



**Jolene Brunson**

Western Oregon University

**Age:** 21

**Year:** Senior

**Major:** Geography and Social Science, preparation for Education program after BA

**Goal:** to teach middle school and high school social studies, geography, or cultural studies

Jolene comes from a tight-knit family in Pleasant Hill, Oregon, a small town just outside of Eugene, and was the first person in her family to attend college, which she says was both exciting and tough. Her parents hadn't been through the college application process before, so everything about it was unfamiliar. After much deliberation and discussion over finances, how far away from home to move, and programs, she decided on pursuing an elementary education degree at Western Oregon University, and has been a strong voice on campus from the start. Jolene has loved her small classes and the community at WOU, where no more than 15 students are in any of her current courses. The lower than average tuition at WOU has also been a great help, as she takes on much of the financial responsibility for her own college expenses through work, scholarships, and loans. A college course on geography by Dr. Van Steeter fascinated her and inspired her to change her academic focus from elementary education to middle and secondary education. She is also considering pursuing high school counseling in addition to her teaching credential after her involvement helping fellow students as a Residential Assistant in the dormitories. Jolene says, "I helped them with so much more than where their classroom was, and just loved being there for them." In fact, her extensive involvements on campus, including positions in student government, residence halls, and student activities board, have been a second focal point of her educational experience. One of her most rewarding experiences has been to participate in Western's PLUS team, Peer Leaders Understanding Students, which provides orientation to freshmen and transfer students for a week each year. She also holds a student job in the office of the Vice President for Student Affairs, and speaks highly of Debbie Diehm, the assistant to the director, because students simply always come first in Debbie's book. It is clear that those middle or high school students will someday be first and foremost in Jolene's book as well.