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Campus clubs accommodate a variety of interests

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Campus clubs accommodate variety of interests



Like Spider-men in training, Brian Simonds '05 (right) and Jonathon Sestak '07 scale the inside walls of a grain silo that's been converted into a climbing gym. During warmer weather, they and other members of IWU's Rock Climbing Club take their passion for heights to the great outdoors. (Photo by Marc Featherly)

A medley of extracurriculars help IWU students make new friends and let off some steam.

By Megan Dubuque '07 and Leslie Boelter '07

At a local climbing gym, the smell of sweat and rubber permeates the air. From below, shouts of encouragement and instruction cut through the pulse of music that plays in the background, as male and female students alike take turns scaling the 65-foot walls of what was formerly a grain silo. Breathing heavily, their muscles flex and tremble with the strain of the work as they climb and re-climb different routes, enjoying the thrill of freedom from the ground. For members of the IWU Rock Climbing Club, it's just a normal night out.

"It's very tricky the first time, because you're untying the rope that's holding you, and every bone in your body is telling you not to do it, but you have to," said IWU senior Brian Simonds, president of the club.

Like a first-time rock climber, when students make the college transition they often find they must untie their figurative safety rope to discover their own route in campus life. One increasingly popular means of finding

those routes is through the medley of campus clubs available to students. General categories of clubs include academic, athletic, cultural, faith, fine arts, media, political, social, and volunteer. But the sky's the limit when it comes to specific types of extracurriculars, from the American Chemical Society to the IWU Pre-Veterinarian Medicine Club; from the Bombardment Club (dodge ball) to the Dance Team and the Water Polo Club. Students can also join fine arts groups such as 9x9, the IWU filmmaking club; Shenanigans, a theatre troupe; and *Tributaries*, whose members edit a biannual collection of student writings and drawings. Students can also write for the student newspaper *The Argus*, or deejay their own show on WESN 88.1 FM, the campus radio station.

Cultural clubs include the Black Student Union, the Council of Latin American Student Enrichment, IWU Pride Alliance, the National Society for Black Engineers, and the Southeast Asian Student Association. For those that want to break out of the "Wesleyan bubble" by volunteering their time and skills, there is Circle K or Habitat for Humanity.

Currently, some 185 clubs are active on campus, according to Darcy Greder, associate dean of student affairs/co-curricular programming. Students learn about extracurricular activities in their first-year orientation and often begin participating in their first semester on campus. "It's a great way for students to get to know one another" across the gaps of class years, majors, or other distinctions that can tend to separate students into predictable cliques. Says Greder, "These activities help bridge those gaps and create the sense of community that is Illinois Wesleyan."

Interest in clubs is not new on campus. In fact, in the 1920s, Illinois Wesleyan students had become so preoccupied with their various literary and oratory societies that University administrators felt the need to enforce sanctions prohibiting indulgence in extracurriculars at the expense of their academics. Today, administrators see the wisdom in allowing students to freely pursue interests outside the academic realm. Bob Rogers, mental health counselor and alcohol education coordinator at IWU, says that benefits from students becoming involved in extracurricular activities include stress reduction “and using these activities to find a healthy balance with a hectic academic lifestyle.”

“Having the chance to do something you really enjoy makes the college experience that much more fun,” said Chelsey Iaquina ’05, who is a member of the Veggie Club — one of a spate of new groups founded by IWU students over the past few years.

Pamela Solowski ’07, a biology/Spanish double major who helped found the Veggie Club, says she got the initial idea in a conversation with her admissions counselor, Chris Kawakita ’98, when the two discovered their common interest in a vegetarian lifestyle. Solowski says it is important for the group that it be perceived on campus as inclusive, rather than exclusive. In fact, meat eaters who are curious to learn more about the advantages of a vegetarian diet are welcome to participate. “The purpose of the club is to really promote the idea of it — of decreasing meat consumption and showing that meatless food can taste good, too.”



Pamela Solowski '07, Diana Lopez '08 and Sarah Flores '07 preview dishes to be served at a Veggie Club meeting. (Photo by Marc Featherly)



Equestrian Club vice president Leslie Boelter '07 is nuzzled by her horse, brought to McLean County, via trailer, from Boelter's hometown of Seattle. (Photo by Marc Featherly)

For Brian Simonds, rejuvenating a climbing club at IWU began after two of his climbing friends graduated. Missing their companionship, he took over the club that had originally been started by Piotr Dabrowski '04 and Van Miller '04 to see if he could attract anyone else with his passion for climbing. It now has over 40 people on the roster. Of those, he says, 15 to 20 students are regular participants. “But before the club, none of them had really climbed at all. They’ve all become self-sufficient and very active.”

Simonds adds: “We have made possible a sport that no one in their right mind associates with the plains of Illinois and in doing so are spreading the IWU name across the country on every free weekend and break.”

For many students, sharing the bonds of friendship that a club offers often becomes one of their fondest college memories. Betsy Johnpeter '04, founder and former president of the Equestrian Club, graduated last year but still keeps tabs on the group. Johnpeter says that when students come together to attend a show or practice their riding skills, they create their own sense of community. “Because riding is such an individual sport, to come to college and meet people who have the same interests was the greatest thing to me.”