

# WWU Campus Conversations Episode 1 Transcript

## Intro Song

I'm shaggy sitting by a fountain  
Having conversations  
About well-being and how to be alive  
I'm sitting with my fish friend  
Feeling all my feelings  
Asking what it would be like if we could thrive  
We can thrive

It's Campus conversations x4

## Intro

**Maggie:** Welcome to Campus Conversations, a production of the Counseling and Wellness Center at Western Washington University! We're trying to spark conversation about mental and sexual wellness at Western Washington University. We'll cover a variety of topics including sex toys and pleasure, body image and mental health and healthy relationships.

**Fiona:** First, we're just going to do a little intro of some of us who will be speaking on this podcast. Hi, my name is Fiona. I use they/them pronouns and I'm studying industrial design here at Western.

**Alyssa:** Hi! My name is Alyssa. I use she/her pronouns and I am a public health and sociology major.

**Maggie:** Hi! My name is Maggie. I use she/her pronouns and I'm a biology major.

**Fiona:** So, I have a question for you all so that the audience can get to know us a bit better. What's your favorite type of pasta? Or what type of pasta would you be?

**Maggie:** Oh, that's such a good question!

**Alyssa:** I think I would be a bow tie pasta because they're cute and they're a little dramatic just like me.

**Maggie:** Love it! I think I would be mushroom tortellini because they have lots of layers. Like an onion.

**Fiona:** I think I would be the spiral twisty pasta just because they're kinda fun and unique but also, they're good at holding in the sauce and that's functional and I appreciate that.

**Sorina:** (in the background) I think that's rotini!

**Fiona:** We are Wellness Advocates and for our first episode we are diving into what a Wellness Advocate is, what wellness resources we have on campus and teaser: how you can join!

## **Interview With Liz Stuart**

**Fiona:** To kick off our first episode we have an interview with Liz. our mentor. We're going to be talking about the Wellness Advocates program what we do, and how you can join or take advantage of these resources if you're interested. So, hello Liz, do you want to introduce yourself?

**Liz:** Yeah, absolutely thank you so much for having me! I'm so excited to be doing this. My name is Liz Stuart, I use she/her pronouns and I am the Assistant Director of Outreach and

Health Promotion with the Counseling and Wellness Center, and I get to lead and mentor the incredible student Wellness Advocates as part of that role.

**Fiona:** Awesome, thank you so much for being here today. Before we get into our information about the Wellness Advocates and all that stuff I was wondering, do you have a current favorite way to practice wellness, personally?

**Liz:** Ooh, you know what? I am kind of a self-care queen. I do not hold back with indulging in the things that I love and that bring me joy and pleasure. To be honest, music is something that really helps me process my feelings and I love dancing, so it has an embodiment aspect and I love to just feel all the feel emo feelings through music and through art. So that is one favorite ways of many.

**Fiona:** Awesome, that is so cool, thank you for sharing.

**Liz:** Yeah! What about you?

**Fiona:** Oh, that's hard question, I feel like currently especially with all the spring weather it's just been getting outside with people I enjoy in a lot of different ways that can be like were gonna go on an intense adventure in the arb. Or I'm just gonna walk to class today and listen to my music on the way there and It'll be chill. Just getting outside seeing all the new things that are growing. My friend saw some hatched baby birds and sent me a photo and they were so cute.

**Liz:** Precious! Nature is magical.

**Fiona:** I agree. So, we're gonna first start with some general info. Would you mind describing who are the Wellness Advocates? What is that as a program?

**Liz:** Yeah, the Wellness Advocate program is a volunteer opportunity where students commit to a year of service in practicing health promotion activities. So, they are engaged in their own learning around health and wellbeing and a lot of different kind of public health problems that we've identified among college students. Things like mental health challenges, sexual health, healthy relationships and violence prevention, substances, and that kind of thing. So, we want to impact those in a positive way. The students commit to a year of service, we have some training at the beginning of the year before classes start that help them feel more prepared to do their activities. We do peer to peer ed, social media stuff, content creation lots of different communications, tabling, really just trying to leverage student power and voice to impact our community here.

**Fiona:** Perfect, that was a great description.

**Liz:** Do you feel like that's right, that's what you do here?

**Fiona:** Yeah, I totally think so. You hit all the spots. Um, as a mentor do you have a favorite part about the program?

**Liz:** Well, my favorite thing is just to observe and be a part of student growth and learning. So, some student will come back a second and third year we love those who just commit that one year, that's awesome too, but it's pretty wild to see how a person changes and grows kind of more in their own identity and confidence between these really crucial developmental years. Y'all's brains are still developing, you're still kind of considering who you are in comparison to how you grew up and your family culture with the broader world and that is really incredible learning and foundational learning for like transformation. So, watching that and being a part of that and helping guide students when they have disruptions or challenges. Honestly, one of my favorite things is when students come to me kind of as an "auntie", and I get to be like "hey you here's what I know, but I trust you in making good choices for your life". So yeah, that's my favorite thing. It's not necessarily like the impact on substance use or something. I care about all of those things too but it's those transformative individual moments that mean so much to me.

**Fiona:** Yeah, and at the end of the day it's kind of about community then, like we're doing the work for our community, but we have our own community too which is what you seem to be focusing on.

**Liz:** Yeah, and I feel like a lot of a lot of times in any kind of service that you're providing there's a tendency to separate ourselves and "other" the community we're trying to impact, or the problem we're trying to solve from ourselves, right? And I think that's harmful. I think all of us are impacted by mental health, substance abuse and addiction. Sexual violence, dating violence all of these problems are ones that are very personal and that you can't separate and kind of professionalize. They are real for all of us and we're in this together and that's a part of the solution to big community-based problems, is to acknowledge we're all in this together and we have each other's backs, and we can do it. We can make it through, you know?

**Fiona:** I couldn't agree more with that. I think that's been one of the most interesting parts of being part of this program, personally. I didn't think I would be distanced from the problems when I first started but I think I was caught off guard with how intertwined things can be. The impact of that is that it feels that much more, I don't even know how to describe it but the outcome is just fuller I think.

**Liz:** Yeah, and I just really believe in like sort of thinking of solving community problems as, I love nature metaphors, so I'm thinking of the roots of a tree and the underground happenings of fungi, right? And so, I think that I imagine community change and liberation and opportunity for like creativity and growth and solutions as sort of a spiral inside of each of us that we start inside and we grow together, you know? Under the surface of the soil or whatever.

**Fiona:** That's beautiful. I like that thanks for sharing. What are some of the projects or events that you've been the most excited about? It would be cool to here maybe an example from the past and maybe something that you're working on for the future/present.

**Liz:** Let's see. I'm thinking about an event that I really enjoyed. There's so many but one specific one was we hosted a local community organization the Commission on Sexual and

Domestic Violence to share some of their findings around a project they did related to restorative justice and restorative practices and centering the voices and experiences of sexual assault survivors. We had a really good turnout. We all learned together around what survivor experiences are and what their hopes are collectively for justice and moving forward in a good way. We have some initiatives, kind of separate from the Wellness Advocates program on campus, together with the Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance Office to implement and embed some more of that. This was a project that we collaborated with a community partner, they had some really great community-based research they had done. We had a lot of students engaged in the conversation and I think there was just some really great learning and opportunities to kind of do something different and center harmed folks in our solutions which always should be the case. Impacted or harmed people should be the ones that we're listening to and generating our solutions from. So that was a favorite, and I think moving forward I'm a really big fan of art and culture as a protective factor. We call them protective factors. You've probably heard of risk factors, folks out there, like you're at risk for different problems but there are also protective factors there are things we can do to promote health and wellbeing and thriving.

**Fiona:** That's so cool!

**Liz:** Yeah, so one of them is cultural practices and art and expression and having a meaningful contribution in your community. Being a Wellness Advocate is a protective factor, having a healthy mentor or adult in your life is a protective factor. So, I'm a big fan of art and culture and I just really believe in the healing and the visionary aspect of imaging something different for our future. Which your generation is so incredible at. Period. Facts on facts! Not me trying to speak your language or whatever. Okay gen X, okay boomer. Anyway, what I'm most excited about is trying to get more integrated, thoughtful, creative collaborative initiatives.

**Fiona:** I really appreciate that. I think art is a way to communicate without having to put what you're feeling into words when sometimes words can't really describe how you're feeling, especially when we haven't been taught to talk about those things.

**Liz:** Totally, yeah.

**Fiona:** Art and culture I can definitely see that. I mean I'm sure both of us have experienced making art in our own free time and that helps a lot too and seeing other people's art helps you understand their story in a way you wouldn't have gotten from just reading a paragraph about them.

**Liz:** Yeah, I mean think about how we just started out today, and my favorite wellbeing thing is consuming art like connecting to myself and something bigger than me through art. And storytelling. It's visual storytelling, or audio storytelling when we're having an art practice. That's rooted in since the beginning of time, hey folks, we have used to gather around fires singing and dancing and sharing stories. It's rooted in indigenous practices and I also want to defer to our indigenous community members for the knowledge and wisdoms of how to sustain societies for generations since time immemorial. Those are just other outlets we don't always think of them as storytelling, art, but it really is a sharing of human experience.

**Fiona:** Definitely. Yeah, awesome.

**Liz:** Join us! Let's do it! Murals, art, painting, fashion.

**Fiona:** I would love to a mural.

**Liz:** Ha ha! Yeah, a mural is on my little hope list.

**Fiona:** If you wanna make a mural, you know who to contact.

**Liz:** Let's go! Name it claim it baby! Manifesting.

**Fiona:** Okay, on to the next question. What's the biggest barrier to accessing wellness at Western that you've noticed and how are we as a program working to take those barriers down?

**Liz:** Unfortunately, there's kind of a lot of barriers and I think they intersect so its challenging to name one. I think we are still grappling with and processing the impact of covid and the deep pandemic and I think that really impacted a lot of us in terms of our levels of social anxiety and social risk taking. You know, I hear from a lot of students that they kind of struggle to make friends or invite somebody to just hang out like in person, not online or videos or whatever. So, we do know that if you experience trauma, which covid was a collective and continues to be a collective trauma and is individual trauma for some. I wanna name too like a lot of people lost folks or experienced their body experiencing covid or just their wellbeing. But what we know about healing and resilience is that it doesn't happen alone, it happens in connection and in relationship and so having disconnection and loneliness and separateness when we just really are one human body and nature and ecology. It's problematic. We suffer in mental health and then we harm each other when we don't know how to cope with mental health struggles, we harm each other we harm out bodies we might choose coping strategies that are not gonna promote our thriving or the thriving of our community or our family or friends. So, I'm gonna say social connectedness. I also wanna say there's also just economic things. Access to resources, basic needs the housing crisis in Bellingham, it absolutely impacts your wellbeing to have stable access to your basic needs. The housing situation in Bellingham has just gotten worse and worse and more desperate, unfair, and inequitable. Those racial inequities, financial inequities, structural inequities are a primary piece and then there's kind of the social connectedness which I also think is an infrastructure problem. You don't just solve social problems by one-on-one connections, there are infrastructure and ways that we can create spaces that encourage people to connect.

**Fiona:** That's something that could be designed and created.

**Liz:** Okay, industrial design major (snaps) ha ha ha!

**Fiona:** Okay, so if any of these topics are sounding interesting to anyone listening out there, the Wellness Advocates might be something for you or something that you might consider looking at the resources we promote, either way we are recruiting right now and applications are due May 10th still, correct?

**Liz:** We actually have updated that, application are due May 17th.



**Fiona:** That means you have more time!

**Liz:** More time! May 17th they're due.

**Fiona:** Were goanna talk about that process really quick, just for anyone who's curious. Do you want to give a brief overview of what applying looks like?

**Liz:** Yeah absolutely, the application is online you can go to [cwc.wwu.edu](http://cwc.wwu.edu) and just search for the volunteers tab and the application is on there. It's an online application. There's kind of just some general questions and then there is one piece on there that you submit a short video of you teaching about something or instructing around something you care about related to wellbeing. I'm not sure how long the application takes. You did it, do you remember?

**Fiona:** I don't remember. I just remember, I was walking around in Red Square and it was April so it was sexual assault awareness month and people were tabling and I was like "hey how can I do this?" and they were like "it's too early right now, but we do have application open for next year" and I went home that night and did it all in one sitting because I was like "I want to do this!"

**Liz:** Aw, cool.

**Fiona:** I remember I was stressed about recording the video, but it was not that bad.

**Liz:** You know what we're not sitting there judging the quality of the video or how good you are or judging you at all really. We just kind of want to know that you will take initiative. We are trying to find folks who can articulate information around health and wellbeing. Just the willingness to put yourself out there indicates to us that you're probably gone be able to do that when we're getting out into the community.

**Fiona:** That makes sense! Apart from being willing to put yourself out there and being articulate are there any other skills or kinds of people that we are looking for?

**Liz:** Yeah, so we are looking for folks who want to make a difference, who want to make new friends honestly. Who are committed to promoting health and wellbeing. Who are reliable. So, we really rely on each other to show up for the things that we are assigned, or that we sign up for. Willing to learn, open mind and heart. We don't know all the things and we have to be considerate and empathetic that other people's stories might be different from ours if we want to work towards a diverse and more tolerant future where lots of ideas are amplified and accepted. That's kind of an important aspect of it or something we're looking for. Reliable, responsible, good attitude, willing to learn is really the biggest thing, self-reflective, willing to learn and contribute something. The commitment is 4-6 hours a week commitment so you're signing up to participate in our training in the Fall which is 30-40 hours long before school starts and then every week we meet for an hour and a half, and you're expected to do 2-4 hours on top of that of service. Let's see am I missing anything? Oh, I think the kinds of things that you gain from the program, and you can kind of add to this or say "that did or didn't work for me". This is a great thing to put on your resume. You're contributing to the solutions that impact you and your community. I think you build skills around building strategies for communicating health strategies also working as a team. You could say customer service type stuff. You're engaging with the community, having conversations, asking good questions, public speaking, we do workshops and things. There are options for how to participate in the program, so you don't have to lead workshops but many of our students lead peer to peer consent workshops or do tabling but we also do tangible things like providing sexual health resources and packing up condoms. There's lots of ways to contribute and we think that everyone has a way, right? No way is better than another, so those are just some reasons that you might want to join. You can make friends and be a part of something that matters.

**Fiona:** I think something I want to highlight that you kind of touched on is the idea of if you're wondering if this might be the right fit for you and you're like "oh, but I don't know everything about sexual health ever" and "I don't know everything about substances ever". You don't have to be an expert to be a part of this, you just have to be willing to learn and support your community. I've learned a lot from being here and I've appreciated that. I think that's a big part of the experience in itself. We have trainings to get trained up, it's not like

you're talking out of thin air, we have resources for us to be able to help our community. If you're worried that you don't know enough, that can be changed.

**Liz:** And none of us do, don't let capitalism tell you that are not enough or you don't know enough. You know what you know, and if you have an interest in learning more and a curiosity, that's the key! To keep learning. I guess my biggest hope for all of our members of the Wellness Advocate program is that they go off and become ambassadors in all the different disciplines and jobs and areas and circles where they influence people to be an advocate for wellbeing and that is lifelong learning, I am still learning about so many of these topics. It's just a fun journey if you make it that.

**Fiona:** I totally agree. I think going off of that talking about having ambassadors in every section of the world as we all disperse. When I first heard about this I was like "oh, is it just for psychology majors or public health majors?" and we love our psychology and public health majors, they're so cool! You don't have to be any specific major. You don't even have to know your major to be in this program. We have people studying all sort of things, people who are different years in school, it's not one type of person who is part of us.

**Liz:** Yeah, in fact we benefit from, and our solutions are better when we have people with diverse interests. We have science and biology majors, psychology is a common one for sure and public health, anthropology. I've had business and economics folks before. There really is no limit to who can be a person who advocates for health and wellbeing, in fact you should be advocating for your and your community's health and wellbeing in every sector.

**Fiona:** Facts!

**Liz:** Yeah, we deserve it. We deserve rest and care and thriving.

**Fiona:** I think we've kind of covered everything. Any closing notes?

**Liz:** I guess my closing notes are, joy is a crucial part of the revolution. These topics can be heavy and hard no doubt, and they hit us personally and they're tragic and sad. We love each other and have fun through them. We eat foods together we play, we find ways to insert joy in coping with and talking about these topics, like we're not being flippant about it but at the same time, having fun and connecting and being like hey, whatever this is, this wow world that y'all inherited, you know, that we all inherited is like we've got to move through it in a way that promotes joy. That's my final thing. It's heavy stuff, its important stuff and it doesn't mean that we're not having a blast also.

**Fiona:** That's a really good point, thank you for sharing that! That concludes our interview with Liz and thanks for listening!

**Liz:** Yeah, thank you so much! It's been fun.

**Maggie:** We want to thank Liz for that lovely interview! If you join the Wellness Advocates, you get to hang out with her all the time! Again, applications for this program are due Friday, May 17th.

## **Q&A**

**Alyssa:** Next, we are moving into our Q and A segment. For our first episode we decided to reach out to our fellow advocates and asked them to share a question that they had about sexual or mental health before joining the program or something they're still wondering. In the future we will be polling you! When this episode comes out, we'll have a link to an anonymous doodle poll on our Instagram. So, if you're not following it already, be sure to check out @bewellwwu on Instagram.

**Maggie:** Okay, Alyssa, so, the first question we received is: What type of lube can be used with condoms and sex toys? So first off, what is lube?

**Alyssa:** Lubricant (or lube) is a liquid or gel which may be used during sex or with sex toys to reduce friction and can increase pleasure for some folks. It is a great option to use with condoms because it can prevent breakage or slippage of the condom during sex, retaining the condoms ability to prevent pregnancy and STIs. Many condoms are pre-lubricated, but you can add extra lube in these cases to further reduce friction. How do I choose which kind of lube to use?

**Maggie:** When choosing a lube, it's important to consider what materials you are using. Water-based or silicone-based lube are safe to use with any type of condom. It is not recommended to use oily substances with condoms such as lotion, Vaseline, or oil-based lubes as this can degrade the condom and lead to breakage Okay, so we've talked about condoms. What about sex toys?

**Alyssa:** When it comes to sex toys, water-based lube is safe. Oil-based lube may be used with sex toys but it may be more difficult to clean off toys than water-based lube. It could be a good idea to do a patch test with your oil-based lube before using it on the whole toy. Another thing to keep in mind when it comes to oil-based lube is it can clog pores and stain fabric. Regarding the use of silicone lubricant, it's important to note that numerous sex toys are made from silicone. The application of silicone lubricant may trigger a reaction with the toy's silicone material, leading to its deterioration.

**Maggie:** To summarize: lube is great and it's important to know what type to use. If in doubt, water-based lube is always a good way to go!

**Maggie:** Another question that we received is how many of my peers are having sex?

**Alyssa:** First, I think it's important to recognize that the term sex can be used to describe various activities. Penis in vagina sex, anal sex but it doesn't have to be penetrative. It can also include oral sex.

**Maggie:** The college years can often be depicted in the media as a time where everyone is having sex all the time and can set up this norm or societal expectation that having sex

frequently or with many people defines a normal college experience. This norm can cause pressure or distress for those that don't fit within this expectation.

**Alyssa:** On the flip side some college students may feel shame for the perceived notion that the amount of sex that they are having, the type of sex they are having or the amount of partners they are having it with is more than what's 'typical' or 'okay'. Think about some of the terms that are used in popular culture like "slut" and how that might make people who choose to engage in casual sex feel. I think it's also important to think about what groups of people are especially targeted by these terms.

**Maggie:** Totally. The truth is that there are so many reasons why people may or may not be having sex. For example, someone might not be having sex due to personal or cultural beliefs or preferences maybe they're focused on their career or school. Wanting to avoid pregnancy or STI risk. Not meeting the right person etc. Some students may also identify as asexual.

**Alyssa:** Some reasons why people may be having sex is because its fun, empowering. It's a way to explore your sexual identity, likes and dislikes. It's also a way to connect with your partner or partners and increase intimacy.

**Maggie:** In reality, we know that not all college students are sexually active. According to the National College Health Assessment, 35% of undergraduate students reported having no sexual partners within the past year, and 49% of undergraduate students reported having 1 – 2 sexual partners within the past year." So, this is actually a pretty even split between those who are having sex and those who are not.

**Alyssa:** For Western specifically, Dr. Mary Hunt did a study here and found that 67.1% of WWU students had sex between 2020-2021. About half (53%) engaged in a new sexual behavior during that time frame. It's also important to note that this data was gathered during peak covid times, so that number may be a bit different if collected today. It pretty much reflects that other statistics that you brought up as well.

**Maggie:** Totally. It's really cool that we had that study and that opportunity to assess what that actually looks like here at Western. It's important that we remember, partnered sex is not the only way people explore their sexuality. Masturbation or solo sex can be a great way for someone to learn about their likes and dislikes and experience pleasure that is independent of anyone else. Also, the frequency and type of sexual behaviors we perform may be ever-changing throughout our lifetime. We have the opportunity to check in with ourselves and renegotiate our relationship with sex at any point.

**Alyssa:** If we're talking about connection and building intimacy there are also a lot of other ways to build connection like watching a movie, cooking with each other, spending time outside being active, sharing emotions, kissing, holding hands, cuddling, trying a new activity or club together on campus. There are a lot of other ways.

**Maggie:** Absolutely. Remember if you do choose to have sex, getting informed consent is mandatory. Whether we're having sex or not, learning ways to ask for and recognize consent is something we should all be thinking about.

**Alyssa:** Our main takeaway for this question is that college can be a time for whatever is important to you, and if that's not sex, that's ok and you're not alone!

## **Campus Events**

**Fiona:** We want to plug a few events and opportunities we have going on and off campus.

**Alyssa:** We also have the Through Our Lens gallery on campus. This is a project through the Counseling and Wellness Center, where Western students got disposable cameras to capture what belonging and well-being at Western means to them. This gallery is open now until May 17th in the B Gallery in the Fine Arts building so make sure to check it out!

**Maggie:** We have the Outdoor Wellness Extravaganza, that's gonna be out at Lakewood, Saturday May 18th from 11am to 7pm. Free food and free boats! But not to take home.

**Fiona:** Dang it! May is also Mental Health Awareness Month, so this is a reminder to do something kind for your mental health. Also, be on the lookout for other resources and events from Western's Counseling and Wellness center to help you care for yourself and others.

**Alyssa:** And again, remember to follow our Instagram @bewellwwu for resources and event information and to interact with the podcast!

**Alyssa, Maggie, and Fiona:** Thank you for listening!

### **Outro Song:**

In the trees and in the forest  
And all that comes before us  
We feel to find the wisdom in our bones  
Releasing judgment and old stories  
Remembering our glory  
We rest in love and walk each other home  
We're not alone  
It's campus conversations x4

### **Sources:**

Planned Parenthood:

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