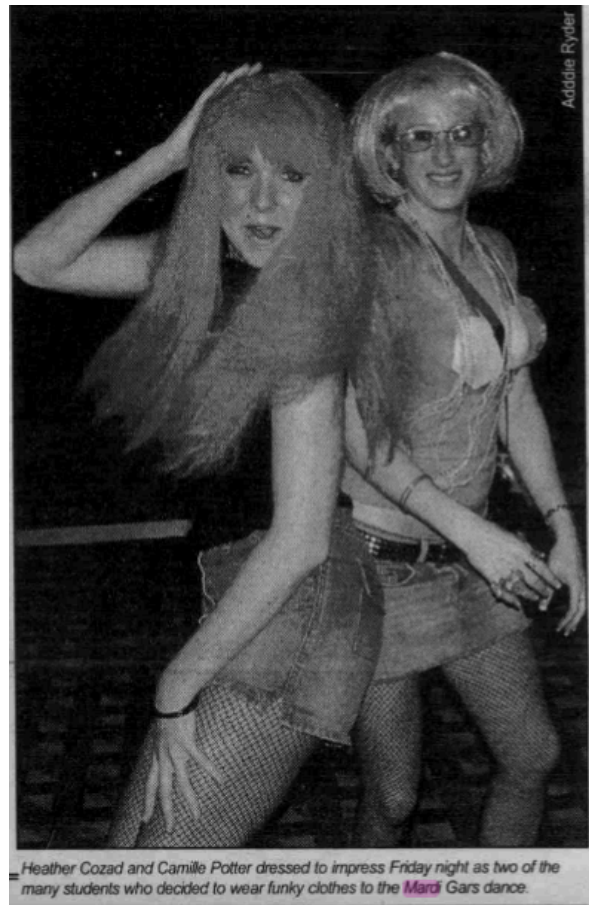
Apart from a couple of events, like the major fair and international fair, there's a campus-wide struggle for engagement.

“To get like five people at an event is kind of a big deal,” said Nancy Panos Schmitt, a marketing professor who's taught at Westminster for 45 years.

## **More wild and fun events from Westminster's past**

Halloween parties, [homecoming](#) week, and [Mardi Gras](#) festivals were just a few of the events thrown by ASW (Westminster's student government), funded by the student activity fee paid within our tuition.

Students might find it hard to believe that Westminster University used to be a party school, but alumni and longstanding professors remember.



“God, and the [events] were so fun, and everyone would go,” Panos Schmitt said.  
“There was much more, just a sense of being and belonging and inclusiveness ... students had a better time than they are now.”

Beyond holiday parties, Panos Schmitt said there were Easter egg hunts, parties recognizing faculty accomplishments, and more.

There was a variety of events; from the oldest tradition of The President's Ball – a formal party where you could ride a mechanical bull to [win a free limo ride](#) – to casino nights in Shaw Student Center, with fake money and real craps tables.

Micheal Santarosa, the registrar at Westminster, was in ASW during his time at the university from 1991 to 1996.

Santarosa said that students in ASW would organize the event's venue, decorations, DJs, and provide food and drink. They would sometimes sell tickets to track participation.

Another Westminster employee and alum, Sarah Lof, said one of her favorite events during her time at Westminster from 2004 to 2008 was casino night in the Shaw.

"You were given X amount of fake money to gamble with, [and you could] submit your winnings at the end of the night into a raffle."

Lof said when comedians were brought out to campus, and theater buy-outs or late-night breakfast happened, there'd be a good turnout.

"I went to the opening midnight showing of the fourth Harry Potter movie ...with a theater full of Westminster students," said Lof, the current associate registrar.

This lively campus culture continued into the 2010s, with lots of evening and weekend events, according to Ahmer Afroz, an alum from 2010.

Many of these events were held at hotel receptions until Westminster got kicked out for being so rowdy, according to faculty and former students.



*Micheal Santarosa (right) and his friend show their cheerleader costumes at a Halloween party in the early '90s. Santarosa said there were usually free drinks and food. Photo courtesy of Micheal Santarosa.*

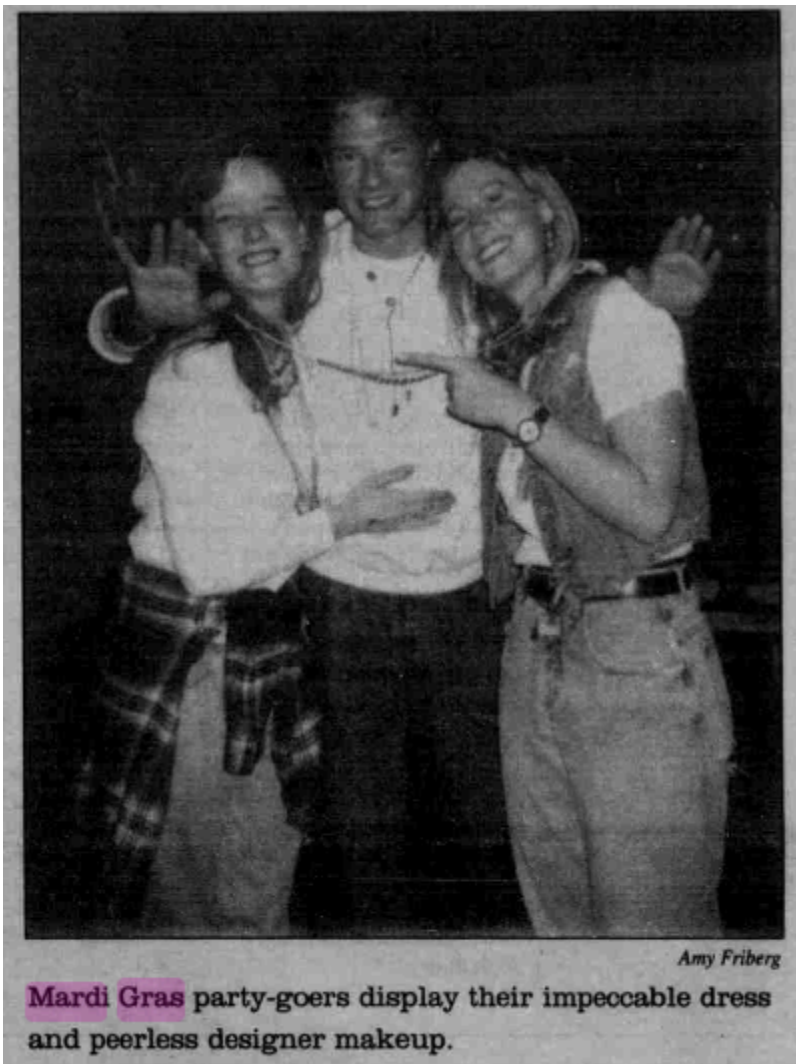
"It got to the point where because of all the drugs and alcohol...that every hotel banned the Westminster," Panos Schmitt said.

After that, Westminster used The Draw (a housing facility off campus) reception area, with a consistently good turnout.



Lia Young, an alum who graduated in 2014, remembered two Halloween parties in her first two years and a Jason DeRulo, a famous popstar, on-campus performance.

“[The events] were so much fun!” Young said. “There was a big turnout from what I remember.”



The last 40 years are only scratching the surface of countless unique and unserious events thrown by students.

In the 1960s, students threw a Westminster Faere with an Olde English theme complete with a drawbridge entrance, a buffet dinner, a cake walk and a “junk car” for students to smash with sledgehammers.

The Faere had 13 booths and a pie contest including faculty, staff and several radio personalities as targets, according to The Forum’s archives.

In more recent history, students had discounted tickets to off-campus events and concerts, like Sundance, from the concierge desk. Today, less is offered, though students retain a discount on their IKON (ski resort) passes.

Eventually, due to low enrollment, cost and distance from campus, Westminster [sub-leased the Draw](#) to the University of Utah. Still, plenty of places to host parties exist on campus.

Panos Schmitt, the professor of 45 years, said Westminster would often hold events on the soccer field for “neighborhood kids, faculty kids and student’s kids because back in those days we had a different population of students.”

Of all these events, only occasional late-night breakfasts, theater buy-outs, and roller rink nights have remained for present students to enjoy. But aside from them, turnout and type of events have changed drastically.

## **High effort, low reward**

Students aren’t the only ones disappointed by the decline in campus engagement.

“[There] are all sorts of well-intentioned people, staff especially, faculty, that work ... to get things on campus to happen,” said Panos Schmitt, who is also the chair of sports management. “[But the consistently low turnout can be] somewhat demoralizing.”

“You try and you try and you try, and it takes the same effort to get one person as it does to get, like, 30 people,” Panos Schmitt said, as she remembered a Sophomore Summit that only one student showed up to.

Low enrollment also causes classroom discussions to be less rich, Panos Schmitt said.

“[Campus] is just a place to do certain things and not to spend meaningful time, which is sad,” Panos Schmitt said.

Other faculty noticed similar trends in student participation.

“I rarely hear [students] talk about attending campus events,” said Sarah Lof, the alum who now works as the Associate Registrar. “It seems like there are fewer events, or [the events] do not draw the same kind of attention.”

## **Low enrollment**

Lof said the lack of campus participation was likely due to the smaller student body and “post-COVID socialization behaviors.”

Similarly, Panos Schmitt said that the main problem with participation is the lack of bodies on campus as well as bigger societal shifts.



Panos Schmitt said getting students to engage was easier when she was an undergrad because most students worked on campus, didn't have a family to support, had no car and had no online space to spend time in or feel judged by.

"There was a cultural value that if you went to college and worked hard, you would get a job and then you could live that American Dream [and that's not the case anymore]," Panos Schmitt said.

This past year, undergraduate enrollment hit a low of 895 students. Attendance has been on a gradual decline since 2012 as enrollment was as high as three to four thousand through the 2000s, according to the [Common Data Set](#).



*Students joke around and take funny photos in 1919, a time when Westminster was even smaller and a religious school. Photo courtesy of Westminster's 1919 yearbook.*

However, a small undergraduate size is nothing new to Westminster.

Panos Schmitt started at Westminster in 1980 when there were 600 students and there were still plenty of events. She witnessed the enrollment increase, the school's bankruptcy in 1983, the name change, and "witnessed geology [program] being shut down twice in one lifetime, and that's too much."

Panos Schmitt said that the school began losing people around 2015 and 2016.

The pandemic hit four-year universities and two-year college enrollment in March 2020, said [USA Today](#).

"You just need momentum...and not the same bodies to do it every time...because that culture is not sustainable," Panos Schmitt said.

This lack of momentum is best seen through clubs. Marketing professor Panos Schmitt remembered her students creating a marketing club, which gained momentum before gradually coming to a halt after the students graduated.

This same pattern occurred with the [Black Excellence](#) Initiative, which consistently struggles to gain momentum.

## **ASW involvement in clubs and parties**

As recent as 2012, there were 49 active clubs including A [capella](#), [dance team](#), [hockey](#), [mock trial](#), [phi alpha-theta](#) and [table tennis](#), according to a Forum article on club budgeting.

Out of the 32 [clubs](#) we have today, four of them are recreational, with three not involving athletics or advocacy: Theater Society, The Hidden Opponent, and Board with Friends.

ASW has recently re-written the process of establishing clubs by sending all requests to Student Engagement and Belonging and has “formed six new clubs within... a couple of months,” according to Juanita Galvis and Quincy Stewart of ASW.

ASW used to drive the majority of student parties.

ASW President, Quincy Stewart, said that part of ASW’s disconnect with events is how it’s advertised, interdepartmental coordination and the “different rules” they have compared to other student organizations.

“I have to be more hands-on with events than other presidents have been because we don’t have a director of events and programming this year,” Stewart said.

ASW advertises its events through social media, a weekly newsletter, emails and flyers and is collecting data on event turnout to find out how students “heard about [the event],” Stewart said.

“We’re starting to realize that getting on the campus calendar would be really beneficial,” Stewart said.

Advertising aside, the types of events and the time they are held still differs from the past functions with informal student interactions prioritized.

Most recently, ASW threw some small holiday celebrations in Shaw during Community Hour and a silent disco held from 3 to 5 p.m.

## **Is there hope for the future?**

Panos Schmitt, the Westminster professor of 45 years, said that despite good efforts, nobody could recreate the same campus culture as the past because culture can't be forced. Even if you schedule a time out of the day to have people come together, like Community Hour (sanctioned time from noon to 1:30 p.m. where no classes take place).

"All of these events planned for this Community Hour, my God... they're just too much,"

Panos Schmitt said. "It has to come from people that want to be together."

Other faculty and alumni have more hope for developing a vibrancy on campus.

"[Culture] does take nurturing," said Micheal Santarosa, the previous ASW participant. "I mean, somebody's gotta initiate it."

Ahmer Afroz, the director of Gore Giovale Center who went to Westminster in 2010, said that he's working with Student Engagement and Belonging to survey the "type of events students want to see, or why they don't go."





*Students in the '90s smile for a photo dressed in Halloween costumes at an ASW event. There hasn't been an evening Halloween party for students in at least four years. Photo courtesy of Micheal Santarosa.*

Despite the perception that students aren't interested in campus events, a group of students said they would want to go to campus parties like those of the past.

Meanwhile, if students want to get to know each other informally, they'll have to find a saint willing to have their house trashed or try their luck (often with fake IDs) at [bars](#). Boring.