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On Behalf Of: Destination Western
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Destination Western saved my life—literally.

Before coming to Western Oregon University, I wasn't sure college was for me. My entire senior year of high school was online due to COVID, and I felt completely unprepared to transition back into an in-person learning environment. I didn't know if I remembered how to be in a classroom, how to make friends in a new place, or how to navigate college life after so much isolation.

Then I heard about Destination Western, a program designed to help new students acclimate before the school year officially started. I thought, Why not? It couldn't hurt. But what I didn't realize at the time was that this program would become so much more than just an introduction to campus—it would become the foundation of my success at Western.

By the end of the first night, I had already started building friendships. By the third day, Destination Western saved my life.

That evening, after dinner, I returned to my dorm and suddenly felt an intense itch on my scalp. Within minutes, hives appeared on my face, and the itching spread down my body. I was having an unexpected allergic reaction—something I had never experienced before—and I was terrified. My roommate and I rushed outside, searching for help.

Thankfully, the director of Destination Western was sitting just outside our building, talking with another student. I interrupted, apologizing, saying something I can only now laugh about: "Hi, I'm so sorry to interrupt! I just want to say we are having so much fun in the program, but I think I'm having an allergic reaction and might be dying."

Without hesitation, they took action. The director immediately called campus public safety, kept me calm, and reassured me that I was going to be okay. In that moment, I realized that I wasn't just part of a program—I was part of a community that cared about me.

That wasn't the last time Destination Western provided the support I needed. Any time I felt homesick, overwhelmed, or unsure if I belonged, there was always someone ready to listen, encourage me, and remind me that I was capable of handling whatever challenges came my way. This program didn't just help me

transition into college—it helped Western feel like home. It gave me the confidence to believe that I belong here and that with the right support system, I can achieve anything.

I was part of the very first cohort of Destination Western in Fall 2021, and the experience was so impactful that I've returned to work for the program every year since. The student workers and professional staff who guided me in my first days at Western shaped my entire college experience—and now, I dedicate myself to doing the same for others. Each year, my goal has been simple: to ensure that every incoming student feels the same support, encouragement, and sense of belonging that I did.

Now, as my time at Western comes to an end, I have one request: Please continue to fund Destination Western.

There will always be students who feel the way I did—uncertain, nervous, and questioning if college is the right place for them. This program has the power to change lives and, in some cases, even save them. The impact of Destination Western extends far beyond just one week before classes begin—it creates lasting connections, builds confidence, and helps students stay in college when they might otherwise leave.

For the sake of future students who need this program as much as I did, I urge you to reinstate Strong Start and keep Destination Western alive.