

# REPORT TO THE NORTHWEST COMMISSION ON COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

*Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness*



***February 14, 2024***

*A Self-Study of Western Washington University's Performance on  
NWCCU Accreditation Section 1 Standards*



**MAKE WAVES.**

# Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness (2024)

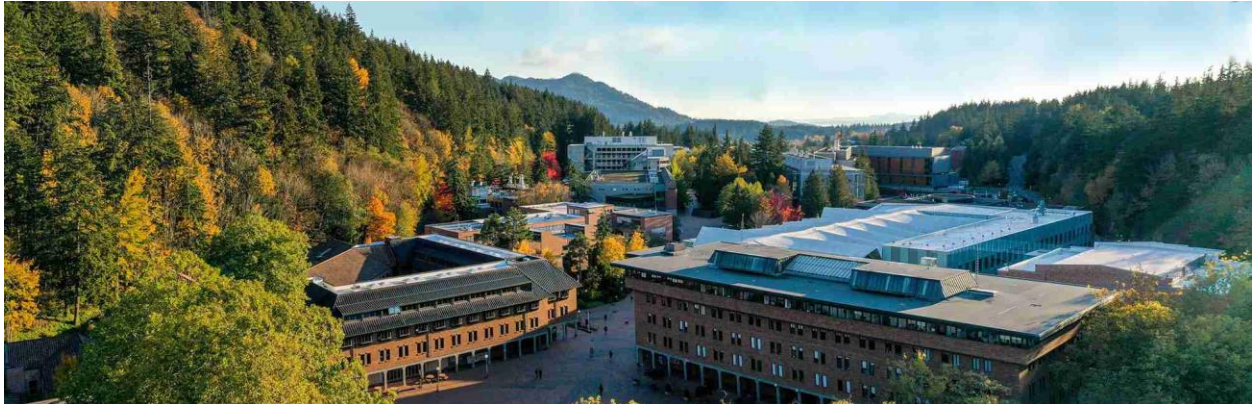
*A Self-Study of WWU's Performance on NWCCU Section 1 Standards*

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*Note: Appendices I-V are attached to this report as separate documents.*

## Institutional Overview



Western Washington University (WWU) is a public comprehensive university with its main campus located in Bellingham, Washington. Established in 1893, it has grown to become one of the leading institutions of higher education in the Pacific Northwest. With a strong commitment to academic excellence, a deep connection to its unique geography, and a focus on sustainability, WWU offers a diverse and inclusive learning environment for its students.

Western is known for its rigorous academic programs and commitment to providing students with a well-rounded education. The university offers a wide range of undergraduate and graduate programs across various disciplines, including the arts and sciences, business, education, and environmental studies. With a student-to-faculty ratio of 17:1, students benefit from small class sizes and personalized attention from experienced faculty members. The university is dedicated to fostering critical thinking, creativity, and intellectual curiosity among its 14,651 students, 93% of whom are undergraduate students and 86% of whom are Washington state residents.

Western's curriculum is noted for its emphasis on experiential learning. Students have the opportunity to engage in internships, research projects, and community service, allowing them to apply classroom knowledge to real-world situations. The university's commitment to hands-on learning contributes to the development of practical skills and prepares students for successful careers in their chosen fields.

Western Washington University also takes pride in its commitment to accessibility, diversity, equity, and inclusion. The university actively promotes an environment that celebrates different perspectives and backgrounds. Initiatives such as cultural competency training, diversity workshops, and multicultural events contribute to a campus culture that values equity and understanding.

WWU has gained recognition for its commitment to sustainability and environmental responsibility. The university has long been a leader in green initiatives, having established the first environmental college in the nation and with groundbreaking

efforts in campus recycling and reducing carbon emissions, and promoting sustainable practices. The campus features environmentally friendly buildings, and students are encouraged to participate in sustainability-related programs and research.

Western Washington University is led by its President, Dr. Sabah Randhawa, a highly qualified academic leader who was selected by the Board of Trustees following a national search in 2016. Western employs five vice presidents who work closely with President Randhawa, as represented in Western's [organizational chart](#). These positions include a Provost and Executive Vice President, a Vice President for Enrollment and Student Services, a Vice President for Business and Financial Affairs, a Vice President for University Relations and Marketing, and a Vice President for University Advancement. The VP for Advancement also serves as the Chief Executive Officer of the [Western Foundation](#). In June 2022, Western completed a national search for its first Chief Diversity Officer, who also serves as Executive Director of the Office of Equity. As members of the President's Cabinet (which now includes the Athletics Director), these administrators work collaboratively with the president to plan, organize, and manage the institution and to assess its achievements and effectiveness.

## Institutional Update

As described in more detail in response to standards 1.B.3 and 1.B.4, Western engaged in a comprehensive strategic planning process in 2017 that led to the development of the 2018-2025 [Strategic Plan](#) that was [approved](#) by the Board of Trustees in April 2018. The Strategic Plan is operationalized in numerous ways through the work of the President's Cabinet, Academic Deans, Department Chairs and Directors, faculty, and student leaders, as well as many others. Structurally, it is reflected in the [Strategic Budgeting Process](#), which is overseen by the office of [Strategy, Management & Budget](#), created in 2021 to provide budget, financial planning, and analysis functions for Western Washington University. The Division of Business and Financial Affairs approved an updated [Strategic Plan](#) in 2019, including [defined strategic priorities](#) to ensure that institutional services, from budgets to facilities to human resources, are aligned with the university's strategic plan. The Division of Enrollment and Student Services created their current [Strategic Plan](#) in 2020 (recently updated in January 2024), and this led to the development of a new Strategic Enrollment Management framework in 2022.

Since 2017, Western has engaged in a number of important areas of growth and renewal in its curriculum. Western offers a number of 2+2 degrees with community college partners throughout Western Washington, including a new Cybersecurity B.S. degree option for students at the Kirkland Institute of Technology started in 2018. In the 2022 session, the state legislature appropriated over \$5 million for the 2023-2025 biennium to expand programs in Bremerton, Poulsbo, and Port Angeles, with the majority of those funds designated to support 2+2 programs with Olympic and Peninsula Colleges. This funding allows Western to offer these programs with state support at the same tuition rate as programs at the Bellingham campus; previously, Western's programs on the peninsulas were self-supporting (and consequently more expensive to deliver). The legislature also expanded Western's authority to offer professional doctorates, with an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership authorized in 2020, and blanket authorization for all professional doctorates in 2023. Additional funding has been secured for expanded programs in Marine and Coastal Sciences, Computer Science, and Electrical and Computer Engineering. Western has continued its leadership in environmental sustainability with the creation of a new department of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning in 2021 and is now finalizing the creation of new departments of Ethnic Studies and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

### Enrollment and Student Services Initiatives

The Division of Enrollment and Student Services (ESS) has focused many of its newer efforts on areas noted by non-returning students as reasons they left Western. According to survey results, the top five reasons included mental health struggles,



unmet basic needs, affordability, a lack of belonging/community, and academic struggles. ESS has furthered a number of initiatives in recent years to address these challenges:

- In 2021, Western was recognized by NASPA as a [First-Gen Forward institution](#), participated in a regional cohort, and completed two main goals: establishing a First-Gen Collective committee to coordinate first-gen efforts across campus departments, and establishing a [First Generation Family Toolkit website](#).
- In 2023, the Academic Advising Center and Student Outreach Services (a TRIO like office) were merged to form a more comprehensive [Academic Advising & Student Achievement Center](#). By combining these teams, AASAC has increased its capacity to serve students and to expand its outreach efforts in support of a more intrusive advising model with students at higher risk of being retained.
- Western has been an active leader across the state in gathering data regarding students' basic needs at our public 2-year and 4-year institutions, serving as the lead partner institution and research entity for the 2022-2023 [Washington Student Experience Survey](#). Western was also one of two 4-year institutions who volunteered to be part of a pilot program ([SB5800](#)) beginning in Fall 2019 and continued that participation ([HB1166](#)) in Fall 2021. The statewide survey results played an instrumental role in securing permanent allocations ([HB1559](#)) in the 2023 legislative session to support this ongoing work.
- In November 2021, Western signed the [Okanagan charter](#), becoming one of the first seven schools in the country to become a Health Promoting campus. A Well-being Collective committee was formed to develop a strategic plan for this work, which is an ever-changing document. In addition, the former Counseling Center and Prevention and Wellness Services were combined to form a Counseling and Wellness Center that covers the full spectrum of prevention from primary to tertiary care.
- Lastly, in March 2022, the division announced a restructure to form a new [Access, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion unit](#) (soon to be renamed The Centers for Student Access, Community, and Intercultural Engagement). The unit consists of the Multicultural Student Services, the Disability Access Center and LGBTQ+ Western. Part of this restructuring also included moving the Ethnic Student Center and the Student Advocacy and Identity Resource Centers under MSS leadership.

## Campus Developments

The [Capital Development & Strategic Vision Plan](#) will establish a campus vision for the next 10-15 years and guide ongoing decision making around capital planning and development, campus open space, and infrastructure. The heart of the planning effort will be in broad and varied stakeholder engagement, to supplement and expand on the background research and analysis into how Western uses its facilities, to engender broad participation and transparency, and to help the deliverables of the Plan to be rooted in Western's mission, values, vision, and goals.

The **Carver Academic Renovation and Addition**, completed in 2017, provides classrooms, computer labs, movement labs, instructional space, offices, support facilities, and gymnasiums for Health and the Human Development, Campus Recreation, and Athletics programs, in addition to new general university classrooms. Health and Human Development offers degree programs for students interested in professions related to kinesiology, P-12 physical education and health, community health education, and recreation.

Located in the Viking Union, the **Multicultural Center**, completed in 2019, provides a visible, accessible, welcoming space to support student needs, diverse identities, and inclusive success. The creation of the center involved student initiatives, funding, collaboration, and advocacy throughout the decision making and design process.

Designed with accessibility and inclusion in mind and completed in 2021, **Alma Clark Glass Hall**, a 413-bed residence hall, uses a series of ramps and an elevator to make the Ridgeway area of campus ADA accessible for the first time. A multi-purpose room, community kitchens, and study lounges encourage academic and social interaction. As part of this project, a ramp and elevator were also added to Ridgeway Commons to allow ADA access to its dining and collaborative spaces.

The **Interdisciplinary Science Building**, completed in 2022, features teaching labs for Biology, Chemistry, Environmental Science, and Marine and Coastal Science, along with flex lab spaces and active learning classrooms. Flexible spaces allow for shared use and greater interaction and collaboration among STEM and non-STEM disciplines, support the Washington state goal of increasing STEM graduates, increase opportunities across the STEM fields, and reduce barriers to fulfilling graduation requirements.

**Kaiser Borsari Hall**, Western's new electrical and computer engineering, energy science, and computer science building, is currently under construction and scheduled for completion early in 2025. The building will offer unique opportunities to students across disciplines with its net-zero energy and carbon design, state-of-the-art labs and experiential learning spaces, active learning classrooms, and collaborative spaces. It will house programs that expand access for an increasingly diverse population of students, including the nation's only interdisciplinary

undergraduate Energy Studies program and one of the most advanced Electrical and Computer Engineering programs in the region.

In partnership and close collaboration with Coast Salish tribal nations and the Western Native American Student Union, Western is planning to build a Coast Salish style longhouse, called the **House of Healing**, scheduled for completion in 2025. It will serve as an educational center; support American Indian and First Nations students, faculty, and staff; and promote cultural exchange and understanding for the communities served by the university.

The **Student Development and Success Center**, currently in design with completion anticipated late in 2025, is planned as an easily accessible and welcoming facility with consolidated student support services. It will aid in recruitment and retention; leading to increased graduation rates, especially among underrepresented students; and will better prepare students to successfully enter the job market.

### **Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The first confirmed case of COVID-19 in the U.S. was discovered in Everett, Washington, in January 2020, and until mid-March, no state had a higher rate of confirmed cases than Washington. The Governor declared a state of emergency on February 29, 2020, and issued a [stay-at-home order on March 23<sup>rd</sup>](#).

### **Communication**

By March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, Western created a coordinated communication strategy for COVID-19 and issued new guidelines and professional support for the possibility of switching to remote instruction. On March 5<sup>th</sup>, NWCCU forwarded to member institutions guidance from the Department of Education that included emergency authorization for colleges to deliver courses by distance education, regardless of previous approval. That same day, Western announced the formation of an Incident Command System team to coordinate the institutional response to COVID-19, bringing together key leaders and stakeholders from across the university's areas of operation. On March 11<sup>th</sup>, Western determined that all classes and exams for the remainder of the Winter Quarter would be held remotely and that course evaluations by students would be optional. The next day it was announced that the start of Spring Quarter would be delayed by a week.

The first COVID-19 case on Western's Bellingham campus was announced on March 16<sup>th</sup>. On March 19<sup>th</sup>, it was confirmed that Spring Quarter classes at Western would be fully remote. Grading for Spring 2020 was agreed by the faculty leadership and Provost to switch to pass/no pass, with the option to request a letter grade. This policy was extended through Summer 2020; Fall 2020 grading returned to pre-pandemic policy, with additional flexibility for students to request pass/no pass grading. By Fall 2021 grading had reverted fully to pre-pandemic policy.



Throughout the two years of the pandemic, an extraordinary focus was placed on communications with faculty, staff, and students, emphasizing the institution's two key priorities: ensuring safety and well-being of the community, and maintaining essential operations to minimize impacts on students' education and degree completion. The communications also recognized the stress and impact of the pandemic on individual members of the community, while trying to create hope and a sense of community during those difficult and virtual times.

### **Professional Development**

During the extended spring break in 2020 and into the Spring and Summer Quarters, an extraordinary effort was made by Western's Center for Instructional Innovation and Assessment and the Office of Academic Technology and User Services to provide a surge of capacity for online course delivery tools to supplement Canvas, our online learning management system. Once it was determined that most courses would continue to be taught remotely into Fall 2020, a team of WWU instructional designers and technologists carried out 50 professional development presentations and workshops, with an additional 12 led by faculty. Stipends for these offerings were made possible by the CARES Act.

Approximately 1,000 faculty and graduate teaching assistants completed the offerings; with multiple registrations, the total number of session registrations was 2,439. Professional development offerings continued during the academic year, both via unpaid presentations and as multi-week paid workshops on the topics of instructional design, hybrid/remote teaching, open educational resources, and inclusive course project development. After the height of the pandemic support era, academic learning systems, technical support, and professional development has settled significantly; however, is still approximately double pre-pandemic levels and is supplemented by hundreds of technical support videos and documents created to meet faculty needs.

### **Expanded Technologies**

To support remote and hybrid work for students, faculty, and staff, changes to our technology services have included the following:

- Expanding our licensing of Zoom, Adobe Cloud, and other cloud products
- Supporting a faster adoption of Microsoft Teams and SharePoint Online for remote collaboration
- Expanding the capacity of and access to our Virtual Private Network (VPN)
- Deploying virtualized computer labs
- Extending loan periods for laptops
- Equipping classrooms and conference rooms with webcams, PTZ cameras, room microphones, and updated software to support hybrid instruction

- Licensing new cloud tools such as the Panopto video recording and management platform

## **Remote Teaching and Learning**

With this tectonic shift in the delivery of our curriculum came the need to clarify working conditions for all employees. For faculty, a series of [eleven MOUs](#) were negotiated as supplements to the Collective Bargaining Agreement. These memoranda clarified workload expectations and provided extensions for post-tenure review and professional leave.

## **Community Health and Wellness During COVID**

Western took a proactive approach to protecting public health during the pandemic, being one of the first universities in the state to enact mandatory testing for all students coming to campus in Fall 2020. Our Student Health Center developed an innovative batch COVID testing system in partnership with a local lab which reduced the cost of COVID tests from \$135 per test to \$13 per test. Western was also among the first universities in the state to require vaccination for COVID for all students, faculty and staff coming to campus in Fall 2021; this policy resulted in vaccination rates of 99% for staff and 97% for students. Washington state enacted rigorous requirements for universities to provide quarantine and isolation housing for any student diagnosed with COVID, regardless of whether or not they lived in campus housing. By Spring 2022, more than 600 students had been transported securely to quarantine and isolation. Western also took a conservative approach to reopening fully for face-to-face instruction, despite complaints and concerns from some students and parents.

On June 12, 2023, Western stopped requiring proof of COVID vaccination for students, employees, or contractors and officially marked the end of the pandemic as a campus emergency after almost three years of the institution being turned upside down by the virus.

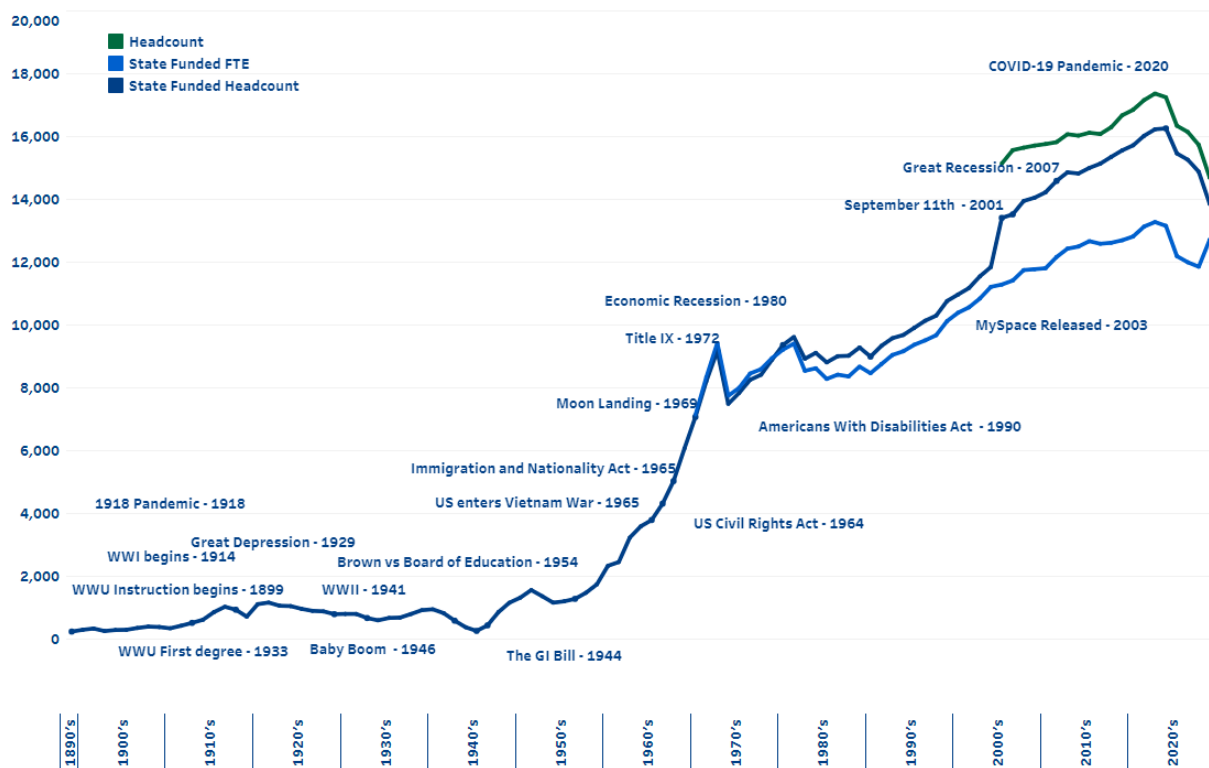
The world has changed so much since the pandemic started, but Western's commitment to keeping its campus community safe never wavered. In that intervening time, the staff at the Student Health Center administered more than 59,000 COVID tests and nearly 3,000 COVID vaccinations and boosters were administered at on-campus clinics. While COVID will never be "over," we have many reasons as a university community to feel very proud about successfully exiting the major stage of the pandemic process together while protecting the health and safety of our campus community.

## Admissions

Along with many public comprehensive universities, Western saw a sharp decline in new student admissions during the pandemic. Prior to COVID-19, the fall quarters of 2017, 2018, and 2019 all saw new first-year student cohorts in excess of 3,100. These were the largest incoming classes (at that time) in the university's history. The Fall 2020 first-year cohort was 2,494 students. Fall 2021 saw some recovery, with 2,874 new first-year students joining Western. At the same time, our retention rates declined overall, most significantly for first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented minority students.

In fall 2022, we experienced a dramatic recovery in our first-year admissions, with a record class of 3223, which was followed by another excellent incoming first-year class of 3184 in fall 2023. These large incoming classes, by themselves, were not sufficient to counteract the integrated effect of prior years' admissions and retention issues. The enrollment headcount in fall 2019 was 16,142. This has declined each subsequent year. Our fall 2023 headcount of 14,651 is a drop of 0.6% from 2022 and 9.3% from fall 2019. Figure 1 [below] shows the full history of Western's enrollment.

Figure 1. Enrollment at Western Washington University (1899 to 2023)



While our enrollment position coming out of the pandemic isn't where we want it to be (particularly in relation to the goals set prior to the pandemic in the 2018-2025 Strategic Plan), we recognize that we are, comparatively, in a strong position. Figures 2 and 3 [below] show that Western has had a more robust enrollment recovery than WSU's Pullman campus, Evergreen State College, Eastern Washington University, and Central Washington University.

*Figure 2. Enrollment at Select Washington Public Universities (2018-2022)*

<b>All Students (All funds)</b>						<b>1-Year</b>	<b>2-Year</b>	<b>5-Year</b>
	<b>Fall 2018</b>	<b>Fall 2019</b>	<b>Fall 2020</b>	<b>Fall 2021</b>	<b>fall 2022</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>Change</b>
Central Washington University	12,533	12,643	11,708	10,886	11,036	1.4%	-5.7%	-11.9%
Eastern Washington University	12,635	12,326	12,351	10,892	10,914	0.2%	-11.6%	-13.6%
The Evergreen State College	3,327	2,854	2,281	2,116	2,113	-0.1%	-7.4%	-36.5%
Washington State University, Pullman	24,463	24,583	24,302	23,549	21,947	-6.8%	-9.7%	-10.3%
Western Washington University	16,121	16,142	15,197	15,125	14,747	-2.5%	-3.0%	-8.5%
UW, Seattle	47,673	47,829	48,450	48,450	49,440	2.0%	2.0%	3.7%
UW, Bothell	6,006	5,963	6,387	6,072	5,791	-4.6%	-9.3%	-3.6%
UW, Tacoma	5,354	5,355	5,399	5,064	4,823	-4.8%	-10.7%	-9.9%

source: OFM data request 04/2023

*Figure 3. New First-Year Enrollments at Select Washington Public Universities (2018-2022)*

<b>New First-Year (All funds)</b>						<b>1-Year</b>	<b>2-Year</b>	<b>5-Year</b>
	<b>Fall 2018</b>	<b>Fall 2019</b>	<b>Fall 2020</b>	<b>Fall 2021</b>	<b>fall 2022</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>Change</b>
Central Washington University	1,899	1,971	1,517	1,393	1,414	1.5%	-6.8%	-25.5%
Eastern Washington University	1,379	1,377	1,129	927	1,021	10.1%	-9.6%	-26.0%
The Evergreen State College	309	260	228	234	279	19.2%	22.4%	-9.7%
Washington State University, Pullman	4,431	4,110	3,438	3,305	3,338	1.0%	-2.9%	-24.7%
Western Washington University	3,147	3,117	2,494	2,874	3,223	12.1%	29.2%	2.4%
UW, Seattle	7,147	6,993	7,025	7,240	7,411	2.4%	5.5%	3.7%
UW, Bothell	781	829	982	896	977	9.0%	-0.5%	25.1%
UW, Tacoma	653	655	619	627	623	-0.6%	0.6%	-4.6%

source: OFM data request 04/2023

## **Operational and Budgetary Impacts**

Despite the fact that Western's enrollment has recovered faster than our peers, we nonetheless experienced a drop in revenue, primarily due to a decrease in enrollment, as discussed above. However, our self-sustaining operations (most notably housing and dining) also experienced significant losses of revenue as a result of the pandemic, estimated at more than \$30 million for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 due to decreased occupancy and utilization. Though refinancing of bonds and the funding provided by the federal government through the CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act of 2020 and the American Rescue Plan of 2021 have helped us

cushion the impact of the revenue declines in 2020 and 2021, we've nonetheless needed to adapt our budget model to avoid creating long-term budget deficits for the university.

Working through the projected budget shortfall requires two complementary strategies: shorter-term actions to decrease base expenditures, and a longer-term set of strategies to increase enrollments and create new revenue streams. For the 2023-24 academic year (FY24,) we have implemented a 3% reduction for all divisions and units; we also instituted several cost savings measures that helped us reduce immediate expenditures, including controlling travel, purchasing, and hiring. We continue our commitment to the retention of our valued faculty and staff by funding compensation increases as provided by the state budget and honoring our collective bargaining agreements.



## Response to Outstanding Mid-Cycle Recommendation (EIE)

**Recommendation 6: Consistent with its mission, the institution creates and maintains physical facilities and technology infrastructure that are accessible, safe, secure, and sufficient in quantity and quality to ensure healthful learning and working environments that support and sustain the institution’s mission, academic programs, and services. (2.I.1, 2020 Standards)**

The previous NWCCU reaffirmation of accreditation in 2017 recommended that Western should update its Campus Master Plan. The [Spring 2020 Mid-Cycle Review](#) and [Spring 2022 Ad Hoc Report](#) Review determined that this recommendation would be continued as “needs improvement,” to be evaluated as part of the Year 7 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness in Spring 2024. Since then, Western has renewed its focus on master planning. Upon completion of the university’s 2017 [Sustainability Action Plan](#) and [2018-2025 Strategic Plan](#), the university began to prioritize updating capital development plans. Initially, the process began by assessing the quantity of additional space required to adequately support existing services into the future and the additional space required to advance the institution’s aspirations and priorities set forth in the Strategic Plan. The working group completed much of its planned analysis and presented reports to the campus community, the University Planning and Resources Committee (UPRC), and the administration. However, when the pandemic hit in late winter 2020, the completion of final reports was suspended. In Summer 2021, the university renewed these efforts, creating a standing committee, the Capital Planning and Space Advisory Committee, with the following charges:

- Develop campus-wide space policies, standards, and guidelines
- Identify operational and future growth space gaps
- Develop and maintain a rolling Ten-Year Capital Plan (including all projects and all funding sources)
- Integrate capital budget planning with operating budget planning
- Begin preparations for the development of a new Comprehensive Master Plan

The Capital Planning and Space Advisory Committee has been working for approximately two years and is composed of faculty, staff, students, and administration representing all facets of the institution. The space policies are in place, and the integrated Ten-Year Capital Plan is completed.

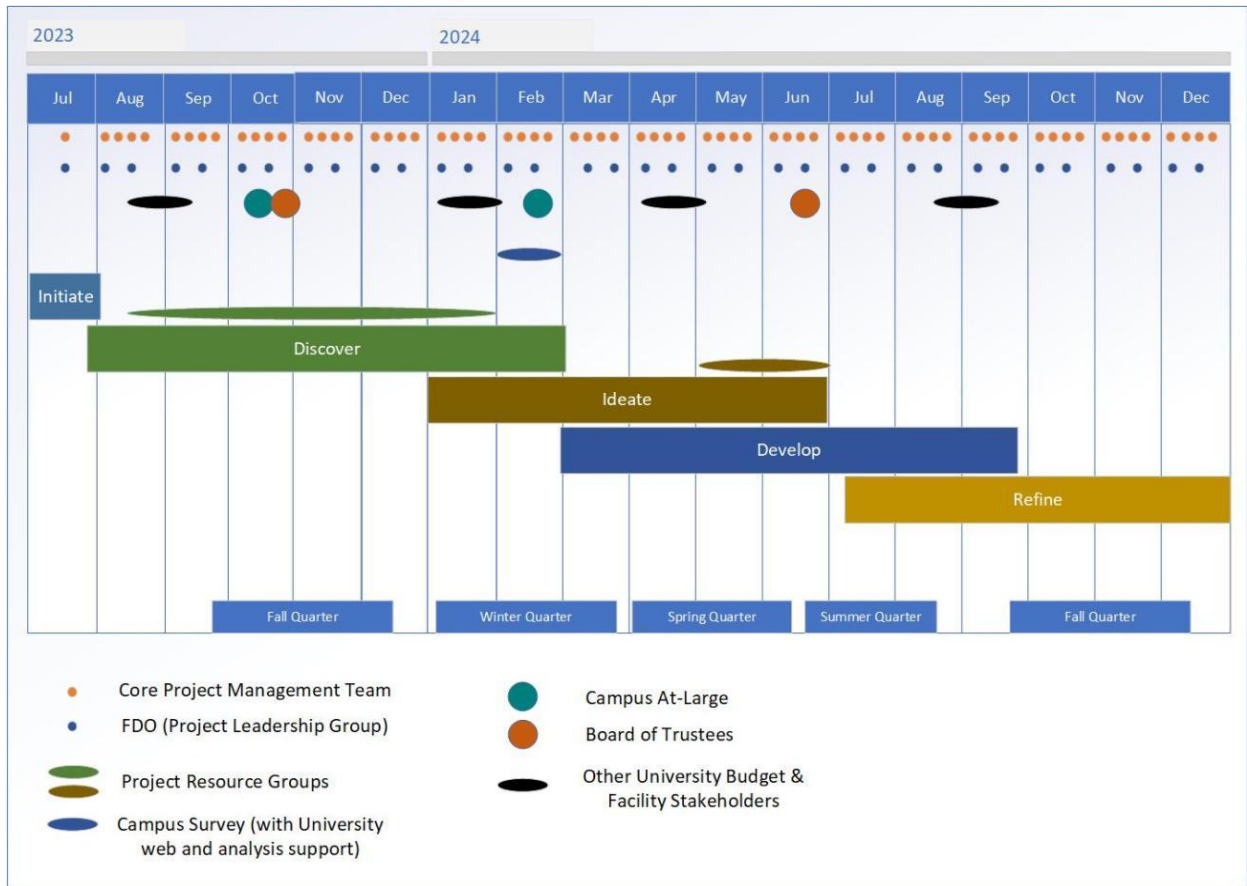
As a result of this work, a process for the development of a [Capital Development & Strategic Vision Plan](#) (“CDSV Plan”) was initiated. This plan will establish a campus vision for the next 10-15 years and guide ongoing decision making around capital planning and development, campus open space, and infrastructure in a manner that aligns with the values, goals, and strategic vision of Western Washington University.

The completed CDSV Plan will guide how we improve and modernize our physical spaces on campus and will serve as a basis for updating the Institutional Master Plan, done in partnership with the City of Bellingham and other community groups. The current 10-year Capital Plan anticipates that much of the development will be focused on renovation and modernization.

The CDSV Plan will assess programmatic space and facility needs across campus, study existing facilities for their suitability to meet these needs and aim to establish a sequence for the next several biennia of projects, including strategies for developing swing space to allow for the likely relocation, whether temporary or permanent, of programs currently housed in each of those buildings. The CDSV Plan will also consider needs related to ADEI, health and well-being, and student, faculty, and staff collaboration and make recommendations for how to address these needs in future projects of all scales and funding sources. Finally, the CDSV Plan will also consider goals related to sustainability, climate impact, and resilience and look at opportunities for partnership and development beyond the main campus, including at satellite locations.

The CDSV process is being led by a team of consultants from NAC Architecture and Walker Macy Landscape Architects (chosen through a thorough RFQ process), in coordination with Western's project team, and will include extensive stakeholder engagement, thorough needs analysis, and coordinated development of the final plan report. The CDSV process was initiated in August 2023, and the plan development timeline is shown below [see Figure 4]. Extensive input from members of the campus community is being gathered and a thorough analysis of campus needs will be done during the planning phase. The process will be guided by Western's core values and Strategic Plan. Once adopted in the summer of 2024, the CDSV Plan will be the basis for any modifications to the associated City of Bellingham zoning documents.

Figure 4. Capital Development & Strategic Vision Plan Development Timeline (2023-2024)



## Institutional Mission (1.A)

### 1.A.1 The institution's mission statement defines its broad educational purposes and its commitment to student learning and achievement.

#### WWU Mission Statement

“Western Washington University is a public comprehensive institution dedicated to serving the people of the state of Washington. Together our students, staff, and faculty are committed to making a positive impact in the state and the world with a shared focus on academic excellence and inclusive achievement.”

As a community, we uphold certain basic values. These include:

- Commitment to student success, critical thought, creativity, and sustainability
- Commitment to equity and justice, and respect for the rights and dignity of others
- Pursuit of excellence, in an environment characterized by principles of shared governance, academic freedom, and effective engagement
- Integrity, responsibility, and accountability in all our work

The WWU mission statement was reviewed and revised as part of the development of a new [Strategic Plan](#) in 2017-2018. This was a comprehensive process involving [extensive consultation](#) with all constituencies; the revision and update of the mission statement and values was an essential component of the plan development. The mission statement was [approved](#) by the WWU Board of Trustees as part of the new Strategic Plan in April 2018.

## Improving Institutional Effectiveness (1.B)

**1.B.1 The institution demonstrates a continuous process to assess institutional effectiveness, including student learning and achievement and support services. The institution uses an ongoing and systematic evaluation and planning process to inform and refine its effectiveness, assign resources, and improve student learning and achievement.**

### Student Achievement Measures

Western's 2018-2025 Strategic Plan centers student achievement through our core theme of "Advancing Inclusive Success." We recognize that our most important challenge is to increase retention and persistence rates and number of graduates, while eliminating achievement gaps for students from diverse and under-represented socio-economic backgrounds. To this end, we have used the following key metrics to track our success in advancing our mission relative to this theme:

- Increase our **overall retention rate** – including the rates for Pell grant-eligible students and students of color – to 87-90%
- Increase our **six-year graduation rate** – including the rates for Pell grant-eligible students and students of color – to 75-90%
- Increase our **four-year transfer graduation rate** – including the rates for Pell grant-eligible students and students of color – to 75-80%

It's worth noting that these are ambitious and aspirational goals, which reflect our commitment to continually increasing student achievement. While we observed some initial gains in these measures during the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 academic years, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and its disruptions to all educational sectors have resulted in significant setbacks in achieving our goal rates [see Figures 5-8 below].



Figure 5. First-Year Student Retention and Graduation Rates (Fall 2023)

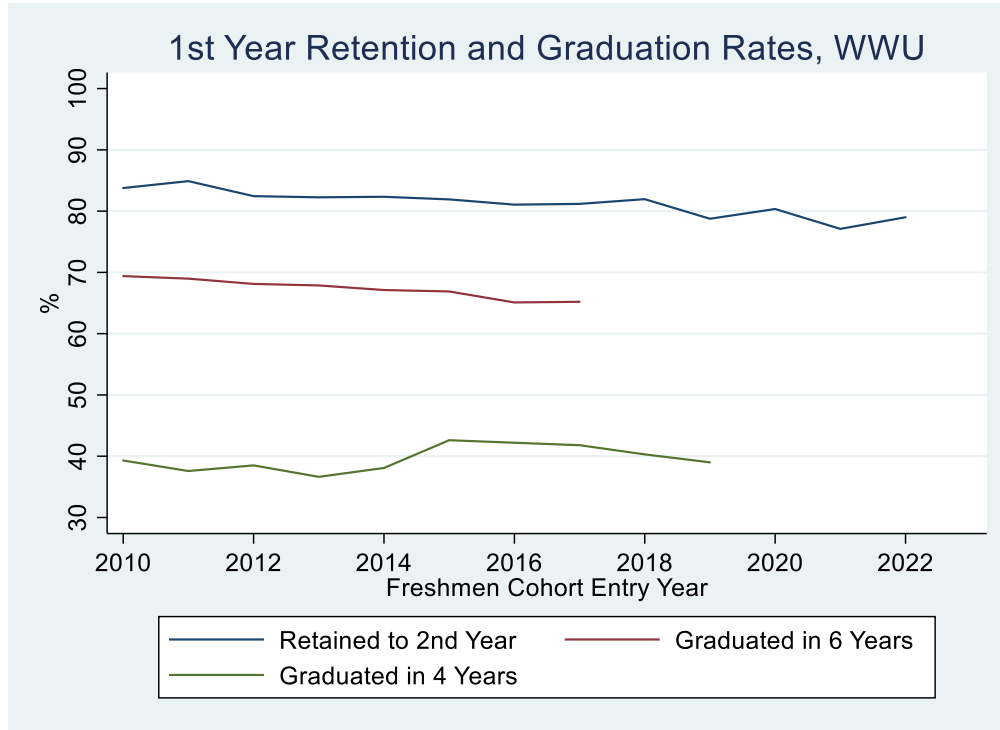


Figure 6. First-Year Student Retention by Subgroups (Fall 2023)

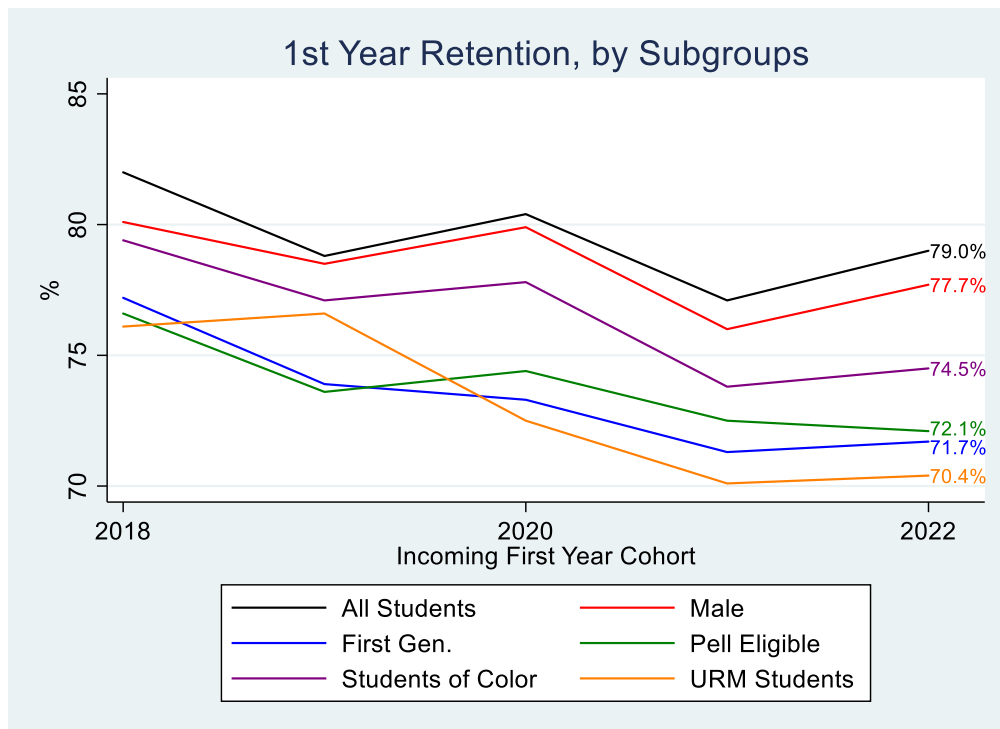


Figure 7. Transfer Student Retention and Graduation Rates (Fall 2023)

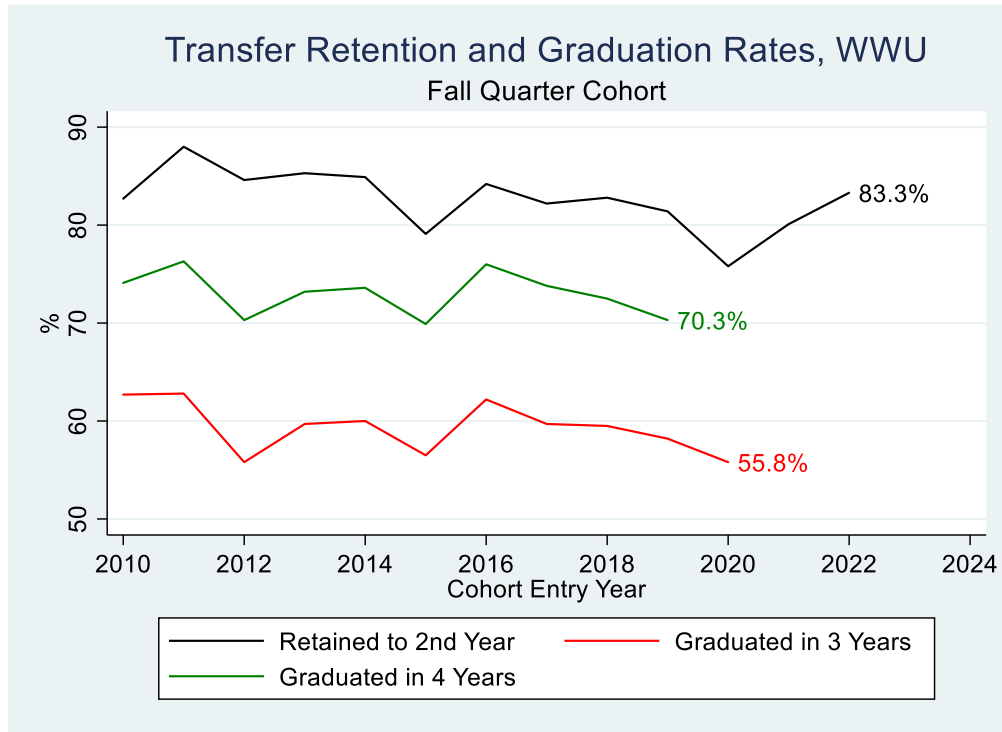
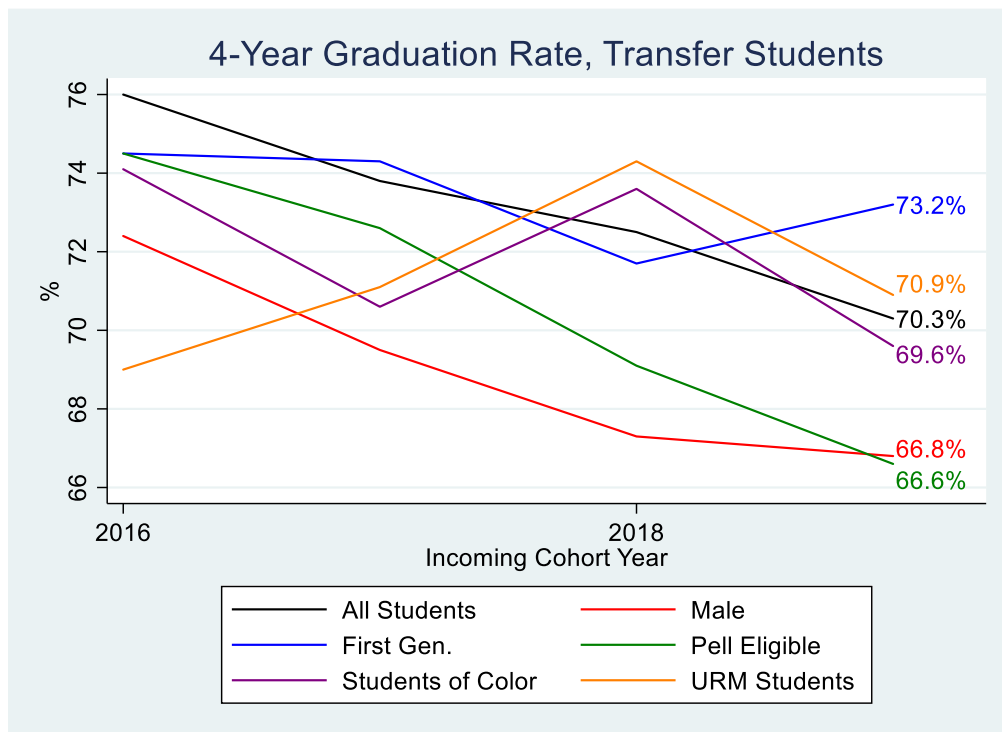


Figure 8. Transfer Student Graduation Rates by Subgroups (Fall 2023)



Nevertheless, we have remained committed to these goals and are beginning to see improvements – particularly in retention rates for the Fall 2022 first-year cohort. We will continue to assess these key metrics annually as we implement new programs and services to support student achievement, improve outcomes, and close equity gaps. Additionally, to highlight our commitment to transparency and accountability, we will continue to track and report on these metrics annually, both through our [Overall Metrics Dashboard](#) and in our [President’s Report](#).

For the purpose of more comprehensively assessing the component parts which contribute to our Core Themes, our Strategic Goals are more numerous and include Core Theme objectives as well as additional objectives, or “Sub Goals,” to each goal:

**Goal 1.** Western will provide a transformational education grounded in the liberal arts and sciences and based on innovative scholarship, research, and creative activity.

Indicators:

- Percentage of students engaging in High Impact Practices (HIPs) and types of HIPs engaged in
- Level and “Mental Activities” emphasized in student course work
- Satisfaction with usefulness and challenge level of our General Education coursework
- Internship Participation
- Graduation rates, disaggregated by first-gen status, academic preparation, gender, Pell-eligible status, and race
- Graduation rates for students of color
- Number of departments offering Gen Ed courses, and rates of seats filled
- Second-Year Retention disaggregated by Pell-eligible status and underrepresented race

**Goal 2.** Western will advance a deeper understanding of and engagement with place

Indicators:

- Number of students originating outside the United States
- Number of students who participated in an internship while at Western

**Goal 3.** Western will foster a caring and supportive environment where all members are respected and treated fairly

Indicators:

- Percentage of students attending Western who have a disability
- Student’s satisfaction levels with the quality of relationships with other students, faculty, and staff/administrators
- Percentage of Western students dealing with food insecurity
- Graduation rates for fall-entering students (freshmen and transfers), disaggregated by students of color and Pell-eligible status

- Graduation rates for students of color
- Graduation rates for freshmen and transfers disaggregated by first-generation, high school GPA, and gender
- Second-Year Retention disaggregated by Pell-eligible status and underrepresented race

**Goal 4.** Western will pursue justice and equity in its policies, practices, and impacts

Indicators:

- Linguistic diversity as measured by the percentage of students who speak a language other than English, or a language other than English is spoken by their family at home
- Tuition and fees tracking
- Student's satisfaction levels with the quality of relationships with other students, faculty, staff, and administrators
- Graduation rates for fall-entering students (freshmen and transfers), disaggregated by students of color and Pell-eligible status
- Graduation rates for students of color
- Graduation rates for freshmen and transfers disaggregated by first-generation, HSGPA, and gender
- Second-Year Retention disaggregated by Pell-eligible status and underrepresented race

Many of these indicators are reported publicly by WWU on the [University FactBook](#), which is maintained by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, including data on [incoming students](#), [overall enrollments](#), and [retention and graduation](#). These reports allow users to disaggregate results by different student characteristics, including gender, race/ethnicity, first-generation status, and Pell-eligible status.

Recognizing the shaping force of the diversity of students we enroll, the influence of college costs, and the impact of social and institutional features upon student achievement measures, in addition to the metrics listed above we also track the following strategic goal indicators:

- Quality of Student Relationships with People at Western, including:
  - Relationships with other students
  - Relationships with faculty members
  - Relationships with administrative personnel and offices
- Tuition and Fees (current and trending over time)
- Languages spoken by incoming students
- Number of students with documented disabilities
- Enrollment and Demographics of International Students
- Percentage of Students Reporting Food Insecurities

We gather most of this data via the [Western Educational Longitudinal Study \(WELS\) surveys](#), also administered by our Office of Institutional Effectiveness. This allows us to fine tune questions and to track, publish, and reflect on more recent data than would be possible were we to rely on IPEDS or the NSSE. Our WELS surveys have a high response rate and are more “actionable” in that they provide more recent data and allow us to add new questions as needs arise. While our WELS surveys provide more current data than can be provided by national surveys, we do use nationally benchmarked data for benchmarking and peer comparisons. In fact, many of our WELS questions track items used in national surveys or are informed by national comparisons. Results from each administration of our WELS surveys can be found on our [Western Educational Longitudinal Study](#) website.

### **Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes**

All degree-granting programs and departments at Western complete annual Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) assessment and improvement reports, assessing their students against their program outcomes as described in their Master Assessment Plans (MAPS), and documenting program improvements informed by these assessments. Western Washington University’s [Assessment Plan](#) defines a set of developmental steps leading to a continuous institutional system for assessing student performance. The developmental steps include:

1. Departmental and program-level mission statements derived from the University Mission and Strategic Action Plan
2. The establishment of departmental and program-level student learning outcomes
3. Opportunities to learn (curriculum) aligned with the student learning outcomes
4. Measurement of student performance relative to student learning outcomes.
5. The collection, analysis and sharing of data derived from these assessments.
6. The systematic use of this data to improve programs and operations.

At Western, assessment is continuous in that it is structured as an iterative feedback process of ongoing program improvement. The assessment learning cycle steps include:

1. Define intended learning objectives
2. Measure selected learning outcomes
3. Compare outcomes with intended
4. Redesign program to improve learning

In order that faculty have ownership of assessment efforts, Western’s assessment structure is decentralized: faculty-driven department and program assessment plans form the foundation of our assessment efforts. Departmental assessment plans, assessment of student learning outcomes and reports on continuous improvement



efforts can be found at [2018-2023 Assessment Reports](#). Despite the decentralized nature of academic program assessment, centralized support is provided to faculty in assessing student learning through our robust [Teaching Handbook](#) resource and in the guides entitled “Tools & Techniques for Program Improvement” and “[Tools & Techniques for Course Improvement](#),” as well as a host of [other resources](#) made available by the Associate VP for Academic Affairs. In addition, Western Libraries provides resources for faculty specific to evaluating literature reviews and student writing, including rubrics for consistent assessment based on AAC&U Standards, which can be found in the [Writing Instruction Support Library Guide](#).

## **Measures of Academic Quality**

In alignment with Core Theme 3, “Enhancing Academic Excellence,” we regularly reflect on a variety of student achievement measures pertaining to the quality of our undergraduate degrees and programs. At the university level we track all the indicators previously described above, but in addition to these we also track the success of our students who seek to earn graduate degrees. We track this achievement measure through multiple approaches:

- Our WELS Undergraduate Exit Survey asks students who have indicated they plan to attend graduate school whether they have accepted one or more offers of admission. [See [WELS Undergraduate Exit Survey](#)]
- We track students attending any college after Western through the National Student Clearinghouse which covers nearly all graduate programs that are federally funded. [See [Graduate Outcomes Report](#)]
- Periodically, we access data in the NSF-sponsored Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED) to track and reflect on the number of our students to go on to earn a research Ph.D. We consider this data an important indicator of academic quality on the logic that only very well-prepared undergraduates can be admitted to and graduate from Ph.D. programs. We are very pleased that the number of Western students who have gone on to earn a research Ph.D. has been steadily improving and that, in the most recent SED data set, Western ranked 7th among approximately 600 Master’s granting U.S. institutions on this measure. [See [SED](#)]

## **Non-Academic Assessment**

### **Business and Financial Affairs**

In addition to evaluating our academic programs, Western also conducts regular assessment of our financial and operational functions, and is currently in the process of using [CampusWorks](#) to thoroughly review all financial and operational departments – including Human Resources; Strategy, Management, and Budget; University Police and Public Records; Risk, Ethics, Safety, & Resilience; Facilities Development and Operations; Transportation Services; and Finance and Business Services. This process

is designed to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of our procedures, use of technology, and organization. We hope to identify ways to alleviate stress related to staff workloads and to find ways to take advantage of underutilized technology to automate and simplify some of our processes. This process is expected to conclude by the end of Spring 2024.

The CampusWorks program review process has been initiated in preparation for updating the strategic plan for Business and Financial Affairs (BFA) during the coming 2024-2025 academic year. The current [BFA Strategic Plan](#) was approved in 2019 following an exhaustive planning process which included assessing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for every functional area in the division. This plan has emphasized the support of key [strategic priorities](#) across BFA, and has guided the work of the division since that time. In addition to building on the CampusWorks review findings, it is expected that the 2025 update to the BFA strategic plan will incorporate key performance indicators (KPIs) for each department, in order to increase transparency and accountability and to support the overall metrics of the university.

## **Enrollment and Student Services**

Western also engages in robust evaluation of our co-curricular programs and support services. In our Enrollment and Student Services (ESS) division, assessment is a critical component of the [strategic planning cycle](#), which was implemented in 2020 to align planning across organizational levels to support university goals and metrics, to identify goals with corresponding assessment measures at each organizational level, and to link resource allocations to reporting and assessment processes. In this model, the University Mission and Strategic Plan Goals “feed down” to inform the division mission and goals [see [ESS Division Strategic Plan](#)], and in turn the mission and goals of each unit and department in the division.

A dedicated Planning and Assessment Consultant provides support for strategic planning and assessment processes across the division. Each department and unit is charged with developing and maintaining clearly articulated goals with defined strategies and specific continuous assessment measures and targets, as well as to report on assessment results on an annual basis. These continuous assessment results “feed up” from the department and unit levels to be reported in aggregate at the division level, and to inform assessment of progress in achieving University Strategic Metrics. Overall outcomes for division assessment measures are reported in our [ESS Annual Report](#), published online for accountability and transparency.

Additionally, each ESS department is encouraged to conduct a comprehensive program evaluation each assessment cycle (every 3-5 years), according to program standards from [CAS](#) (and/or specific accrediting agencies). By this process, the program, services, operations, and policy of each department are assessed relative to established best practices specific to each functional area, resulting in a self-

assessment report with clearly identified action steps for making any needed improvements. Continuous improvement is an expectation across the ESS division, and assessment results are used to inform program improvements and resource allocations. Indeed, results from continuous assessment processes and action items from program evaluations are used to identify strategic priorities at the department, unit, and division levels; these strategic priorities are then used as a basis for allocating any new resourcing within the division, as well as to support requests for new institutional funds through the strategic budgeting process. More information about the planning, assessment, reporting, and resourcing process in ESS can be found on the [ESS Strategic Planning website](#).

## **Western Libraries**

Historically, [Western Libraries](#) engages in several methods of assessing and evaluating its spaces, services, and collections. The primary method is a three-year assessment cycle for facilities and patron services. Year One utilizes a strategically selected national instrument (examples have included LibQUAL+ and ITHAKA Local surveys) in order to make peer comparisons. Year Two is the Western Libraries Facilities Use Survey that assesses space utilization and service point use. Year Three is the Western Libraries Resource Use and Needs Survey that solicits responses from undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty/staff about their scholarly resource needs and how they use the collections. The pandemic disrupted this assessment cycle and has led to nearly four years without centralized assessment. However, the Libraries plans to restart the Facilities Use Survey during Winter 2024 and then re-evaluate the overall assessment cycle during the next Libraries strategic planning process beginning in Summer 2024.

In addition to the centralized three-year assessment cycle, the Libraries also has other assessment and evaluation methods including an annual subscription review that solicits input and feedback from across the university related to collections. There are Library-focused questions in the WELS Undergraduate Exit survey that include feedback on the usefulness of services including the Tutoring Center, Hacherl Research & Writing Studio, Heritage Resources (now renamed Archives & Special Collections), Course Reserves, etc. The Libraries, specifically the Teaching & Learning Division, has spent the past two years working with ESS to launch Navigate as a tool to better track and assess how students are using library services, as well as implementing an “Early Response” pilot to proactively direct students to particular library services.

Some recent examples of new or modified services or spaces based on feedback and data the Libraries has received through our assessment practices include creating the Bayview Study Lounge space; opening the Kitto Graduate Student Hub; piloting Embedded Writing Support in partnership with the English 101 program; making the Tutoring Center (TC) officially part of the Libraries organization; reshaping staff roles and service delivery to integrate welcome functions, study skills support, and subject

tutoring within the TC; proactively scheduling study groups for all TC supported courses with over 100 enrolled students; and developing a Find A Space tool.

### **Closing the Loop**

Western's assessment and monitoring processes, working within the framework of the 2018-2025 Strategic Plan, provide a great deal of information to support divisional leaders, along with the President and the Board of Trustees, as they regularly evaluate progress toward mission fulfillment (note, for example, the discussion on this topic in an extended session of the [Board of Trustees meeting](#) on December 7, 2023) at which an [analysis of mission fulfillment](#) was presented. The decisions of the Board and the President's Cabinet are then used to inform the [Strategic Budgeting Process](#) through which internal reallocations of funds are made and priorities set for legislative budget requests and fundraising priorities [see 1.B.3 below for more information about the Strategic Budgeting Process]. Likewise, data-driven decisions of the Board and the President's Cabinet are also used to inform the Strategic Enrollment Management process, which will set multi-year and long-term enrollment goals for the university [see 1.B.4 below for more information about the Strategic Enrollment Management process].

## **1.B.2 The institution sets and articulates meaningful goals, objectives, and indicators of its goals to define mission fulfillment and to improve its effectiveness in the context of and in comparison with regional and national peer institutions.**

### **Assessment of Mission Fulfillment**

At Western we define mission fulfillment as *making substantial progress in advancing the three core themes and, in particular, our commitment to increase retention and graduation rates, eliminate achievement gaps, increase overall the number of degrees awarded annually, and to increase our impact through increasing access to our programs and advancing inclusive achievement of our faculty, staff, and students.*

In order to assess mission fulfillment at-a-glance we maintain a simple, one-page, public-facing dashboard so that assessment of our progress toward mission and core-theme fulfillment can be easily and continuously communicated and tracked [see [Overall Metrics Dashboard](#)]. In addition, progress relative to mission fulfillment is summarized in the annual President's Report to the University community and Board of Trustees [see [President's Report](#)]. The report is discussed each year by the BOT at their summer meeting and is widely distributed in electronic and print formats. In this way we ensure that the broader university community, as well as the Board of Trustees, is involved in our process of assessing mission fulfillment and, more importantly, in making resource and strategic decisions informed by our mission and core theme fulfillment data.

Mission fulfillment, of course, is more than capturing progress on quantitative metrics. Creating and sustaining institutional climate and culture is just as important in attracting and retaining a diverse community of students, faculty, and staff, as well as ensuring that they are successful while at Western and beyond. To this end, Western has started and/or expanded a number of programs and initiatives. These include the Provost's Diversity and Hiring Initiative to hire, retain and advance faculty to cultivate a more diverse campus; the construction of the Multicultural Student Center, a state-of-the-art facility to house multicultural programs which was completed in 2021; and expanded staff to support students of various identities, including a new Director of Multicultural Student Services (hired in 2021), a new Assistant Director of Multicultural Student Services (hired in 2023), a Coordinator of the Black Student Coalition (hired in 2022), and an Ethnic Student Center Program Manager (hired in 2023). Additionally, the staff of our Counseling and Wellness Center has been expanded in recent years to include a Black Student Support Specialist, an LGBTQ+ Student Support Specialist, and a Native American and Indigenous Student Support Specialist. Western also hired its inaugural Executive Director of American Indian/Alaska Native and First Nations Relations and Tribal Liaison to the President in 2019 and a Coast Salish Longhouse building is in the early phases of construction and



will provide a dedicated space to support culture and identity for American Indian/Alaska Native students on campus.

In addition to expanded infrastructure and staff to support diverse students, there are many student-related ADEI initiatives underway, many of which are reflected on our institutional Access, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion webpage [see [ADEI](#)] as well as on the Enrollment and Student Services Access, Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion webpage [see [ESS ADEI](#)]. Transformative cultural changes need to be inclusive, persistent, and long-term, and Western is committed to creating an exemplary institutional culture and climate foundational to advancing our mission and core themes.

## **Core Themes**

Informed by the previous accreditation standards, our strategic planning documents describe our core themes as “overarching constructs essential for advancing the institutional mission.” While the Core Themes identify distinct areas centrally related to mission fulfillment, they also prioritize objectives and indicators identified by the Strategic Planning Committee as key to all the themes – such as improvement in our rates of retention and graduation. However, for the sake of simplicity, we only list shared metrics once, under Core Theme 1.

Advancing Inclusive Excellence, Increasing Washington Impact, and Enhancing Academic Excellence represent those overarching constructs. We believe that progress on advancing institutional mission and vision requires making significant and continuous progress on these ideals, which reflect the goals of the strategic plan. Following this framing, we established a definition and rationale, an overarching goal, and measurable objectives for each core theme.

### **Core Theme 1: Advancing Inclusive Success**

Education is the most powerful social equalizer, a true engine for upward mobility. While postsecondary institutions become increasingly diverse, the degree attainment gap persists for low-income students and students of color. We recognize that our most important challenge is to advance inclusive success, that is, increase retention and persistence rates and the number of graduates, while eliminating achievement gaps for students from diverse and under-represented socio-economic backgrounds. We have a great platform to advance access and completion at Western, starting with a six year graduation rate of 70 percent, one of the best in the region.

**Advancing Inclusive Success Goal:** Increase retention and persistence rates and the number of graduates, while eliminating achievement gaps for students from diverse and under-represented socio-economic backgrounds.

**Objectives:**

- Increase first-to-second year retention overall, and for students of color, and PELL- grant eligible students.
- Increase six-year graduation rates overall, and for students of color, and PELL-grant eligible students.
- Increase transfer 4-year graduation rates overall, and for students of color, and PELL-grant eligible students.

**Core Theme 2: Increasing Washington Impact**

In the next decade, two-thirds of the jobs in Washington will require some form of post- secondary education. We recognize that to contribute to the future workforce needs in Washington and the region we need to expand access to our programs, increase persistence and graduation rates, and partner with other education providers to offer programs and credentials to place-bound and non-traditional students. At the same time, we must prepare our students to be successful in a continuously changing work and social environment, where technology and automation are driving employment trends and changing the nature of work and relationships.

**Increasing Washington Impact Goal:** Expand access to our programs, increase persistence and graduation rates, and partner with other education providers to offer programs and credentials to place-bound and non-traditional students.

**Objectives:**

- Increase degrees awarded overall, and for graduate students and state “high needs areas.”
- Increase enrollment for students of color, off-campus students, and for students enrolled in Outreach and Continuing Education (OCE) programs.

**Core Theme 3: Enhancing Academic Excellence**

Western provides a transformational education grounded in the liberal arts and sciences and based on innovative scholarship, research, and creative activity to foster the development of engaged members of a global community. Making progress on critical issues – from environmental sustainability and climate change to human health, economic vitality, and cultural diversity – requires investing in, and nurturing, a faculty culture that integrates knowledge and exploration in our undergraduate and graduate programs. We will continue to enhance the high quality of our undergraduate and graduate programs in the liberal arts and professional programs, while simultaneously extending our reach to become a greater catalyst for regional economic and social development. We strive to expand and deepen our work to build a diverse, inclusive, and equitable community and culture in terms of access and success, curriculum, learning, shared experiences, embedded values and beliefs, and engagement opportunities to create enduring change.

**Enhancing Academic Excellence Goal:** Enhance the high quality of our undergraduate and graduate programs in the liberal arts and professional programs, while simultaneously extending our reach to become a greater catalyst for regional economic and social development.

**Objectives:**

- Increase tenure/tenure-track faculty overall, and for faculty of color.
- Increase annual research revenue for Research & Sponsored Programs (external), and university supported research and creative activities (internal).

As previously noted, our performance relative to each of these objectives is displayed on the [Overall Metrics](#) dashboard. In addition, we internally track, publish, and reflect on rates of enrollment, retention, and graduation for our students via our student performance dashboard [see [FactBook](#)]. This data is updated quarterly and allows us to disaggregate rates of retention by more than a dozen variables, including first-generation status, gender, full or part-time status, high school GPA, Pell eligibility, and race and ethnicity.

### **Comparative and Benchmarked Data**

Western has used several sets of peer institutions over the last two decades; these are regularly reviewed and updated as necessary to support university planning processes. All have been developed for specific purposes and rely on the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). One of Western's comparison data sets was developed in 2004 by the Board of Trustees for use in benchmarking various areas [see [Peer Institutions](#)]. The criteria used to identify this national peer group included:

- Master's I Carnegie Classification
- Public funding
- National reputation for academic excellence (e.g., US News & World Report, Regional Tier 1 Public Institutions).
- Faculty excellence
- Institutional mission similar to Western
- Enrollment between 5,000 and 20,000
- Institutional diversity

Additionally, Western uses the state public baccalaureate institutions in Washington as a regional peer group.

A third set of peer institutions used for comparisons was Western's [Global Challenge State Peers](#). This list was compiled by the State in 2008 as part of a statewide effort to increase Washington institutions' performance relative to institutions in a few selected states (California, Connecticut, Maryland, New Jersey, and Virginia). These

two lists were used throughout the 2010s to benchmark Western against a wide variety of peer institutions to observe and make comparisons of general trends.

In order to be more strategic in using peer institution data to advance our mission and outcomes, in 2018 the University Strategic Planning Committee was charged with establishing “a new peer institution list that would help drive establishing stretch goals for the institution.” Following a process that included the examination of IPEDS data, the state context, university websites, and other rankings, the committee identified seven institutions that it deemed aspirational in one or more important dimensions, such as work in equity, inclusion, and diversity; internationalization; student retention and graduation; social mobility; and research productivity. This list was approved by the Board of Trustees in 2020, and all seven of the institutions on the Aspirational Peer List are also on the Peer Institution list, and all but one of the eligible institutions are on the Global Challenge State Peers list [see [Aspirational Peer List](#)] – and it is against these institutions that we have been measuring our success in recent years.

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) annually distributes a report prepared by the National Center for Education Statistics that compares Western’s performance on several important IPEDS data points with the institutions named on our Aspirational Peer List, as well as with the other universities in Washington [see [IPEDS Reports](#) for WWU data; comparison reports are internal documents excerpted below]. These reports allow Western to compare performance against strong peer institutions to inform our strategic planning and initiatives, and include the following performance measures:

- FT Freshman Retention Rate (%)
- 6yr Freshman Graduation Rate (%)
- Total Degrees Awarded
- Graduate Degrees Awarded
- Faculty Tenured/Tenure-track (Full-Time)
- Research Expenditure
- Degrees per 1,000 FTE Student
- Degrees per \$100K Tuition and State Support
- Degrees per \$100K State Support
- Graduate Degrees per Tenured/Tenure-Track Faculty
- Research Expenditure(\$) Per \$1K Tuition and State Support
- Core Expenditure per Degree (\$)
- % Research Expenditure
- % Instruction Expenditure
- Tuition & State support(\$) per FTES
- % of State Support
- Total FTE Student (FTES)
- Instruction Expenditure
- Core Expenditure

- Tuition and fees, after deducting discounts and allowances
- State Support
- Total Tuition and State Support

Several of these performance measures are emphasized for being tied directly to our Strategic Plan Core Themes [as described above]. For instance, the key measures for Advancing Inclusive Success are freshmen retention rates and six-year graduation rates, and the key measures for Increasing Washington Impact are total degrees awarded and graduate degrees earned. These measures are highlighted and analyzed for the list of Aspirational Peer institutions as well as for the other universities in Washington [see Figure 9 below]. More detailed review of this information is made possible through a [public-facing dashboard](#) that allows for comparisons of enrollment, first-year retention and 6-year graduation rates for undergraduate students. Using this dashboard, the graduation rates can be disaggregated by the key demographic categories of race and gender. For example, we see these data that the gap in six-year graduation rates for students of color at Western was as low as 2% in 2017, and as high as 7% in 2020; in 2023 it sat at 6%. We see this mirrors similar trends at other Washington public baccalaureate institutions. Other than the University of Washington Seattle and Bothell campuses, Western Washington University has the highest overall six-year graduation rates in the state, and this is also true for graduation rates among students of color. Western compares very favorably to Central and Eastern Washington University, the other regional public comprehensive universities, in terms of first-year student retention and graduation rates. Statistically, Western appears to have more in common with Washington State University, despite the Pullman campus being an R1 university that is significantly more selective than Western.

While these comparisons validate much of the work that has been done to create a supportive academic environment at Western, they also highlight the gap between the current, post-COVID reality and the objectives articulated in our 2018-2025 Strategic Plan, which called for achievement gaps to be closed by 2025 while also increasing retention and graduation rates overall. This analysis resulted in an array of student success initiatives described in more detail in our response to Standard 1.C.7 [below]. It was the major impetus for work done in the Strategic Budgeting Process conducted in 2022 that resulted in new state appropriations for programs designed to address the gap in achievement for students historically represented at Western. These focus on first-year writing, first-year math and the academic and social integration of new first-generation students coming to our university.

Figure 9. Selected Performance Measures Compared to Peer Institutions (2021)

Performance Measures - 2021		Inclusive Success		Washington Impact	
Institution Name	State	FT Freshman Retention Rate (%)	6yr Freshman Graduation Rate (%)	Total Degrees Awarded	Graduate Degrees Awarded
California Polytechnic State University-San Luis Obispo	CA	95%	85%	5,896	520
California State University-Chico	CA	81%	65%	4,436	312
Towson University	MD	85%	72%	5,639	1019
The College of New Jersey	NJ	92%	87%	2,096	377
Appalachian State University	NC	86%	73%	4,837	655
University of North Carolina Wilmington	NC	83%	72%	5,031	1167
James Madison University	VA	91%	82%	5,548	751
Western Washington University	WA	81%	68%	3,704	277
Central Washington University	WA	69%	54%	3,076	320
Eastern Washington University	WA	67%	50%	3,025	834
The Evergreen State College	WA	67%	43%	758	81
Washington State University	WA	81%	60%	7,724	1567
University of Washington-Seattle Campus	WA	93%	84%	13,844	5744
University of Washington-Bothell Campus	WA	88%	66%	2,063	211
University of Washington-Tacoma Campus	WA	75%	58%	1,994	434

Note: An additional set of peer institutions is used in determining parts of salary increases for faculty per the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). This list is compiled according to [Appendix E of the CBA](#), which specifies these as those public universities in the 2010 Carnegie Master's Large classification with 10,000 or more FTE students. This list changes every year based on enrollment and reporting variances. It is only used for the specific purpose identified in the CBA.

### **1.B.3 The institution provides evidence that its planning process is inclusive and offers opportunities for comment by appropriate constituencies, allocates necessary resources, and leads to improvement of institutional effectiveness.**

Under the leadership of a new President (Dr. Sabah Randhawa), Western initiated a comprehensive review of our mission and priorities in 2017, leading to the development of the 2018-2025 [Strategic Plan](#) that was [approved](#) by the Board of Trustees in April 2018.

The process of developing the plan was led by a 15-member [committee](#) comprised of faculty, staff, students, community representatives, and administrators. President Randhawa charged the committee with the development of a strategic plan consisting of three to five aspirational goals, a set of objectives related to each goal, and associated metrics. He also charged the committee with the development of a list of aspirational peer institutions.

[Communication](#) about the plan development was shared through all-campus email messages and through the publication “Western Today,” the primary source of news for members of the Western community.

The committee’s first task was to hear from people both inside and outside the University community. They conducted nearly 30 [focus group sessions and open forums](#) on and off campus. Second, two [surveys](#) were conducted, one of students, staff, and faculty, and one of alumni. From these surveys and focus groups, the committee identified emergent [themes](#) around which the goals articulated in the plan developed. Once specific objectives were established for the plan, it was circulated in draft form to the entire campus community for feedback, prior to final revisions and submission to the Board for [approval](#).

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated an unplanned pivot in most aspects of the university’s operations. It also led to new challenges in enrollment, student success, human resources, and budgeting that had not been anticipated during the development of the plan (see Institutional Update above for more details). Nonetheless, the Strategic Plan has continued to serve as a guide star for our medium- and long-term planning efforts. Nowhere is this more evident than in the development of the [Strategic Budgeting Process](#). The office of [Strategy, Management & Budget](#) was created in 2021 to provide integrated budget, financial planning, and analysis functions for the university. The office reports to the Vice President of Business and Financial Affairs and works closely with a wide variety of offices at Western to provide budget, financial planning, and analysis functions to the University. This includes the Strategic Budget Process through which Western issues a single, annual call for proposals focusing on priority areas informed by the institution's strategic goals. Proposals may be considered for internal investment or reinvestment at the division or institutional level, combined or synthesized into



larger decision package requests for state funding, or identified for future fund-raising efforts. All proposals are required to address how they advance the strategic plan, including identifying which metrics would be impacted and how success would be evaluated.

Western's Strategic Budget Process is built around communication and consultation with affected stakeholders. For example, the [development of the FY 24 budget](#) involved two community forums, a call for budget abstracts, a workshop for an extended group of university leaders to provide feedback on those abstracts and regular communication about the process of refining the proposals into a set for consideration by the state legislature and/or the WWU President's Cabinet for internal funding. The full university community is invited to provide written comments on budget proposals through the budget web forum. Strategic Budgeting is also supported by the [University Budget Committee](#), made up of representation from across the university including governance groups, which makes recommendations to the President and President's Cabinet on strategic budgeting processes and priorities.

An example of how the strategic planning process worked during the past four years can be found in how Western responded to challenges to the retention of first-generation students. The metrics of the Strategic Plan call for an overall increase in first-year student retention to 87-90% from a pre-pandemic average of about 82%. The student success objective also called for closure of the small achievement gaps that existed for underrepresented students. What emerged during and after the pandemic was a disturbing decrease in student retention that was significantly concentrated among underrepresented students, with first-generation students experiencing the greatest gap in how well Western was serving them. Surveys of non-returning students indicated that financial issues, mental health, and family situations were primary factors in their decisions not to return. On the academic side, we saw a surge in students coming out of the math placement test needing remediation before being ready for college level courses; in writing, we saw an unprecedented gap open up between first-generation and other students' grades in English 101. At the same time, our admission of first-generation students in Fall 2022 dropped to its lowest level in decades, even while our overall class of new students was the largest in Western's history.

While this crisis in student retention was not anticipated during the development of the Strategic Plan, it still provided the prioritized framework in which our response has been formulated. Our Enrollment and Student Services (ESS) Division has established a strong [strategic planning framework](#) that guides operations at the division, unit and department levels, and organized within its [Strategic Plan](#) (developed in 2020 and recently updated for 2024). ESS continues to build on its strong basis for the support of first-generation students – as noted in our 2021 [designation](#) as a First-gen Forward institution by NASPA – the leading organization for Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. In 2023, a significant

reorganization led to the creation of the Academic Advising & Student Achievement Center. With a modest investment of new institutional funds from the President's Cabinet and reorganization of existing advising units, the Center is taking steps toward an intrusive advising model for first-year, undeclared students while also working to enhance support for high-needs student populations such as those categorized as first-generation. Western's recognition of the roots of the retention challenges is also evident in our becoming a signatory in 2021 of the [Okanagan Charter](#). This established Western as one of the eight members of the [United States Health Promoting Campuses Network](#). By adopting the charter, we are making an institutional commitment to move toward more systems-level strategies that influence the health and wellbeing of every member of the Western community.

Through the Strategic Budget Process, we also developed proposals for restructuring of first-year mathematics and English courses and a new year-long seminar series designed to support academic skills and the sense of belonging of first-generation, low-income students. After being prioritized in the Strategic Budget Process, all three of these proposals received new base funding from the state legislature in June 2023 for implementation in fall 2024.

Other important recent examples of inclusive planning efforts initiated at Western that are at the core of our strategic efforts to improve as an institution include the development of a Strategic Enrollment Management framework and the development of a [Capital Development & Strategic Vision Plan](#) to guide facilities planning and operation.

**1.B.4 The institution monitors its internal and external environments to identify current and emerging patterns, trends, and expectations. Through its governance system it considers such findings to assess its strategic position, define its future direction, and review and revise, as necessary, its mission, planning, intended outcomes of its programs and services, and indicators of achievement of its goals.**

### **Operating Trends**

Western initiated a systematic assessment of our internal and external operating environments in 2017 with the strategic planning process that resulted in the 2018-2025 [Strategic Plan](#). As described in more detail in our narrative for Standard 1.B.3, this was a highly inclusive process involving faculty, students, staff, and community members. It also involved a formal consultation process with the Faculty Senate. The plan included a significant revision to the mission and vision statements for the university, and represented President Sabah Randhawa's aspirational vision of how the university could move from being very good in its class to excellent in terms of key metrics of inclusive student achievement. The document was [approved](#) by the Board of Trustees in April 2018.

The unanticipated events of the COVID-19 pandemic tested Western's ability to assess and respond to our external operating environment like nothing since World War II. As described in some detail in the institutional update, this event tested our institutional resilience in all dimensions of our operations. Some of the biggest challenges were faced in Housing and Dining. For our auxiliary enterprises, losing almost all income with little advance warning was an extreme situation [see more information in "Institutional Update" above]. In the area of health and wellness, Western was a leader in providing COVID-19 testing for students, staff and faculty, and a very large investment of effort and financial resources was put into providing quarantine and isolation housing for students. We moved quickly to adopt a vaccine requirement when they became available, and we returned to in-class instruction in a deliberate and careful manner that prioritized public health. This effort was supported by a set of ad-hoc working groups that worked across administrative units to plan and carry out this complex series of transitions and manage the communication process with the community.

### **Enrollment Trends**

One of the outcomes of the development of the 2018-2025 Strategic Plan was the recognition of the need for a more systemic and inclusive process for establishing long-term enrollment strategies and ensure that meaningful progress is made towards achieving those targets. The Division of Enrollment and Student Services brought relevant programs under an Enrollment Management unit and created the

position of Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management in 2019 to lead this effort. However, the work was interrupted by the COVID-pandemic and the last two years have focused on recovering from enrollment losses suffered during the pandemic. A confluence of several factors makes longer term enrollment planning critical for the strategic and financial health of the institution.

The need for a more intentional and multi-year enrollment plan is driven by several important considerations:

- A key driver of Western’s strategic plan is the [state’s 70% attainment goal](#) and the need to increase four-year degree access for qualified Washingtonians. This requires a plan for increasing enrollment on the main campus, WWU Peninsulas, and other operating sites, while ensuring the delivery of high-quality educational programs.
- Effective enrollment planning is needed to ensure that Western meets its goals related to enrollment mix (undergraduate/graduate, first-year/transfer, resident/nonresident, students of color, etc.) and generates sufficient resources to advance its strategic goals and priorities.
- Longer term enrollment projections are critical to more stable and predictable budget plans, as well as providing more effective tools for planning around academic capacity (faculty, support services, program size, course offerings, etc.) and physical infrastructure needs (classrooms, labs, etc.).
- Western needs to develop targeted goals for its outreach and continuing education programs, including defining the role Western will play in providing pathways for the spectrum of future students, including over 1 million Washingtonians who have attended post-secondary education but have not completed a degree program.

The Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Framework consists of the following key components:

- Enrollment Planning and Oversight Committee (“Steering Committee”)
- Undergraduate Recruitment and Onboarding—Main Campus
- Transfer Student Enrollment
- Honors College Enrollment
- International Student Enrollment
- WWU Peninsulas and Other Offsite Location Programs Enrollment
- Graduate Enrollment
- Non-degree and Continuing Education Programs Enrollment
- Retention and Completion

As the SEM framework suggests, the overall “enrollment” effort is quite broad and includes both enrollment and retention and touches almost all parts of our educational enterprise. Effective planning requires that appropriate individuals and groups are engaged in developing and implementing appropriate plans and

strategies. The Enrollment Planning and Oversight Committee represents a steering group that provides oversight to the SEM framework and convenes and coordinates the work of the various working groups tasked with specific elements of the enrollment and retention plan.

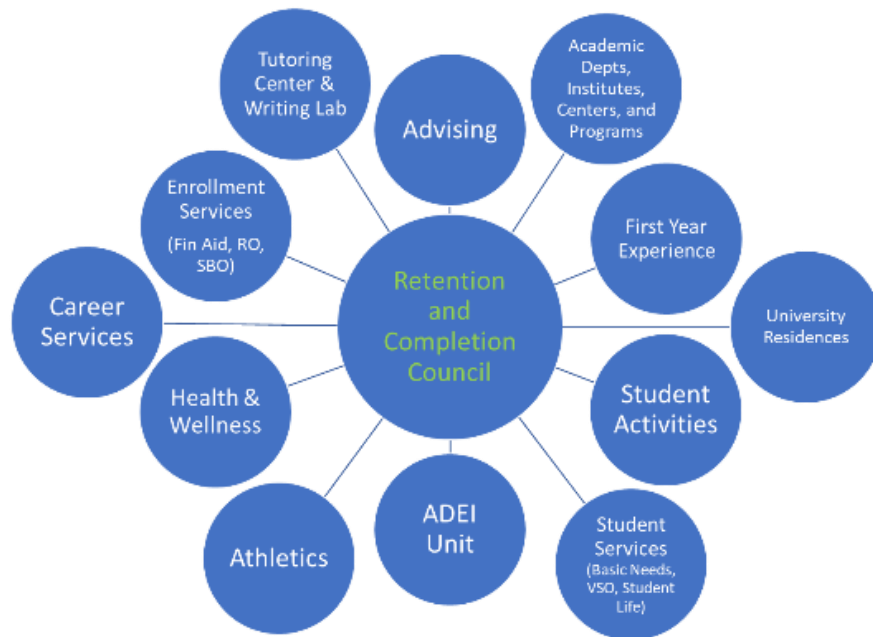
The emergent process for SEM initiated in winter quarter 2023 is based on a number of guiding principles:

- Establish goals that align with the 70% Attainment Goal for the State
- Stabilize enrollment
- Grow enrollment in targeted areas
- Improve retention
- Facilitate successful degree and credential completion
- Ensure that health and wellness underpin all enrollment planning
- Broaden access to underserved populations
- Identify new and emerging academic programming that meets student and workforce demands
- Equip students for successful career outcomes
- Employ actions and modify processes to minimize barriers that impair student success
- Develop a culture that focuses on the student experience in all of Western's work

Organization of SEM involves a network of working groups representing manifold constituencies and types of expertise at the institution. An illustration of this is the network summarized in the figure below [figure 10 on page 40], visually representing the working groups charged with supporting Western's focus on retention and completion for undergraduate students.

The development of the SEM process involved consultation with the Faculty Senate, the President's Cabinet, and the Board of Trustees. It will be the primary forum for enrollment planning for the foreseeable future and will be tightly coupled to the Strategic Budget Process. For example, SEM will determine the most promising interventions to support inclusive student success and will contain the primary expertise needed to model the likely enrollment outcomes for any scenario. This information will be the basis for the cost-benefit analysis that will be used to evaluate all proposed enrollment initiatives that would require an investment of additional resources. From our initial enrollment assessments have come our recent initiatives to expand our enrollments in our remote sites on the Kitsap and Olympic Peninsulas [also described in the Institutional Update], the reorganization of academic advising [described in PRFR response to Standard 2.G.6], and the new funding received for key first-year student retention initiatives and other new efforts directed at inclusive student excellence [described in Standard 1.C.7].

Figure 10. Retention and Completion Working Group Representation (2023)



### Partnerships and Continuous Process

Strategic partnerships are critical to understanding challenges and trends both regionally and nationally. Across all divisions at Western, leaders participate in various professional organizations and both formal and informal groups that provide coordination amongst institutions in the state, region, and nation. For example, Western plays a leadership role in the [Council of Presidents](#) for the state of Washington. We are part of the Inter-institutional Committee on Academic Program Planning for the state that filled part of the gap left by the dissolution of the Higher Education Coordinating Board in 2012. We are also an active voting member of the Joint Transfer Council that sets policies for transfer from community and technical colleges to baccalaureate institutions in Washington. Additionally, staff from the Enrollment and Student Services division have partnered extensively in recent years with representatives from the Washington Student Achievement Council, in both assessing and piloting programs to address the issue of unmet basic needs amongst college students across the state, which included collaboration with 38 other colleges and universities. Along with our active participation in seminars and meetings sponsored by NWCCU and the Department of Education, these professional networks are critical to our ability to monitor current and emerging trends in higher education.

Continuous evaluation and reporting processes are also critical to identifying and responding to challenges and trends. College reports provided to the Provost at the end of each academic year create opportunities for the Provost – in collaboration with each respective Dean – to conduct an analysis of strengths, weaknesses,

opportunities, and threats of each individual college, identifying areas of concern and new opportunities. Similarly, each institutional division completes a division-level assessment at the end of each year to see their progress on goals and strategies from the previous year, as well as to define plans for the following year. At the highest level, the accountability of institutional performance rests with the President and his Cabinet. A year-end Cabinet retreat each year provides an opportunity for senior leadership to review the external environment and drivers impacting the university, assess plans from the previous year – including important learnings from actions and strategies instituted in advancing our core themes – and develop plans for the following year. Those plans and priorities are then discussed by the President with the Board of Trustees, ultimately forming the basis for annual divisional action plans.



## Student Learning (1.C)

**1.C.1 The institution offers programs with appropriate content and rigor that are consistent with its mission, culminate in achievement of clearly identified student learning outcomes that lead to collegiate-level degrees, certificates, or credentials and include designators consistent with program content in recognized fields of study.**

Western Washington University has several policies related to the content and rigor of its programs that are aligned with its mission and vision to prepare and inspire “individuals to explore widely, think critically, communicate clearly, and connect ideas creatively to address our most challenging needs, problems, and questions.” Policies that guide the development of a transformational liberal arts and sciences academic curriculum [see [Strategic Plan goal #1](#)] are the purview of the faculty and is managed by the [Faculty Senate](#) and the [Faculty Senate Handbook](#). The [University Catalog](#) is the official publication of regulations, policies, programs, requirements, and course requirements for the specific academic year, which specifies entrance and graduation requirements. It is updated and published on the website: previous years’ catalogs are also available on this. The Faculty Senate’s standing committee, the [Academic Coordinating Commission](#), administers policies in its [ACC Handbook](#) that govern credit, modality, course titles, course repeatability, collegial communication, and requirements for approving new and revising existing academic majors, minors, certificates, and courses. Such processes ensure the relevance and applicability of academic program requirements, including its curriculum and [student learning outcomes](#), to existing disciplines. The program and course approval and revision processes are outlined below to highlight the rigorous peer review and oversight of program and discipline alignments.

Curriculum development begins at the department level guided by disciplinary expertise when faculty who teach and do research in the program propose additions and changes to the University Catalog in an online curriculum management system called [Curriculog](#). The system requires documentation of faculty peer review at the program/department level and directs proposals to the next level of review, which is typically the college-level curriculum committees. Proposals related to teaching program, general university requirements, and graduate programs also need to go specialized committees appointed with faculty who have the disciplinary expertise to ensure disciplinary viability, rigor, and appropriateness of the content. All proposals arrive at the Academic Coordinating Commission itself, which reviews each proposal for adherence to the [policies](#) approved by the Faculty Senate. Proposals must include clear disciplinary derived rationales, crafted by faculty experts in recognized fields of study, for the listed program and course student learning outcomes and how they will be assessed by the department faculty.

The [ACC Policy on Credit Hours](#) and the [Syllabus Requirements and Guidance](#) policy ensures that substantive and regular interaction occurs in all programs and courses undergoing review. Program proposals and programs revision proposals require clear rationales curriculum content, in terms of its continued currency to the discipline. New program proposals and proposed program revisions also require self-evaluation of the continued appropriateness of the student program learning outcomes to degree standards for depth and breath, and to build on program assessments of learning outcomes.

Faculty, staff, and administrators collaborate to ensure that the institution offers programs of distinction. Following ACC approval and approval of ACC minutes by the Faculty Senate, proposals are automatically routed in Curriculog to the Catalog Coordinator, Curriculum Maintenance, Degree Works, Accreditation, Academic Advising, and Admissions, and Marketing & Web Tech designated participants to coordinate successful implementation of the curriculum changes that are clearly communicated in the Catalog and student tools like Degree Works. Committee minutes documenting thorough peer review by all of ACC's standing committees are recorded in ACC minutes, which are in turn reviewed and approved by the Faculty Senate.

## **1.C.2 The institution awards credit, degrees, certificates, or credentials for programs that are based upon student learning and learning outcomes that offer an appropriate breadth, depth, sequencing, and synthesis of learning.**

When faculty at Western develop a new degree, they are required to articulate their rationale and to demonstrate an appropriate breadth, depth, and sequencing of learning through a detailed map of the required coursework. This map is reviewed at the departmental, college and university level. The last of these steps happens in the [Academic Coordinating Commission](#), the standing committee of the Faculty Senate whose members are charged with oversight of all aspects of the curriculum, including the appropriate rigor and quality of learning. The next phase is to develop an assessment plan where they describe how the articulated learning outcomes will be assessed. A key component of the curriculum development and approval process described in Standard 1.C.1 above is the requirement for learning outcomes to be established for all courses. These learning outcomes are evaluated at the department, college, and university curriculum review level. Academic departments have the primary responsibility for ensuring that these outcomes align with learning required for students to successfully advance toward their degrees.

There is a regular and ongoing biennial assessment of student achievement of learning outcomes in academic degree programs that the [Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs](#) manages. The assessment plans and student learning outcomes for each degree program are linked in the University's [accreditation](#) and [assessment](#) websites and published in SharePoint [here](#). Additionally, each department web page has a readily accessible link to its degree program student learning outcomes and reports. In the first year of the biennial assessment two student learning outcomes for each degree program are assessed to identify target areas for continued improvement of student learning. In the second year, the focus is directed toward making improvements to support greater student success. Rubrics are used to guide and promote best practices to ensure that program assessment addresses and creates improvement in all aspects of degree programs. The best practices for each phase of the biennial cycle are identified below.

*Phase One Biennial Assessment Best Practices:* broad faculty participation; all degree or program SLOs assessed twice in a 7-year cycle; assessments meaningfully connected to improvement efforts; SLO assessment includes meaningful and quantifiable direct measures; indirect measures meaningfully supplement direct measures; reported results detail meaningful conclusions sufficient to support data-informed and measurable improvements.

*Phase Two Biennial Assessment Best Practices:* broad faculty participation in both planning and implementation; rationale meaningfully connects the improvement to a quantitative summary of SLO assessment results, and to supporting departmental discussion; improvement is largely implemented (e.g.,

proposed curriculum change was approved by the department and sent to the college curriculum committees and ACC).

For programs that conduct assessment as directed by their national accreditation agencies [see Figure 11 in section 1.C.5 below], they report those assessment results and documented efforts to improve student learning [these reports are available to review [here](#)]. Some programs like Psychology have begun looking at specific achievement gaps, supported in part by data publicly available in [WWU FactBook](#) that disaggregates the number of majors into important groups for identifying possible equity and access gaps.

In annual report meetings with deans, department chairs discuss the quality and distinction of programs, and deans provide feedback on the year's assessment activity with an eye toward examining its academic programs to identify contextual changes to the higher education, industry/professional, and other community landscapes. This examination leads to the identification and then realization of the best recommendations for the program's improvement over the next year. Chairs and deans reflect on the broader context of academic programs, including:

- Alignment with the university
- Suitability of pedagogy and curriculum
- Degree of students' and graduates' success
- Social and economic contributions to society
- Involvement in professional, creative, and scholarly activity
- Effectiveness of administration and operations

These discussions lead to the identification and then realization of the best recommendations for the program's improvement. Program reviews in departmental annual report meetings build on program assessments. Rates of student achievement of program learning outcomes from annual assessment reports are included to facilitate analysis of areas of strength and weakness in the curriculum and students' learning. Also discussed at these meetings are the resources required to provide the needed components to support program viability and success, spotlighting needs that should be addressed in budget requests. Based on annual meetings with each department, the deans prepare reports to the Provost and discuss with the Provost any opportunities or challenges for continued improvement in academic programs in order to create programs of distinction. The Provost has asked that all departments and programs conduct in 2023-2024 a thorough examination of their vision and strategic planning with an eye to the next ten years. The goals are to decide what will make the department and its programs distinctive and to implement strategic scheduling and planning that will shape the realization of the identified points of distinction. The annual report meetings in the coming year will incorporate these examinations.

### **1.C.3 The institution identifies and publishes expected program and degree learning outcomes for all degrees, certificates, and credentials. Information on expected student learning outcomes for all courses is provided to enrolled students.**

Western Washington University identifies and publishes expected program and degree learning outcomes on its [Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes at Western](#) website and shares results of assessment there. The SharePoint site includes master assessment plans grouped by college. Master assessment plans include student learning outcomes for each degree program within the identified academic department and/or academic program. Degree-level student learning outcomes may also be accessed through the institution's [Student Learning Outcomes](#) site.

Prospective and current students can explore Western's [Majors](#) webpage which provides in-depth information about more than 200 programs of study at the undergraduate and graduate levels. This compilation was developed by the Admissions and Marketing teams in collaboration with Registrar's Office and Web Technology and allows students to learn more about outcomes to the institution's programs and relatable courses. The Majors webpage is searchable by keyword and interests and is one of the most accessed paged used in communication and marketing by the institution. One example is [Marine and Coastal Science](#) which provides the following: a) information on the interdisciplinary disciplines within the program; b) learning outcomes through research and capstone projects; c) hands-on experience through immersive studies on and off campus; d) access to marine research labs and more; e) lists of related courses to explore; and f) more information on what students can accomplish with their degree, career examples and possible employers. Additionally, all Majors webpages include University Catalog links for more information on declaration and program requirements.

WWU enforces the [Syllabus Requirements and Guidance](#) policy (approved by Faculty Senate and the Academic Coordinating Commission) that requires syllabi to include course goals and learning objectives. Syllabi are prepared and distributed to students during the first week of class, and academic units retain copies of all course syllabi for documentation and retention. The institution uses the Canvas LMS which allows instructors to create learning environments and enhance communication of learning outcomes. Furthermore, all new courses are required to include student learning outcomes and explain how outcomes will be assessed as part of the institution's approval workflow and peer review processes for the creation of new courses. Syllabi for all courses offered at the university in the Fall 2023 and Winter 2024 have been gathered and are available for review [here](#) (while syllabi are not publicly accessible due to faculty intellectual property concerns, NWCCU team members have been given access to this information for the purpose of this review).

### **1.C.4 The institution's admission and completion or graduation requirements are clearly defined, widely published, and easily accessible to students and the public.**

Western Washington University undergraduate and graduate admission requirements, and institution graduation requirements, are published in the [University Catalog](#) which is accessible to students and the public. The [Undergraduate Admission](#) section of the catalog includes general information and admission information for first-year, transfer, post-baccalaureate, and international students. The Admission section also includes information on readmission into the university, admission information for programs at locations other than Bellingham, and for non-degree seeking students and auditors.

#### **Admission**

Admission requirements are managed by the [Office of Admissions](#) and follow guidelines established by the [Washington Student Achievement Council](#) and Western Washington University policies. The Admissions website provides customized information on admission requirements for [new first-year students](#), [international students](#), [transfer students](#), [graduate students](#), [returning students](#), [undocumented students](#), and [non-degree seeking](#) students. This customization by student type allows applicants better clarity in understanding how the process works for their particular status, simplifying the process. Applicants submit an electronic application, an application fee, and proof of high school completion, anticipated completion, or equivalent (e.g., high school or GED transcripts). Standardized test scores such as the ACT or SAT are not required, but if submitted will be considered within the holistic review of application materials. Applicants can upload most materials directly into the online application, and personalized, real-time application checklists track applicants' progress toward matriculation.

Prospective students can [connect with an Admissions counselor](#) for personalized assistance at any point in the process. Prospective students also receive individualized attention during [on-campus events](#) (e.g., Fall Preview Days, Admitted Student Days, Junior Visit Days, campus tours, etc.). Those events provide opportunities to learn about the admissions process, meet with representatives from academic areas, see the campus, learn about financial aid processes, and ask questions of admissions counselors and student recruiters.

Admitted students receive an admissions letter and a series of tailored communications (physical mailings, emails, texts, and direct messages) and access to their portal. The [Admitted First-year Guide](#) provides detailed information about next steps and deadlines, including confirming intent to enroll, applying for financial aid, reserving a seat in Advising and Registration as a part of the Orientation and Onboarding process, securing housing, and submitting mandatory immunization

records. Providing streamlined communication and making information accessible allows students to understand what is needed and allows them to move smoothly through the process to matriculation at Western.



## Graduation

Graduation requirements are published in the [University Graduation Requirements](#) (undergraduate) and the [Graduate School](#) sections of the University Catalog. The University's graduation requirements for undergraduates are clearly defined and separated under multiple headers:

- Student Responsibility for Completion of Requirements
- WWU Graduation Requirements for Bachelor's Degrees
- Degree Works – Online Academic Planning and Degree Progress
- Extension Program Time Limits
- Procedures for Applying for a Bachelor's Degree
- Procedures for Applying for a Residency Teacher Certificate
- Commencement
- Baccalaureate Degrees with Two Majors
- More than One Baccalaureate Degree
- Baccalaureate Degree and Teacher Certification
- Writing Requirements at Western Washington University
- General University Requirements (GURs) at Western Washington University
- Four-Course Maximum
- Grades in GUR Courses
- Attributes
- List of GURs
- Transfer Credit to Satisfy GUR
- Scheduling of GUR Courses

The Graduate School section of the University Catalog includes information on admission, general requirements for graduate-level study, funding and support, program requirements and more. Additional information may also be found on the [Graduate School](#) website.

The state of Washington grants authority to WWU to award degrees in [RCW 28B.35](#). Graduation requirements are set by the Faculty Senate, with the support of the Academic Coordinating Commission (ACC). The Registrar's Office is responsible for evaluating students' records and making determinations about whether or not a student has met the requirements for the degree sought, and the Graduate College performs that duty for candidates for graduate degrees. Graduation requirements are published annually in the [University Catalog](#), available on the university website, and available to students via Ellucian Degree Works degree evaluation software in their student portal.

The [University Catalog](#) includes all approved programs of study – undergraduate majors, undergraduate minors, graduate programs, minors, certifications, and

endorsements – on the [Programs of Study](#) section of the catalog. The University's programs of study are listed by hierarchy of institution/college/academic department and/or academic program. Requirements for each program of study are clearly defined and accessible to students and the public. Programs of study may also be sorted/located in the [Programs by Degree Type](#) section of the catalog. For students earning undergraduate degrees, common requirements (e.g., minimum GPA, writing proficiency, total credits, upper-division, and residency), are outlined in the [University Graduation Requirements](#). Also available to students are [online videos](#) explaining Western's graduation requirements and the General University Requirements (GUR). The [General University Requirements](#) section of the catalog explains broad knowledge and practice literacies, including a listing of all courses in the current catalog that meet these foundational requirements. The Registrar's Office website also features a [Purpose of the GURs](#) page which further addresses the objectives of these core literacies. Requirements for conferral of graduate degrees is found in the Graduate School [Program Requirements](#) in the catalog.

Students also receive personalized information about their degree requirements in the university's degree evaluation software, [Degree Works](#). This academic planning tool provides students a web-based, mobile-friendly, and accessible interface with constant access to a live, detailed degree evaluation for each declared program or institutional certificate. Degree evaluations present institutional, general university, and program-specific requirements in an itemized list that adjusts in real-time as students register for and complete coursework. Clear symbols and formatting ensure that students understand which of their requirements are completed, in-progress, and remaining. For any requirement still remaining, Degree Works provides detailed information on how to complete it, including direct links to course details, prerequisites, and seat availability. Academic advisors use Degree Works to review students' requirements in advising appointments, and students are encouraged to use Degree Works between appointments to track their progress and plan for the future.

Students learn to use Degree Works during [New Student Advising & Registration](#) sessions, advising appointments, and through resources available in their Academic Planning Tools. Training and tutorials are provided on the university's [Degree Works website](#), which features guides for [Understanding the Worksheet](#), [What If](#), [GPA Calculators](#), [Plans](#), and [Frequently Asked Questions](#) pages with concise explanations of requirements and terminology. Students who change programs of study are encouraged to work with an advisor to understand how their new program and catalog year will affect graduation requirements. Students can use the "What If" analysis function in Degree Works to see how their current courses fit into other programs or catalog years. Advisors use this tool to counsel students on the impact of program changes. Degree Works is also used to notify students about the degree application process once they achieve senior standing, and they can track their degree application status through applied, pending, and degree awarded.

With the information on Degree Works readily available, students can be confident that they are making progress towards completion of degree requirements and that degrees are awarded consistently and efficiently.

## **1.C.5 The institution engages in an effective system of assessment to evaluate the quality of learning in its programs. The institution recognizes the central role of faculty to establish curricula, assess student learning, and improve instructional programs.**

### **Learning Assessment**

Western has a strong record of assessing student learning based on a pragmatic, student-centered approach that seeks to align assessment processes as closely as possible with the primary pedagogical approaches used at the course, certificate, or degree level. Support for assessment efforts come from the [Center for Instructional Innovation and Assessment](#) (CIIA) and the [Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs](#) (AVPAA). CIIA maintains a [teaching handbook](#) with extensive resources on curriculum development, pedagogy, and assessment. Additionally, they offer a wide range of professional development resources, courses, and mentoring for faculty within the “Teaching and Learning” section of their website. As described in section 1.B.4, CIIA played a central role in the support of faculty during the rapid pivot to online course delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic. The AVPAA oversees annual departmental reporting on student learning outcomes and provides [resources](#) to support assessment efforts, including the Western Washington University [Academic Outcomes Assessment Plan](#).

Accountability for assessment of student learning flows primarily from department faculty through department chairs to the dean’s offices for each college. The AVPAA works with department chairs and assessment coordinators to establish or modify schedules for assessment efforts and reporting. Department Chairs are asked to discuss degree level student learning assessment conducted by department faculty as part of their annual reports to their college deans. Assessment reports are shared with the Provost’s Office and posted to a [searchable database](#) of assessment work.

For departments, disciplines, or degrees that have specific accreditation bodies relevant to the profession, we recognize that the requirements of those accrediting bodies should play the primary role in organizing the approach to assessment [see figure 11 below]. In these cases, departments, or colleges submit to the Provost’s Office their professional accreditation self-studies and the results of their accreditation reviews. These are also included on the [assessment website](#) for reference and transparency. This applies to the following colleges, departments, or majors.

Figure 11. Programs with Specialized or Professional Accreditation (2024)

College, Department, or Major	Professional Accrediting Body
All majors offered in the College of Business and Economics	AACSB International
MA in Speech Language Pathology	American Speech-Language-Hearing Association's Council on Academic Accreditation
Clinical Doctorate in Audiology	The Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology
All majors in Computer Science	Computing Accreditation Commission of ABET
All majors in Electrical Engineering Manufacturing Engineering Plastics and Composites Engineering	Engineering Accreditation Commission of ABET
BS in Industrial Design	National Association of Schools of Arts and Design
MS in Clinical Mental Health Counseling MEd in School Counseling MA in Rehabilitation Counseling	Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)
BS in Public Health	Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH)
BA in Recreation Management & Leadership	Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism and Related Professions
BA in Urban Planning and Sustainable Development	Planning Accreditation Board
Special Education and Inclusive Teaching Degrees	Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)
BAE in Early Childhood Education P-3 Option BAE in Early Childhood Education – Non-Certificate	National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

Learning outcomes at the course level are established at the time a course is developed and approved through the departmental, college, and university curriculum approval processes, which are managed through the [Curriculog](#) software system adopted in 2017. New course proposals and course revisions must be accompanied by a clear rationale statement for the proposed change. For courses that relate to programs in more than one department, collegial communication between faculty in the different disciplines must be documented as part of the course proposal. At the university level, every new or revised course is reviewed and approved by the [Academic Coordinating Commission](#) (ACC), a faculty body created by the [Faculty Senate](#). The ACC has established “[syllabus requirements for curricular review](#)” that specify the requirement for learning outcomes to be articulated in the proposal for a new or revised course. For courses that are approved as “[general](#)

[university requirements](#)” (GURs), this review of learning outcomes will also include the [Committee on Undergraduate Education](#), a standing committee of ACC, which has primary oversight and evaluation responsibilities for general education.

At the degree level, learning outcomes are reviewed or specified by faculty as they develop their “master assessment plans” for the degree. These plans are reviewed at the college level before submission to the Provost’s Office for inclusion in the assessment database. The general scheme for degree-level assessment work since the last NWCCU review is as follows:

- First year: two or more degree-level learning outcomes are assessed, per the schedule and process outlined in the master assessment plan. This assessment work is summarized in a common format used university-wide and submitted to the college and AVPAA.
- Second year: faculty evaluate the results of the previous year’s assessment efforts. They are encouraged to integrate this information with other qualitative and quantitative data on student success and use this to inform curricular improvement work. The results of this process are summarized in a common “closing-the-loop” report format, which is submitted and stored in the assessment database.

This cycle then continues until all degree-level learning outcomes have been assessed. For most degrees, this ensures that all learning outcomes are assessed during a specific NWCCU accreditation cycle. The AVPAA also works with the Accreditation and Assessment Advisory Committee to develop a rubric for evaluating degree-level student learning assessment efforts. This rubric is included in the [Academic Outcomes Assessment Plan](#) and is shared with faculty as part of the common form used for reporting degree-level learning outcomes.

There is a wide range of assessment strategies used at the degree level, and Western encourages faculty to use a range of measures, including direct and indirect. For example, student surveys and achievement data can be useful in understanding the experiences of students. At the same time, we expect faculty to engage in meaningful, direct assessment of student learning, and we encourage the integration of these assessment strategies into capstone courses required for the degree. We also encourage assessment of other core courses that are essential for student success.

At the university level, every new or revised program of study (major, minor, certificate) is reviewed and approved by the [Academic Coordinating Commission](#) (ACC). Department faculty regularly review the quality of learning and revise and create new programs based on assessment of student learning outcomes and input from students. For example, in a multi-year effort a new department and major in Ethnic Studies has been developed to replace the program in American Culture Studies to better address learning outcomes in a more coherent and improved instructional program. The development of the Ethnic Studies Department is

response to a collective demand by students, faculty, and alumni for a more focused and strategic study of race, ethnicity, and Indigeneity in the United States. In direct alignment with WWU's strategic goals, Ethnic Studies will offer a major, GUR classes, and community-based projects and partnerships. A core curriculum and three field emphases for the major have been created to realize the improved and better-defined learning outcomes, as outlined in more detail in Curriculog [see Appendix I.a].

In addition to expanding curricula, many programs have been at work refining and improving existing programs to better support students in achieving degree learning outcomes free of unnecessary repetition and to create more focused classes and improved sequencing. For example, the Public Health major has eliminated three cumbersome two credit 100-level classes to address the needed learning outcomes more clearly in one 5 credit 200-level course, sequenced to support student success and highlight critical learning outcomes. Several 300- and 400-level classes have been significantly expanded as well to create improved coherence and sequencing, as documented in Curriculog [see Appendix I.b]. At the graduate level, the Clinical Doctorate in Audiology in its program revision has restructured courses to address the problem that in their Grand Rounds students did not get enough exposure to complex cases and opportunities for public speaking [see Appendix I.c]. These are a few of the copious examples of revised and new programs of study documented in Curriculog.

## **Pandemic Impacts**

The COVID-19 pandemic created new challenges for assessing student learning. One of these was the significant workload involved in pivoting the entire curriculum of the university to remote delivery in 2020. Under that burden, department chairs requested, and were granted a number of extensions to assessment reporting deadlines. The net effect of these extensions was that we eventually delayed the reporting schedule by one full year. During the transitional time, departments were out of sync, with some reporting on the original schedule and some on the modified one. We've categorized all the assessment reports in our database to the year that the reports were eventually due, but this is sometimes a mismatch with when the reports were developed and submitted.

More significantly, our assessment system is built on the assumption that the external environment is relatively consistent, and that we can meaningfully measure changes in learning outcomes that result from our curriculum improvements, perhaps six or eight years after those changes were implemented. By many measures, we know this is not the case, both for students enrolled at Western during the pandemic, and for students who experienced COVID during high school. For example, in the five years prior to the pandemic, the average percentage of students in English 101 receiving a D, F or W grade was 5.6%. During the 2021-2022 academic year, that number almost doubled to 10.6%. Of even greater concern was the vast achievement gap that opened up between first-generation and non-first-generation students during COVID.



One of our responses to this alarming achievement gap was the development of a new course-level student success dashboard that is described in more detail in the response to Standard 1.D.4 and Appendix IV. This is a tool specifically designed for faculty to better understand and disaggregate the student success data for their courses. In a FERPA-compliant manner, it gives them access to demographic information for their students and allows them to look across multiple domains and courses levels to evaluate patterns in the courses that they teach. It also allows for comparisons to departmental average results across those domains. This tool was launched in early 2023 and is now available to all faculty.

**1.C.6 Consistent with its mission, the institution establishes and assesses, across all associate and bachelor level programs or within a General Education curriculum, institutional learning outcomes and/or core competencies. Examples of such learning outcomes and competencies include, but are not limited to, effective communication skills, global awareness, cultural sensitivity, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and logical thinking, problem solving, and/or information literacy.**

### **General Education Curriculum**

General Education at Western Washington University is organized into General University Requirements, or GURs. The GUR course requirements for students are divided into six categories:

- *Communication*
- *Quantitative and Symbolic Reasoning*
- *Natural Sciences*
- *Humanities*
- *Social Sciences*
- *Comparative, Gender, and Multicultural Studies*

The actual trajectory that [WWU students take through the GURs](#) varies significantly; for example, students transferring with a two-year degree that qualifies for the “direct transfer agreement” are considered to have met the GURs. For incoming students completing all the GURs through WWU courses, they will take a minimum of 14-15 GUR courses. (Note that students admitted to Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies at WWU do not complete the WWU GURs; this is replaced by the [Fairhaven College Core Curriculum](#).)

In addition to the GUR requirements, students must meet the additional graduation requirement of completing upper-division courses that are designated as providing “[writing proficiency \(WP\) points](#)”. Depending on the amount and type of writing in a course, it might be designated as providing 1, 2 or 3 WP points. Students need three WP points to graduate.

The structure and content of the GURs are determined through faculty governance at WWU; this work is done by the Faculty Senate and its committees, specifically the Academic Coordinating Commission (ACC) and the Committee on Undergraduate Education (CUE). CUE is specifically assigned the primary responsibility to review all proposed changes or additions to the list of courses designated as GURs. CUE also plays the lead role in assessment of student learning in WWU’s general education curriculum.

In 2018, a [new Strategic Plan](#) was approved for WWU, and it directs us to “provide tools and experiences for all students to follow their intellectual curiosity, to work across disciplines, and to develop the skills, knowledge, and habits of mind that will enable them to effectively contribute to evolving societal needs” (Goal 1.2) and to “review and improve general education requirements and programs of study at the undergraduate and graduate levels to ensure they foster the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind required in a dynamic world” (Goal 1.5).

Prior to 2019, the learning outcomes for the GURs were described in the following 11 competencies that focused on skills and practices:

- *Analyze and communicate ideas effectively in oral, written, and visual forms*
- *Analyze and interpret information from varied sources, including print and visual media*
- *Use quantitative and scientific reasoning to frame and solve problems*
- *Identify and analyze complex problems*
- *Apply tools of technology, with an understanding of their uses and limitations*
- *Explore, imagine, and create*
- *Recognize the rights, responsibilities, and privileges of participating in, and contributing as a citizen in, a diverse society*
- *Understand and evaluate assumptions, values, and beliefs in context of diverse local, national, and global communities.*
- *Work collaboratively and manage projects to effective completion*
- *Reflect on one’s own work and on the ethical dimensions of academic pursuits*
- *Understand and assess the impacts of interactions among the individual, society, and the environment*

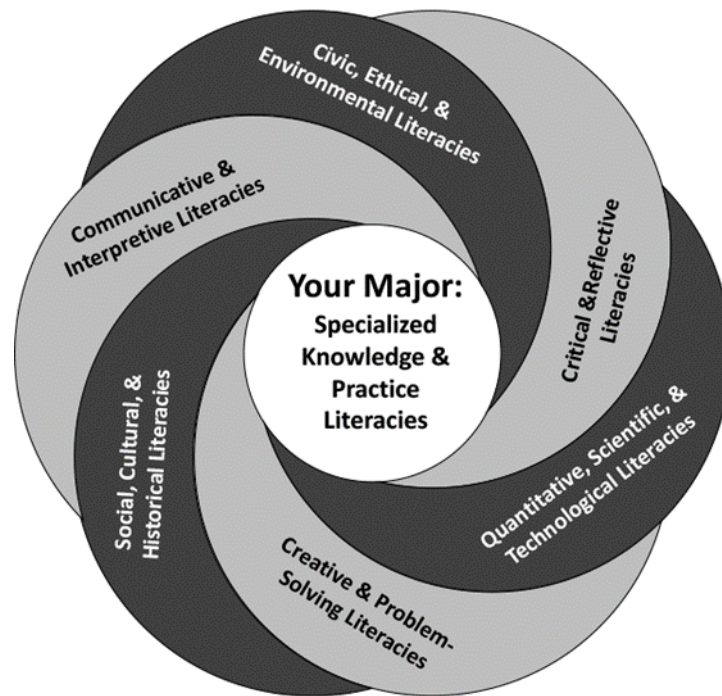
After an extensive review of the GURs, the ACC formally charged CUE with constructing a clear purpose for the GURs with an accompanying visual representation that could explain how the GURs fit into a liberal arts and sciences education and help faculty teaching the GURs explain their importance to students. In addition, ACC recommended a reduction in the current eleven competencies that appear on course proposal and revision forms. In response, CUE developed [a new framework](#) for describing the desired outcomes for student learning in the GURs that reduces the 11 competencies to 6 literacies, organized into areas of knowledge and core practices that more effectively map the institutional learning outcomes for general education across the knowledges and practices of the university.

- **Core areas of knowledge**
  - *Social, cultural, and historical*
  - *Civic, ethical, and environmental*
  - *Quantitative, scientific, and technological*

- **Core practices**
  - *Communicative and Interpretive*
  - *Creative and problem solving*
  - *Critical and reflective*

This revision was adopted by ACC in January 2020, with Faculty Senate approval the following month. As a result of this change, faculty teaching GURs are now asked to identify the literacies that are relevant to their course and include the following graphical representation in their course syllabi:

Figure 12. Student Learning Outcomes Framework (2020)



### Previous Assessment Strategies and Results

Prior to the revision of the GUR learning outcomes in 2020, a variety of assessment strategies were used for general education:

- The Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and CUE developed detailed rubrics for several of the previous GUR competencies. These are modeled on the rubrics developed in the [AAC&U VALUE project](#).
- The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) was administered several times for incoming first-year students and graduating seniors. This provided a method for direct assessment of student learning in three of the previously used 11 competencies.

- The [National Survey of Student Engagement \(NSSE\)](#) has been administered regularly (every three years) and has provided valuable student self-assessment that related to 9 of the 11 previously used competencies.
- The [Western Educational Longitudinal Study \(WELS\)](#) is WWU's primary survey tool for studying the student experience; it involves gathering data at a half-dozen points in time, from the confirmation of admission to graduation and beyond to the feedback of alumni. This data was a very valuable source of indirect assessment for all of the 11 previous competencies.

The previous GUR competencies were [evaluated comprehensively in 2016](#). The approval of new GUR learning outcomes in 2020 necessitated the development of a new assessment strategy. This plan was developed in 2021-2022 by CUE and approved by the Faculty Senate in fall 2022. The primary responsibility for assessing the effectiveness of the GURs rests with CUE, working closely with the faculty teaching GUR courses.

The new assessment strategy moves away from the CLA as the primary tool for direct assessment of GUR learning outcomes. It was noted by CUE members that most WWU faculty are unfamiliar with the test and were not involved with its past implementation, and thus may have been less motivated to accept the results as a motivator for continuing the development and improvement of their GUR pedagogies. CUE members believe that WWU faculty will be much more invested in curriculum assessment and improvement efforts if this assessment is connected to existing class assignments that tie to the GUR core areas of knowledge and practice. The CLA is also quite expensive to implement, and it has proven difficult to motivate a significant number of seniors to complete the exam, despite offering modest financial incentives, leading to problems with the credibility of the results.

Additionally, it captures changes over the entire college experience, not just those due to general education. For these reasons, we have moved to a schedule of every-other-year alternation between direct GUR assessment and improvement activities that are developed in consultation between CUE and academic departments/faculty delivering the GUR courses in question. In the years between assessment efforts, CUE focuses on using the results to improve the GUR program. This schedule parallels our assessment system for student learning in their majors with alternating years focused on assessment projects and curriculum improvement efforts (closing-the-loop). The actual GUR literacy and focal point to be assessed in each round is determined by CUE to address key strategic priorities of the university, with the complete cycle for GUR literacies assessment occurring over 12 years. This timeline allows for substantial and meaningful work in using the results of the student learning assessments to improve our academic programs.

Student learning in first-year writing and math plays a critical role in their overall academic achievement, and it appears that the pandemic has significantly impacted learning in these areas. For example, DFW rates in English 101 for first-generation

students more than doubled in 2020-2021 compared to the prior five years and remained high in 2021-2022 and scores on the ALEKS math placement test taken by many incoming students have also fallen substantially compared to pre-pandemic levels. Thus, the assessment of the “Communicative and Interpretive” literacy with a focus on the effectiveness of first-year writing instruction, especially for first-generation students, was chosen for the initial two-year direct assessment and improvement cycle for which a full suite of assessment activities would be possible (starting in Fall 2022). It is expected that assessing the “Quantitative, scientific and technological” literacy with a focus on the effectiveness of first year math classes, especially for those students with weaker math preparation, will be examined in the second cycle.

CUE's assessment of the "Communicative and Interpretive" objective with a focus on first-year writing instruction, especially for first-generation students, primarily looked at our ENG 101 course since passing ENG 101 with a C- or higher is the only way to complete the ACOM (first-year writing) requirement through WWU classes for students without a transfer credit (e.g. through an AP or IB course). CUE members reached out to colleagues in various departments and centers, especially colleagues with writing instruction experience, to help develop specific learning outcomes for first-year writing. CUE also took previous assessment work into account through review of proposed rubrics for key GUR competencies. Ultimately CUE identified that for the SLOs for first year writing/ACOM, students would demonstrate:

- Ability to understand and navigate the stages of writing, from generating ideas to revising the final product
- Ability to engage in critical and reflective analysis of diverse perspectives and communication techniques
- Ethical research and writing through locating, evaluating, and utilizing sources, to both develop and support their argument and discover what has been said and whose voice is missing
- Ability to evaluate both scholarly and non-scholarly sources
- Understanding of how to craft comprehensible and effective arguments
- Ability to adjust their writing or other communication based on their objective, audience, and other context

The actual assessment of these SLOs were primarily informed by two sources of information: direct assessment of student work in ENG 101 and student surveys run by WWU's Office for Institutional Effectiveness. This is in line with the general education section of WWU's [Assessment Plan](#), which notes that while "different literacies and focal points would lend themselves to different types of assessment", direct assessment of student work and well-established survey instruments are expected to play a key role.

In Spring 2023, CUE members obtained a randomized list of approximately 80 students who had passed ENG 101 in FA22 and WI23, where first-generation, Pell eligible, and URMs were overrepresented in the sample to obtain better statistical power for later subgroup analysis. CUE then obtained these students' submissions for their final ENG 101 writing project and each member assessed several projects; most projects were assessed by multiple CUE members. Assessors focused on whether the ENG 101 final project showed a satisfactory or better outcome for the four SLOs that were relevant to the final draft of the ENG 101 final assignment. CUE members did not assess "Ability to understand and navigate the stages of writing, from generating ideas to revising the final product," as they were only looking at the final draft and did not assess "The ability to adjust their writing or other communication based on their objective, audience, and other context," since they were only looking at one assignment with a single objective and audience.

CUE also worked with WWU's Office for Institutional Effectiveness to add new questions related to first year writing to the WELS survey given each quarter to WWU graduates. These new first-year writing questions were included in the WELS survey for Spring 2023 and Summer 2023 graduates. These questions asked graduates to self-identify the extent to which completing the ACOM (first-year writing requirement) through ENG 101 helped with each of the six SLOs and two additional questions relating to how well completing the ACOM requirement prepared students for future writing assignments in college.

In addition to examining the overall results, the assessment results were also analyzed for a variety of subgroups (first generation, Pell-eligible, underrepresented minorities, first-gen but not Pell-eligible, underrepresented minorities but not Pell-eligible, etc.).



## **1.C.7 The institution uses the results of its assessment efforts to inform academic and learning-support planning and practices to continuously improve student learning outcomes.**

### **Academic Improvement**

As described in more detail in section 1.C.5, assessment of degree level learning outcomes is centered on the work of faculty directly engaging students in their major coursework. This is supported by a common framework, timeline, and system for organizing the assessment data. Accountability for assessment processes flows through the departments to the college deans. Assessment of student learning outcomes and reports on program improvements are collected by the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs in a [searchable database](#). The alternating year reporting timeline (assessment of student learning one year, followed by program improvement the next year) is meant to emphasize the practical application of this assessment work to improve student learning.

The formal process for developing curricular improvements through the governance processes established by the Faculty Senate are described in more detail in the response to Standard 1.C.5. We note here, however, the requirement built into that process that collegial consultation among all departments impacted by the development or improvement of a course be consulted.

Recent examples of “closing-the-loop” include:

- In the Electrical and Computer Engineering degree, assessment of student outcomes resulted in a concern about student performance on an ethics quiz in a senior capstone course. A non-negligible number of students were unable to identify that the safety of the public is the highest ethical obligation of an engineer. As a result of this finding, the majority of the capstone project-related ethics content was moved one quarter earlier in the curriculum. This was done primarily because students are required to address ethical issues in their senior project proposal in the earlier course, so it made more sense to include ethics content in it. The program also supplemented video lectures on ethics with an in-person lecture by a faculty member to discuss ethics issues in more detail. This outcome was reassessed in the following year (2018), and the prior concerns were addressed by these changes.
- Through direct assessment of graduating student outcomes and formative assessment of progress towards those outcomes, the Linguistics Department identified gaps in their junior level course sequence, which they addressed with a split of topics into two courses. Total credits required for the degree were kept stable by relaxing elective course requirements. Results will be assessed both in the Junior level coursework and program capstone.



- Assessment of understanding of the application of research methods among Sociology students revealed a gap with departmental goals. In response, faculty added new assignments to provide students with opportunities to learn how different methods are employed across sociological studies, practice research methods, gain better data literacy, and engage in data visualization. Internship research opportunities were also expanded to provide additional practical experience.

## General Education

In the [GUR Literacies Report](#) submitted to the faculty by CUE, the work described in standard 1.C.6 to improve general education at Western was framed in this context:

*After more than a decade of dissatisfaction among students and faculty alike, and after many surveys and task force reports, ACC formally charged CUE with constructing a clear purpose for the GURs with an accompanying visual representation that could explain how the GURs fit into a liberal arts and sciences education. These visuals aids and help faculty teaching the GURs as well as advisors across campus assisting with course registration explain their importance to students. In addition, ACC recommended a reduction in the current eleven competencies that appear on course proposal and revision forms.*

Prior to the revisions approved in 2020, Western's general education outcomes were articulated in a traditional manner, with a cafeteria-style menu of courses to choose from to meet specific requirements. Student surveys showed that general education was an area of lower satisfaction than their major coursework. The move toward a more thematic and integrated approach to describing the general education outcomes was intended to create coherence and clarify the intention for both students and faculty. The new GUR assessment plan described in Standard 1.C.6 will give faculty better tools to determine if this has been achieved.

## Closing Gaps in Inclusive Student Achievement

The 2018-2025 WWU Strategic Plan calls for the closing of the small achievement gaps observed for underrepresented students. As described in more detail in the Institutional Update in this report and in the response to standard 1.B.1, as we've improved our systems for disaggregating and monitoring student success data since the last NWCCU comprehensive review, we've observed some disturbing trends related to first-generation students that indicate the gap is actually getting larger rather than smaller – i.e., we are going in the opposite direction. These patterns became evident during the pandemic and first-generation student achievement remains to be an area of great concern. The emergent gaps in first-generation student retention and achievement in key gateway courses such as English 101 are believed to be part of a larger pattern of a widening global social class achievement gap that was

an anticipated outcome of the pandemic. This information was a catalyst for a reconsideration of how well our first-year experience was serving first-generation students and led to significant changes in our academic and student support programs. These include:

- Piloting intrusive advising with a cohort of first-year students that includes first-generation and/or low-income students
- Gaining national recognition as a First-Generation Forward institution
- Establishing a First-Generation Collective to bring together key campus partners to organize and coordinate information about first-generation programming initiatives
- Developing an online toolkit to support the family members of first-generation students
- Hosting an annual First-Generation Celebration
- Recruitment of faculty and staff who identify as first-generation students to serve as role models
- [Reorganizing](#) our central advising services to better support students and conduct intentional and persistent outreach; this involved the merger of the former Academic Advising Center and Student Outreach Services (a TRIO-like department) into a comprehensive Academic Advising & Student Achievement Center
- Piloting embedded Hacherl Research & Writing Studio Assistants in sections of English 101 to connect students to the Studio during their first quarter, and to offer more writing feedback for first-year writers
- Training offered to all tutors by the Tutoring Center to be able to provide study skills support such as executive functioning, active learning strategies, and college/life management in addition to subject tutoring

Most recently, the university requested an additional appropriation for the state legislature to support a new, year-long first-year program of curricular and student support initiatives to support first-generation students during their transition to Western. This request was partially funded, and the new program, including an early-start orientation program, engagement with peer mentors, participation in a year-long sequence of student success seminars and opportunities to engage in other high-impact activities during their first year will be available for students starting at Western in fall 2024.

Additionally, as described in the Institutional Update [see “Enrollment and Student Services Initiatives”], the Division of Enrollment and Student Services (ESS) has focused many of its newer initiatives on areas noted by non-returning students as their top reasons for leaving Western – which include mental health struggles, unmet basic needs, affordability, a lack of belonging/community, and academic struggles. To address these challenges faced by students, the following initiatives are ongoing:

- In 2021, Western signed the [Okanagan charter](#), becoming one of the first seven schools in the country to become a Health Promoting campus.
- In 2022, the ESS division announced a restructure to form a new [Access, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion unit](#). The unit consists of the Multicultural Student Services, the Disability Access Center and LGBTQ+ Western.
- Since 2019, Western has been an active leader across the state in collaborating in initiatives to support student basic needs, including being a pilot institution for supporting former foster students and students previously impacted by homelessness (2019, renewed in 2021), piloting and leading statewide assessment of unmet basic needs (beginning in 2021, ongoing), staffing a Basic Needs Navigator position (beginning in 2021), and participating in a pilot providing food vouchers for eligible students (beginning in 2023).

**1.C.8 Transfer credit and credit for prior learning is accepted according to clearly defined, widely published, and easily accessible policies that provide adequate safeguards to ensure academic quality. In accepting transfer credit, the receiving institution ensures that such credit accepted is appropriate for its programs and comparable in nature, content, academic rigor, and quality.**

Western's undergraduate transfer credit policies are approved by the University's faculty and broadly published in the [University Catalog](#) and on the [Admissions website](#). Staff in the Office of Admissions and Registrar's Office follow well-established processes that comply with statewide transfer and articulation policies ([RCW.28B.77.210](#)), Intercollege Relations Commission ([ICRC](#)) guidelines, and nationally recognized best practices and recommendations from the American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers ([AACRAO](#)) to award transfer credit.

Western Washington University grants credit for baccalaureate-oriented courses completed at regionally accredited two- and four-year institutions of higher education. Coursework completed at nationally recognized institutions is assessed for comparability in nature, content, academic rigor, and quality of our baccalaureate degree programs.

Academic department chairs and their designees review catalog course descriptions and syllabi to evaluate the appropriateness of curriculum content for potential Western course equivalency. The Office of Admissions maintains a searchable electronic transfer course equivalency database that is available on the [Admissions website](#).

Western also awards credit for prior learning in compliance with published [Credit by Exam, Prior Learning and Advanced Placement policies](#). Qualifying scores on Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) and Cambridge International Exams (CIE) can be found on the [Admissions website](#). Students who desire credit through experiential learning complete a comprehensive portfolio that is evaluated by faculty with content expertise in the discipline for which the student is seeking credit.

Coursework taken prior to formal admission to a WWU master's degree program, whether at Western or another accredited institution, can be considered for transfer credit if the following criteria listed below are met:

- A limit of 12 quarter credits
- Graded B (3.0) or better
- Taken no more than three years prior to admission
- Acceptable to the granting institution for its master's degree
- Not used toward the completion of any other degree

Graduate Program Advisors may recommend accepting transfer credit on a case-by-case basis. If transfer credit is approved, the advisor should enter a note in Degree Works with details. Credit taken at another accredited institution, concurrent with graduate status in a WWU master's degree program, can also be considered for transfer credit if the same criteria are met. Such coursework should be approved in advance of registration to prevent any misunderstanding or false expectations.

Information about transfer of graduate credit policies can be found on the [University catalog](#) and on the [Graduate School website](#).

**1.C.9 The institution's graduate programs are consistent with its mission, are in keeping with the expectations of its respective disciplines and professions and are described through nomenclature that is appropriate to the levels of graduate and professional degrees offered. The graduate programs differ from undergraduate programs by requiring, among other things, greater: depth of study; demands on student intellectual or creative capacities; knowledge of the literature of the field; and ongoing student engagement in research, scholarship, creative expression, and/or relevant professional practice.**

Western offers 39 graduate degree programs and 7 graduate certificates across 5 academic colleges, conferring 10 types of degrees including the Master of Arts (MA), Master of Fine Arts (MFA), Master of Science (MS), Master of Education (MEd), Master of Business Administration (MBA), Master of Music (MMus), Master of Professional Accounting (MPAcc), Master in Teaching (MIT), Doctorate of Education (EdD), and a Clinical Doctorate in Audiology (AUD).

These programs are well-aligned with the University's mission, vision, and strategic goals, and reflect our institutional values:

- Commitment to student success, critical thought, creativity, and sustainability
- Commitment to equity and justice, and respect for the rights and dignity of others
- Pursuit of excellence, in an environment characterized by principles of shared governance, academic freedom and effective engagement
- Integrity, responsibility, and accountability in all our work

Many of Western's programs are reviewed by external accreditors, which include the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB), the Council for the Accrediting of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), American Speech-Language-Hearing Association's Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology (CAA), the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM), and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Self-studies of program quality and the evaluations of those external accreditors are [available for review](#). Western degree and certificate programs are consistent with the institution's vision to prepare and inspire individuals to explore widely, think critically, communicate clearly, and connect ideas creatively to address our most challenging needs, problems, and questions.

For all graduate programs at WWU, admission requires clear evidence of foundational academic skills demonstrated through an earned baccalaureate degree (or equivalent degree from a foreign university) and minimum undergraduate GPA requirement. Select programs, such as Computer Science, will admit students with an undergraduate degree in a related field if the applicant has completed certain required foundational classes [for example, refer to the section "Applying without a

CS background” on the [CS Graduate Program webpage](#)]. Admission decisions also consider current letters of recommendation and/or candidate resumes to assess applicants’ professional competence. English language proficiency for international applicants is assessed through standardized TOEFL or IELTS test scores. In addition to these university-wide requirements ensuring evidence of foundational skills, many individual graduate programs have additional program specific requirements, for example, requiring a writing sample, interview, or recital/performance.

The [Graduate Faculty Governance Council](#) and the [Graduate School](#), along with Colleges and Departments, support graduate programs at Western. The mission of the Graduate School is to promote advanced learning, study, and scholarship in service of our students, Washington State, and society. The Graduate School advances high academic and professional standards through advocacy, support, and oversight that:

- Fosters the academic and professional success of graduate students and postdoctoral scholars
- Promotes scholarship, research, and the creation of new knowledge
- Encourages diversity, scholarly integrity, and inclusivity

The Graduate Faculty Governance Council (GFGC) is a standing committee of the Academic Coordinating Commission (ACC), a subcommittee of the Faculty Senate. It advocates for the interests of Graduate Students and has jurisdiction over all graduate curricula, degree, and certificate programs. The GFGC, comprised of representatives from the Graduate Faculty, Graduate School, Western Libraries, and graduate students, supports and advances graduate education at Western through shared graduate faculty governance. The Council's authority and duties include, but are not limited to:

- Providing leadership in the areas of Graduate School strategic planning, policy and standards, and resource allocation in collaboration with the Dean
- Promoting the interests of the Graduate Faculty and graduate students
- Enhancing the visibility of graduate education throughout the University, including the promotion and celebration of academic accomplishments by graduate students
- Approving and monitoring standards for graduate admission, retention, and graduation
- Advising on the development and creation of new graduate programs
- Reviewing graduate curriculum proposals from all departments and programs
- Conducting graduate program reviews to ensure ongoing effectiveness
- Participating in the Graduate School NWCCU accreditation process
- Selecting Western Association of Graduate Schools outstanding thesis nominees
- Adopting and amending its rules of operation as the “Bylaws of the Graduate Faculty Governance Council”

Academic standards in graduate courses are monitored by the faculty-led GFGC and are distinguished from undergraduate standards in several ways. Graduate students are required to demonstrate deep knowledge of the discipline, understand contemporary disciplinary literature, demonstrate an ability to formulate research questions, make scholarly inquiries, or complete creative works drawing on their disciplinary knowledge, and, for professional programs, graduate prepared to make contributions to their profession. A higher level of learning, experience, and disciplinary expertise is required of all graduate students. Several of Western's graduate programs are independently accredited, which entails documenting differential outcomes and requirements for graduate level work. Through written or oral comprehensive exams, culminating projects, juried research reports and creative works, committee-reviewed theses and dissertations, and successful completion of professional or field experiences, Western's graduate students demonstrate disciplinary-based competences. All of Western's graduate programs have program level assessment outcomes that distinguish work from that of undergraduates and GFGC reviews each new course proposal to ensure it includes specific graduate level outcomes.

New program proposals or major revisions receive extensive scrutiny at multiple levels, including by departments, colleges, GFGC, Deans, and ACC over the rigor of the proposed program and curricula, the prerequisites, syllabi, depth of knowledge students will be expected to acquire and demonstrate, the department's support in faculty and other required resources, student and program outcomes, employment demand, and admissions criteria. Graduate courses are distinguished from undergraduate courses by 500 or 600 course prefixes. Some graduate courses are "dual-listed" with undergraduate courses, but differences from the undergraduate offering are required in all cases, and syllabi include distinguishing outcomes for the graduate students that are reviewed by the GFGC to ensure appropriate differences in the levels of rigor and expectations for graduate and undergraduate students. Additionally, GFGC conducts comprehensive and holistic graduate program reviews every five years which include review of program operations, resources, enrollment, and student outcomes, and involve interviews with program faculty, staff, the department chair, dean, current students, and alumni.

Additional policies further reinforce the distinction of graduate program outcomes. A graduate student may not include more than ten credits of 400-level (undergraduate, senior-level) courses in a graduate plan of study. Undergraduate enrollment in graduate-level courses is restricted to seniors who have a 3.0 or higher GPA, is restricted to one course per quarter, and requires both department and Graduate School approval. Accelerated BS/MS programs in Computer Science, Mathematics, and Accounting are designed for high achieving students who have the ability to complete their BS and MS degrees in five years. Western's graduate programs generally require a minimum of 45 credits with thesis and 48 credits without thesis. The thesis programs require 24 or more credits of approved 500 and 600-level courses other than the thesis (690), and no fewer than 2 credits and no more than 36 credits of



thesis (690). For non-thesis programs, the requirement is 38 credits or more of approved 500 and 600-level courses.

Graduate Students are further supported outside their programs by graduate-level professional development and advising in the Graduate Research & Writing Studio, as well as the newly opened [Kitto Graduate Student Hub](#). The Kitto Graduate Student Hub supports graduate students by:

- Fostering a sense of community and belonging that recognizes, welcomes, and celebrates the diversity of graduate students at Western
- Increasing visibility of university and community resources focused on access, equity, academic excellence, and professional/career development
- Providing access to a community of peer advisors focused on wellbeing, connection, and navigating university-wide supports
- Offering access to a community of co-inquirers with expertise in an array of academic literacies and disciplines
- Facilitating a central and flexible physical space for independent and collaborative endeavors that support student agency

Examples of some additional support services offered to graduate students outside their programs of study through the Kitto Graduate Student Hub include a regular series of offerings and workshops specifically for graduate students on topics such as:

- Grant Writing Support and Writing for Funding
- Personal Statements
- IRB Workshop Series
- Impostor Syndrome
- Job Searches
- Resumes and Cover Letters
- Fulbright Workshop and Info Session
- Digital Media Skills
- Fellowship and Scholarship Opportunities
- Art and Creativity in Research
- Zotero Research Management
- The NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program

Additional graduate student success services include the Graduate Open Studio, which invites drop-ins for assistance with research, writing projects, or application materials for graduate programs and professional opportunities; Peer Advising, by which graduate assistants serve as knowledgeable and informed peer advisors who can answer questions and help navigate university services and supports; and Career Services, which provides assistance and guidance in job-seeking, interviewing, and resume-writing for graduate students seeking employment.

## Student Achievement (1.D)

**1.D.1 Consistent with its mission, the institution recruits and admits students with the potential to benefit from its educational programs. It orients students to ensure they understand the requirements related to their programs of study and receive timely, useful, and accurate information and advice about relevant academic requirements, including graduation and transfer policies.**

Western's recruitment experiences and admissions processes underscore the institution's commitment to its broad mission of engaging, supporting, and empowering students to achieve their goals. The Office of Admissions' [website](#) features information about the various recruitment efforts which span a range of activities and programs.

Blended through a mix of on-campus events, off-campus outreach, and virtual engagement, these tactics aim to inform a diverse population of prospective students about academic programs of study through links to our [Majors' Pages](#), as well as opportunities for co-curricular learning, such as those available through the [Ethnic Student Center](#). Information is further tailored by audience, such as for [transfer](#) and [international students](#), or those seeking admission to [location-based programs](#). This approach ensures the relevant, timely, and actionable information available to all students during their recruitment and enrollment journey.

Western continues to build capacity in strategies and tactics to connect with underserved student populations. Key among them is the [Washington Guaranteed Admissions Program](#), with the leading goal to increase post-high school attainment among the state's adult population. We are increasing promotion of [guaranteed transfer admission](#) programs to the state's underserved communities in the Kitsap and Olympic peninsulas. While not yet officially available, the institution will soon introduce a dual-credit program, *College in the High School*, in partnership with select districts in our region, to enhance academic achievement and college-going rates among the University's surrounding communities.

Segmented communication to various audiences and populations is supported by print, electronic (e.g., email), and digital platforms (e.g., advertisements, social media posts), maximizing our reach and connection with specific audiences. As students formally apply for admission, additional details are shared through an applicant portal, powered by a constituent relationship management (CRM) software. Details in the portal generally feature important next steps or calls-to-action, like the sending of supporting documentation (e.g. official high school transcripts), application for on-campus housing, submission of immunization records, registering for math placement assessments, and reservations for academic advising and class registration programs [a sample screenshot for the student portal is attached in Appendix II].

Our [academic advising and class registration program](#) (known as “A&R”) is required for all first-year students, encouraged for all transfer students, and serves as an introduction for students to requirements related to their programs of study and relevant academic requirements, including graduation and transfer policies. During A&R, Admissions works closely with the [Academic Advising & Student Achievement Center](#) to ensure that Academic Advisors and students have access to an updated Transfer Equivalency Report (TER), which details the number of transferable credits the student is eligible to receive based on all submitted official post-secondary transcripts and examinations results (e.g. Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), Cambridge International). Detailed information about the Office of Admissions’ transfer credit and credit for prior learning is noted in section 1.C.8 of this report, while a sample TER screenshot is attached in Appendix II. In addition, all incoming students with transfer credit receive an email from Admissions upon initially populating their TER with comprehensive information regarding credit transfer, including plain-language instructions for how to interpret the TER.

A&R includes individual and small group advising with faculty, staff, and student advisors, and is designed to support students in developing core academic planning skills and in connecting with other new and current WWU students. Following A&R, all participants are surveyed to collect feedback on what students learned, how the experience benefited them, the degree to which the program felt accessible and inclusive, and the ways in which the program might be improved. Survey results are compiled and reviewed each quarter to inform planning for future A&R programs.

**1.D.2 Consistent with its mission and in the context of and in comparison with regional and national peer institutions, the institution establishes and shares widely a set of indicators for student achievement including, but not limited to, persistence, completion, retention, and postgraduation success. Such indicators of student achievement should be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, first generation college student, and any other institutionally meaningful categories that may help promote student achievement and close barriers to academic excellence and success (equity gaps).**

Consistent with its strategic plan, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) maintains the [University FactBook](#) which presents metrics related to [persistence, completion, and retention](#); this report allows users to evaluate persistence and graduation rates for either first-year students or transfers across 16 different student characteristics, including race/ethnicity, first-generation status, Pell eligibility, and prior academic achievement like AP or IB credits earned. A separate [dashboard](#) describes enrollment, retention and graduation data in the context of the four peer comparison groups described in the response to Standard 1.B.2 and allows the comparative graduation rates to be disaggregated by race and gender. As discussed previously, these peer groups have been evaluated and modified regularly by the Board of Trustees. Other reports include information about cohorts of [incoming students](#) and outcomes related to [post-graduation employment and salary information](#). In addition to the University Factbook, the university also prominently displays key performance indicators on its [Overall Metrics](#) page. This page presents disaggregated indicators of student achievement as well as financial and normalized data. Importantly, these data are placed in context of the university strategic plan goals so one can monitor the university's progress in meeting those goals over time. (Note that the 2018-2025 Strategic Plan benchmarks for student achievement are described in more detail in the response to Standard 1.B.2). For instance, the Equity Scorecard on the Overall Metrics page reports on retention and graduation rates relative to the university's five-year goal for these measures. This presents an opportunity to understand the rate of progress various student subgroups have made relative to these long-term goals.

While WWU provides considerable public access to student-level data, we also provide information on faculty diversity and retention. For instance, our OIE supplies data on faculty retention by rank and gender at our [Office of Equity](#) webpage. One goal of all of these pages is to provide prospective students and WWU employees with up-to-date information on how the university is progressing to its strategic goals. Another is to provide the public and prospective students with as much information as possible to evaluate WWU meaningfully. Finally, all of this data documents WWU's progress in addressing equity gaps across student groups. The use of such data in equity-focused program improvement efforts is described in some detail in the response to Standard 1.C.7.

**1.D.3 The institution's disaggregated indicators of student achievement should be widely published and available on the institution's website. Such disaggregated indicators should be aligned with meaningful, institutionally identified indicators benchmarked against indicators for peer institutions at the regional and national levels and be used for continuous improvement to inform planning, decision making, and allocation of resources.**

As described in 1.B.2 and 1.D.2, WWU shares many disaggregated indicators of student success on its [Factbook](#), produced by the Office of Institution Effectiveness (OIE). OIE also produces a [dashboard](#) of indicators benchmarked against WWU's peer institutions. WWU uses four lists of peer institutions: 1) Aspirational Peers; 2) Board of Trustees Peers; 3) Global Challenge Peers; 4) the public universities in the State of Washington (these lists are described in more detail in the response to Standard 1.B.2 above).

For each of these peer groups, the dashboard provides comparisons and data for enrollment, retention, and graduation. Data can be disaggregated by gender, student-of-color indicator, and full/part time student. In addition, OIE partners with the Education Research and Data Center (ERDC), a state agency which provides [detailed comparisons](#) of the public 4-year Washington colleges and universities. The ERDC dashboards are [linked](#) to WWU's OIE website and broadly include information about student enrollment, student progress, and degrees. All of these dashboards disaggregate students by age, sex, race/ethnicity, residency status, Pell eligibility, Washington College grant status, veteran status, and the type of pre-collegiate experience (e.g. enrollment in remedial math or English courses).

As described in more detail in the response to Standards 1.B.3 and 1.C.7, these comparative data sets are used regularly to monitor progress toward strategic plan goals and to inform planning and resourcing of program improvement efforts.

#### **1.D.4 The institution's processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing indicators of student achievement are transparent and are used to inform and implement strategies and allocate resources to mitigate perceived gaps in achievement and equity.**

As discussed previously in this report, WWU has established aspirational goals for student achievement [see Standard 1.B.1] which include the elimination of gaps that we observe in how well we are meeting the needs of several groups of historically underrepresented students. We regularly assess our progress toward mission fulfillment [see Standard 1.B.2] and we have implemented Strategic Enrollment Management practices [see Standard 1.B.4] and Strategic Budget processes [see Standard 1.B.3]. During this accreditation cycle, this planning process has resulted in significant programmatic innovations and improvements to address key needs in student services and academic support [see Standards 1.B.1 and 1.C.7].

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness plays a leadership role in this effort; this leadership is evident when comparing, for example, the degree of transparency in the data presented in WWU's public facing [Factbook](#) compared to the publicly available data from our peer institutions in the state. The mission of OIE is to "facilitate effective data-driven decision making by creating and providing accurate data collections, performing integrating analysis and research, and advocating for data quality and integrity."

One way OIE accomplishes this is to provide faculty information on their own student academic attainment which can be disaggregated by various student characteristics. This Course-Level Student Success Dashboard was the result of a 2021 NWCCU Internship and provides faculty- and course-specific information on grades given in each course by student attribute. Because the information in these reports is FERPA protected, we created an anonymized data set which we demonstrate this product via screenshots [see presentation on the dashboard in Appendix IV, attached]. The goal of this endeavor is to engage faculty with data about student outcomes from their own courses. WWU faculty do not know basic student demographics of their own student. The Student Success Dashboard is intended to let faculty understand how students of different backgrounds perform in their courses in the hopes that faculty will reflect on this data and make appropriate classroom changes to better engage low-performing students.

A second example of using data to encourage student success is through WWU's [Navigate Platform](#), which is utilized broadly across campus by those involved in the academic advising and academic support of students. Navigate is a type of student success management system that is used for student retention. It facilitates a campus-wide coordinated network by allowing advisors, instructors, and other professionals to share documentation and relevant information in supporting student success. At an institution like Western Washington University, where we have a highly

decentralized advising model, Navigate is a system that streamlines advising reports and notes. A subgroup of users has been utilizing the appointment campaigns feature to identify specific populations of students (e.g., low academic standing, populations known to be at greater retention risk) and instituting intentional and intrusive outreach to get these students to engage with an advisor. This feature was introduced to all users in Fall 2023. The next feature to be piloted will include progress reports which will be used to issue alerts and open cases with key referral offices (e.g., Academic Advising & Student Achievement Center, Tutoring Center, Hacherl Reading & Writing Studio, etc.).

## Conclusion

Western Washington University is a public, comprehensive institution of higher education dedicated to serving the people of the state of Washington. Together our students, staff, and faculty are committed to making a positive impact in the state and the world with a shared focus on academic excellence and inclusive achievement. Our relationship with NWCCU as our primary accrediting agency is a critical component that supports this mission. NWCCU and its standards for accreditation continue to evolve, with an ever-greater focus on inclusive achievement for all students, and this aligns well with the development of Western's strategic plan and priorities. This accreditation review process serves as a valuable opportunity for evaluating Western's institutional effectiveness. Several key points are worth noting as part of this evaluation of institutional effectiveness:

### **Advances in Strategic Management**

Over the last seven years, and in the context of the 2018-2025 Strategic Plan, Western has developed important new decision-making processes that have brought a more strategic approach to critical operational planning and resource allocation. Strategic Enrollment Management provides a structured network for ongoing environmental scanning, analysis, and recommendations from the subject matter experts in several divisions and many departments – so they can flow as efficiently as possible to the cabinet level for final strategic prioritization. This network is critical for longer-term enrollment management planning, but also allows for better responses to immediate enrollment challenges. A current example is the delay in the FAFSA that is preventing us from providing aid awards to students in a timely manner. Mitigating these risks (particularly for our most vulnerable, first-generation, low-income students) is the primary question being addressed within our Strategic Enrollment Management teams right now.

Our Strategic Budgeting process also provides a structured approach to university budget allocation that improves the transparency of the process, the communication at multiple steps, the alignment of budget proposals with the Strategic Plan, and the quality of information reaching the President's Cabinet as they make plans for requests going to the legislature, priorities for fundraising initiatives, or the reallocation of internal resources.

Parallel advances in strategic planning in the divisions of Enrollment and Student Services, Business and Financial Affairs, University Advancement and the Foundation are documented in this report.



## **Using Data to Support Inclusive Student Success**

Western's Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) has led the effort over the last seven years to provide ever-greater levels of detail on the disaggregated statistics of student success and achievement. Through the public-facing [Factbook](#) website, Western provides a greater level of detail regarding student retention and graduation than our peer institutions and regularly updates retention and graduation data within a week of census dates. Comparisons of student success data with several well-vetted groups of peer institutions are available in Factbook. OIE has also created a [dashboard](#) that allows direct tracking of progress towards key quantitative metrics tied to goals in the 2018-2025 Strategic Plan.

More recently, OIE has developed a course-level student success dashboard that gives faculty a new set of tools to monitor patterns of equity in the grade outcomes of their large-enrollment courses by key student demographics. This tool allows them to see trends over time and to make comparisons with department average grade results. Combined with professional support for developing plans for equity-based course improvements, this dashboard can be a powerful tool as they practice ADEI principles in their classrooms and also evidence that can demonstrate this in their tenure and promotion portfolios.

Additionally, insights gleaned from institutional data and from feedback provided by WWU students (particularly from our [Non-Returning Student Survey](#) and the [Washington Student Experience Survey](#)) have informed the development of new interventions and services to support students most at risk of stopping out. New data-driven efforts which have emerged during this accreditation cycle include enhanced ADEI programs, expanded basic needs support resources, increased staffing of mental health counselors, intrusive advising for first-year students (currently being piloted), targeted outreach to first-generation and Pell-eligible students, and campus-wide wellbeing initiatives to ensure holistic student support.

## **COVID Recovery and Distance Education**

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, distance education played a very limited role in Western's curriculum and in our primary identity as a residential campus. Only in two degree programs and some certificates did the university have any significant online teaching presence. The pandemic forced an almost overnight shift to online courses and delivery of most student services. The professional development for faculty and staff that occurred out of this necessity has opened up new opportunities for Western's identity to evolve. This is happening through a deliberate and strategic process that retains the focus on Western's core identity as a residential campus while recognizing that issues of access and other compelling rationale should be considered in the planning of future academic programs.

After the pandemic, Western's Provost determined that these deliberations should be focused at the level of the individual colleges that make up the university, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach for the university, as a whole. From this came the approval, in Fall 2023, of [modality polices](#) for each college at Western. These plans recognize the disciplinary differences in how distance education can serve the strategic goals of departments and colleges to meet the emerging needs of their students. The plans were developed within the boundary conditions created by federal requirements, NWCCU's policy on distance education, and the guidelines developed through faculty governance (for example, how to meet requirements for substantive and regular interaction as articulated through the [credit-hour policy](#)). These new policies also recognize that distance education will play a much greater role at our off-campus educational sites. For example, our development of a branch campus in Poulsbo in collaboration with Olympic College will involve, initially, the development of three new 2+2 degree options that will be offered primarily through hybrid and online instruction.

This new orientation toward distance learning will support the evolution of Western's institutional identity as we strive to effectively meet the needs of new generations of students, with our unwavering focus on academic excellence and inclusive achievement, to make a positive impact in the state of Washington and the world.

### **Delivering Increased Student Access and Success for Washington**

Among the public 4-year institutions in the state, the University of Washington, as state's flagship university, is a highly selective, R1 institution. A recent article in The Chronicle [["Flagships Enroll More Out-of-State Freshmen,"](#) February 2, 2024] showed that following a national trend, the UW enrollment of resident freshmen decreased by 21.6% between 2002 and 2022. Besides the demand for admission into the state's flagship institution, WWU is the only other public 4-year institution that can claim a healthy enrollment rebound since the global pandemic in 2020-21, with the two largest freshmen classes in fall 2022 and fall 2023. All other state institutions are still struggling with enrollment and budgetary challenges, including dealing with significant external issues, such as the collapse of the Pac-12 athletics conference for Washington State University. Furthermore, enrollments in the community and technical colleges in Washington have dropped by double digits for most institutions, with several now facing critically low numbers.

Beyond the enrollment numbers, the quality of the WWU brand – students' education and learning experiences – is highly valued by employers, legislators, and other external constituents. The WWU strategic focus on advancing inclusive student success, its North Star since the current strategic plan was adopted in 2018-19, is aligned with the state's 70% attainment goal and the societal imperative to increase equity of access and success. WWU is intentionally extending its reach to serve Kitsap and Olympic Peninsulas, the most under-served region in the state with respect to four-year education, while continuing to deliver its programs in Everett. WWU is

uniquely positioned to be the lead public institution in the state that enables increased access to high quality, affordable education, while delivering on critical retention and success outcomes. At the same time, WWU can leverage its partnerships with community and technical colleges and K-12 to open new pathways and help build a more robust and healthy education ecosystem in the state.

## Acknowledgements

This report represents the work of many in the Western Washington University community. Matt Bryant (Planning and Assessment Consultant, Enrollment and Student Services) contributed material throughout the report and served as the primary editor. Jack Herring (Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs) provided oversight for the team of subject matter experts and contributed to multiple sections related to student success at Western. We would like to acknowledge the important contributions of our entire team of subject matter experts, as identified in the following table.

<b>Subject Matter Expert</b>	<b>Position</b>
Cezar Mesquita	Director of Admissions
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Jackie Caplan-Auerbach	Associate Dean, College of Science and Engineering
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Jeanne Gaffney	Associate Director of Admissions
John Krieg	Director, Office of Institutional Effectiveness
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Marc Geisler	Associate Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Meagan Bryson	Director, Academic Advising and Student Achievement Center
Michael Barr	Associate Dean, Graduate School
Nick Wonder	Associate Professor, Finance and Marketing
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Ronna Biggs	Program Director, New Student Services and Family Outreach
Sara Wilson	Executive Director, Student Success Initiatives
Shelli Soto	Associate VP for Enrollment Management
Veronica Velez	Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, Woodring College of Education
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We extend our appreciation to everyone who contributes, every day, to supporting the mission of Western Washington University.

## Addendum A. Responses to Year 6 Recommendations (PRFR)

In February 2022, Western Washington University submitted its report for the Year 6 Policies, Regulations, and Financial Review (PRFR) . The peer evaluators [identified 4 standards among the 29 covered in PRFR](#) for which Western is complying but also needing improvement, each of which is addressed below.

### **2.B.1 Within the context of its mission and values, the institution adheres to the principles of academic freedom and independence that protect its constituencies from inappropriate internal and external influences, pressures, and harassment.**

**Team Verification:** Needs Improvement

**Evidence:**

- Academic freedom policies and procedures (evidence could include samples of negotiated agreements with faculty and/or staff, where appropriate): Y
- Evidence that the students also have academic freedom: N

**Rationale:** The support of academic freedom is stated in the faculty handbook and the collective bargaining agreement with faculty. The faculty handbook required a login to view online. No evidence for protections for students were provided.

**WWU Response:** Pending action by WWU Faculty Senate and Board of Trustees on draft statement on academic freedom.

The WWU Faculty Senate has had several robust discussions about academic freedom in response to this finding from the PRFR report. Currently, they are considering a [revision to the academic grievance policies](#) in the university catalog that would allow a student to appeal a grade decision if it was based on a decision that violated a student's

“... right to pursue knowledge, engage in open dialogue, express diverse perspectives, and participate in intellectual endeavors without fear of reprisal or discrimination”.

It is anticipated that the Faculty Senate will take formal action on this proposal prior to the NWCCU site visit on April 10-12.

In parallel, the WWU Board of Trustees has been deliberating about an overarching statement of the university's position on academic freedom that would serve to tie together existing policies and procedures. The text of the draft statement is shown on the following page. The next scheduled meeting of the Board is April 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>.

Draft Statement:

**Introduction:**

Academic freedom is an essential principle in any university environment, promoting open inquiry, intellectual exploration, and the pursuit of knowledge. As a vital aspect of higher education, it is imperative to uphold academic freedom for all members of the university community, fostering an environment that encourages critical thinking, free expression, and respectful discourse. This statement articulates the aim of Western Washington University to establish guidelines to ensure academic freedom while maintaining the integrity and values of the university community.

**1. Definition of Academic Freedom**

Academic freedom for members of the university community is the fundamental principle that empowers educators and students to engage in free and open inquiry, research, and teaching without fear of censorship, interference, or reprisal. It encompasses the rights to pursue knowledge, express ideas, and challenge conventional wisdom, fostering a vibrant intellectual environment that benefits both faculty, students, and society by promoting critical thinking, innovation, and the pursuit of truth.

**2. Protection of Academic Freedom**

a. The right of faculty to academic freedom is codified in the Faculty Handbook, as approved by the Board of Trustees, which states “all faculty are guaranteed academic freedom as set forth in the 1940 Statement of Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure with 1970 Interpretive Comments ... formulated by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the American Association of University Professors...” The CBA with the UFWW further emphasizes the importance of academic freedom and states:

Academic freedom as it pertains to this contract is defined as the freedom to discuss all relevant matters in the classroom, to explore all avenues of scholarship, research, and creative expression, and to speak or write as a public citizen without institutional discipline or restraint on matters of public concern, as well as on issues related to professional duties and the functioning of the University. (CBA 2.2)

b. Students who believe their academic freedom has been violated in the context of a course they are taking may seek resolution through established grievance procedures specified in the WWU Catalog ([Appendix F](#)).

**3. Limitations of Academic Freedom:**

While academic freedom is valued, it must be exercised within the bounds of the law, ethical standards, and the university's policies and codes of conduct. The university reserves the right to intervene when academic freedom conflicts

with the safety, security, or well-being of individuals or the university community. For example, the University may reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the University's activities or the legal rights of others.

**2.G.3 Publications and other written materials that describe educational programs include accurate information on national and/or state legal eligibility requirements for licensure or entry into an occupation or profession for which education and training are offered. Descriptions of unique requirements for employment and advancement in the occupation or profession shall be included in such materials.**

**Team Verification:** Needs Improvement

**Evidence:**

- Accurate information on national and/or state legal eligibility requirements for licensure or entry into an occupation or profession for which education and training are offered: N
- Descriptions of unique requirements for employment and advancement in the occupation or profession shall be included in such materials: N

**Rationale:** The Catalog includes information about all degree and certificate programs, including name, degree or certificate conferred, program goals, learning outcomes, and requirements, along with information about career opportunities. Information about fields which require certifications or licensure, such as Chemical Dependency Counselling, Nursing, and Welding are presented in detail.

**WWU Response:** As noted in the PRFR report, Western has followed an approach to disclosure of professional licensure requirements that depended on individual academic departments to provide information on licensure to prospective students. We also provided general professional licensure information, in accordance with 34 CFR 668.43(a)(5)(v), which previously included this statement:

Western Washington University has not determined whether its programs meet other states' educational or professional requirements for licensure and certification. Students planning to pursue licensure or certification in other states are responsible for determining whether, if they complete a Western Washington University program, they will meet their state's requirements for licensure or certification. This disclosure is made pursuant to 34 CFR §668.43(a)(5)(v)(C).

This approach was believed to meet the federal requirements, an opinion supported by consultation through the NC-SARA process.

In response to the NWCCU PRFR opinion to the contrary, WWU has worked with the Office of Intuitional Effectiveness and subject matter experts to develop a new [central repository](#) for all programs leading to professional licensure and is currently building out our database on licensure requirements in other states for each of these programs. We have also initiated conversations with the Council of Presidents for Washington State's six public baccalaureate institutions to develop a coordinated approach to updating a shared database of professional licensure requirements. With legislation pending in Olympia [[HB 2164](#)] that could force Washington universities to withdraw from NC-SARA, attending to our regulatory obligations related to licensure of our graduates in other states has assumed greater importance.

**2.G.5 Students receiving financial assistance are informed of any repayment obligations. The institution regularly monitors its student loan programs and publicizes the institution's loan default rate on its website.**

**Team Verification:** Needs Improvement

**Evidence:**

- Published financial aid policies/procedures including information about categories of financial assistance: Y
- Information to students regarding repayment obligations: Y
- Policies / procedures for monitoring student loan programs: Y
- Loan default rate published on website: N

**Rationale:** WWU provides thorough information about loan repayments with other consumer information. There was no evidence of the loan default rate being published on the website and could also not be found with a search.

**WWU Response:** A new section has been added to the [Federal Student Loans page](#) on the Western website; this is also available in a link found on the [consumer information page](#). We note that Western has a very low loan default rate compared to peer institutions. For example, according to [data released in 2020](#) the other three public comprehensive universities in Washington had an average default rate of 6.9% (close to the [national average](#)), but for the same period Western's default rate was only 2.7%. Our default rate has dropped since then, bottoming out at 0% for 2020.

**2.G.6 The institution designs, maintains, and evaluates a systematic and effective program of academic advisement to support student development and success. Personnel responsible for advising students are knowledgeable of the curriculum, program and graduation requirements, and are adequately prepared to successfully fulfill their responsibilities. Advising requirements and responsibilities of advisors are defined, published, and made available to students.**



## **Team Verification:** Needs Improvement

### **Evidence:**

- Description of advising program, staffing, and advising publications (Student handbook or Catalog; links to webpages – please note specific pages or areas): Y
- Systematic evaluation of advising: N
- Professional development policies/procedures for advisors: Y

**Rationale:** WWU provided information about a variety of academic advising resources and programs including use of a predictive analytics and advising platform and plans to implement mandatory advising for all incoming students. Professional development opportunities were described but there was no information provided about regular, systemic evaluation of advising, particularly as WUU has different teams providing this service.

**WWU Response:** Evaluation of academic advising at Western has been an ongoing effort and has resulted in significant changes since the last NWCCU accreditation review in 2017. In 2018, Western received a comprehensive set of enrollment management recommendations as the outcome of a study commissioned from Ruffalo Noel Levitz. Among the recommendations was to strengthen first-year advising, particularly for at-risk first-year students. The onset of the pandemic delayed the implementation of some of the recommendations, but it also created some institutional learning opportunities. The fall Advising and Registration (A&R) process was historically done as a face-to-face event during scheduled summer sessions. This created additional costs for students and potentially family members who didn't live in the local community as they had to make a separate trip to Bellingham. During the pandemic, A&R shifted to a remote format; one of the unanticipated outcomes was an increase in the participation rate for transfer students for whom the program is optional. In addition, the new format is structured so that each student has an individual 30-minute appointment with an advisor to complete their course selections rather than group advising in a computer lab setting. The feedback from both advisors and students was very positive and the format addressed equity issues that had been increasingly apparent with the previous format. With this information and feedback, it was decided to maintain the remote format for fall A&R after the pandemic ended.

The enrollment and retention drop-off seen during the COVID-19 pandemic brought the question of advising back to the forefront of planning, and the Presidents' Cabinet identified improved first-year advising as a key component of our plan to "close the loop" and support enrollment recovery. The new Academic Advising & Student Achievement Center ([AASAC](#)) was created in 2023 to provide both academic advising support and targeted outreach to students, especially prior to major declaration. The AASAC is taking steps toward a proactive, intrusive advising model for first-year, undeclared students while also working to enhance support for high-

needs student populations such as those categorized as first-generation and/or Pell eligible. The AASAC will be evaluated annually on the basis of continuous assessment measures (including retention and graduation rates of student served) and will engage in a program self-evaluation every 3-5 years, as per Enrollment and Student Services (ESS) assessment practices [see 'Support Services Evaluation' under 1.B.1 below for more information about assessment practices in ESS].

Following the advising services provided by the AASAC to students prior to major declaration, students begin receiving specialized advising from their departments upon pre-major and/or major declaration. In 2020, Western adapted its long-running WELS Survey to include an evaluation of major advising by graduating Seniors. Overall, the findings indicated that a small majority (59%) of Western students are satisfied with their advising regarding their major requirements [see Figure I below]. These results did vary from college to college [see Figure II below]; the high satisfaction with advising at Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies is to be expected, based on the high level of faculty contact that is built into the curriculum, particularly for those students designing their own majors at Fairhaven. The high level of satisfaction with advising in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (Western's largest, representing about 40% of all degrees conferred) highlights an area of strength within the liberal arts education at Western, where enrollments in the humanities have remained steady, bucking the national trends away from these disciplines. A report on these [results](#) was shared with college and academic department faculty and staff involved with advising, who were encouraged to dig more deeply into the data made available on the [WELS website](#) to further evaluate the nuances of the effectiveness of their academic advising efforts.

When the restructuring of the academic advising for undeclared students through the AASAC goes through its first program self-evaluation, Western will also implement an expanded assessment of pre-major and major advising. This will be done through an expanded WELS survey of graduating seniors who will be asked about their experiences with aspects of their pre-major and major advising experience, including published catalog and departmental materials, the DegreeWorks tool for evaluating progress toward the degree, and the accessibility and responsiveness of major academic advisors.

Figure I. WELS Survey of Graduating Seniors: Satisfaction with Major Advising (2020)

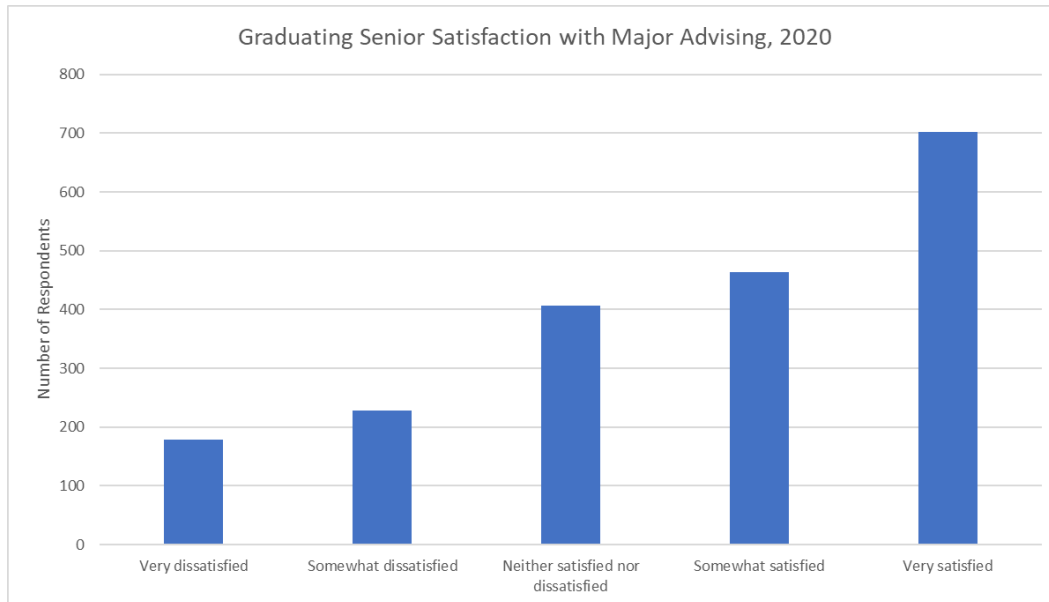
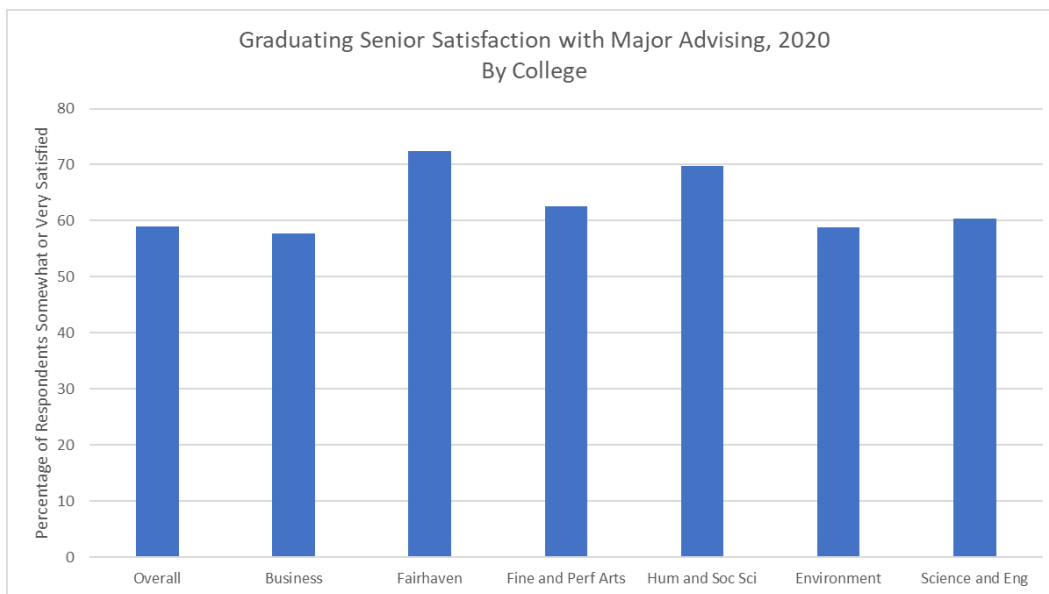


Figure II. WELS Survey of Graduating Seniors: Major Advising Satisfaction by College (2020)



## Addendum B. Distance Education Policies, Procedures, and Programs

This addendum provides response to NWCCU's questions related to distance education, as summarized below:

*Institutions authorized to offer Distance Education must include an addendum to their EIE Self-Evaluation Report. In this addendum, institutions should address and provide evidence of the following: [...]*

*For more information on this and guidance on how to address these requirements, please reference the [NWCCU Distance Education Policy Verification Notice](#).*

Each prompt from NWCCU is stated below, with a response and supporting evidence and/or documentation from WesternOnline and other university resources.

### Student Identity Verification

**Prompt:** Policies and procedures for ensuring the student who registers in a Distance Education course or program is the same student who participates in the course and receives credit.

**Response:** Western students are assigned a unique student number and a universal computing account. At the time of account activation, students choose a confidential password and, beginning January 2023, all accounts, including student accounts, are automatically enrolled in multifactor authentication (MFA). This unified account is used to log-in to Western's core services including the learning management system (Canvas), e-mail, student account information, and registration records.

On a quarterly basis, students must agree to a [Responsible Computing User Agreement](#) which summarizes student roles and responsibilities with regard to privacy and security using Western's Information Technology resources.

Students must also abide by the University's [Academic Honesty Policy](#), and all other academic integrity policies outlined by the University and/or within their program of study. Instructors may reference the Academic Honesty Policy in their course syllabi. The following sample is a recommendation provided by the Center for Instructional Innovation and Assessment (CIIA):

"Academic dishonesty is not tolerated at Western Washington University. Someone commits an act of academic dishonesty when that person participates in representing something as the work of a student that is not in

fact the work of that student. A Western student who is caught committing such an act at Western typically fails the course in which it occurred, and repeated such acts can lead to dismissal from the University.” (See also: [Syllabus Guidelines](#))

At this time, there are no additional institutional verification requirements for students enrolled in online coursework above and beyond those required for students enrolled in face-to-face offerings. Instructors may choose to implement additional security measures such as face-to-face exam proctoring at an approved testing facility, online proctoring via Western's approved proctoring service ([Honorlock](#)), required face-to-face discussion sessions, online synchronous video sessions, content matching tools to help detect plagiarism, and recorded student presentations to assist in ensuring students' identification. These additional requirements are clarified and outlined in the course syllabus and provided to students by the instructor. During the course set-up process, departments are asked to communicate information pertaining to proctored exams to students to include the number and format of proctored examinations.

Western is characterized by a personalized approach to education and relatively small class sizes. Faculty get to know their students and their work through their intensive contact with them during an academic term. A key strategy for ensuring the integrity of academic work in distance education is through the regular and substantive interaction that is required for any credit-bearing course ([Policy on Credit Hours](#)). All courses approved for fully remote delivery are required to document how they meet this requirement in the syllabus submitted for review by the Academic Coordinating Commission (ACC), the primary curricular approval body of the Faculty Senate.

Supporting Evidence/Documentation:

- [Academic Coordinating Commission Policy on Credit Hours](#)
- [Center for Instructional Innovation and Assessment Syllabus Guidelines](#)
- [Western Washington University Academic Honesty Policy](#)

## Student Privacy

**Prompt:** Policies and procedures that make it clear student privacy is protected.

**Response:** Western ensures consistent protection of student privacy in distance education, mirroring protocols of face-to-face programs. A summary of Western's online privacy is available at the “WWU Online Privacy Statement.”

Supporting Evidence/Documentation:

- [WWU Online Privacy Statement](#)

## Tuition and Fee Notification

**Prompt:** Notifications to students at the time of registration of any additional charges associated with verification procedures.

**Response:** Students are notified throughout the registration process that select self-sustaining online offerings include additional fees. A summary of the different outreach efforts is included below.

## Marketing and Outreach

All marketing and outreach materials contain a disclaimer that self-sustaining courses include additional tuition and fees.

## WesternOnline Website

Tuition and fee information is provided on the WesternOnline website. A link to the website is available in the “Supporting Evidence/Documentation” section [below].

*Figure III. WesternOnline Tuition and Fees Screenshot (2024)*

## Tuition and Fees

**Fall 2023 through Spring 2024: \$298 per credit**

Tuition is due first day of classes

Legislative Action Fee \$1 per quarter

*Summer Session Only* - Tuition and fee information through [Summer Session](#)

## Browse Classes

Browse Classes includes three notifications of differential tuition.

The first area is a course attribute indicating that the course carries “Self-Sustaining Tuition & Fees”

Figure IV. Browse Classes – Screenshot 1 (2024)

Title	Instructor	Meeting Times	Status	Attribute
▶ Introduction to ...	Introduction to Human Origins	W T F S	- Type: Asynchronc 25 of 25 seat...	DELIVERY Online-Asynchronous DELIVERY Online GUR SSC-Social Sciences Self-Sustaining Tuition & Fees

The second area is within the “Course Description.” For each self-sustaining section, WesternOnline adds text to clarify the tuition rates: “Self-Sustaining tuition is \$298 per credit which is not included in 10-18 credit tuition costs.”

Figure V. Browse Classes – Screenshot 2 (2024)

### Class Details for Introduction to Human Origins Anthropology 102 91N

**i** Term: 202420 | CRN: 22769

<b>Course Description</b>	Description of scientific evidence for the evolution of the human lineage from its primitive primate ancestors to the origins of civilization. Emphasis on analytical methods employed to reconstruct history from fossils, geological context and cultural remains. <b>Section Information:</b> Self-Sustaining tuition is \$298 per credit which is not included in 10-18 credit tuition costs.
<b>Prerequisites</b>	
<b>Detailed Prerequisites</b>	
<b>Fees</b>	

The final area is within the “Fees” section of the course details. The total course tuition is provided for student review. This area is also where students can find any specific course fees.

Figure VI. Browse Classes – Screenshot 3 (2024)

Class Details for Introduction to Human Origins Anthropology 102 91N								
Term: 202420   CRN: 22769								
Course Description	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Level</th> <th>Description</th> <th>Amount</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td>AYSS Online TUI-Anthropology</td> <td>\$1,490.00</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Level	Description	Amount		AYSS Online TUI-Anthropology	\$1,490.00
Level	Description	Amount						
	AYSS Online TUI-Anthropology	\$1,490.00						
Prerequisites								
Detailed Prerequisites								
Fees								

### ClassFinder

Information about self-sustaining tuition and fees can be found both under each individual course title and under the “additional charges” area of ClassFinder.

Figure VII. ClassFinder Screenshot (2024)

Anthropology							
Class GUR/Course Attributes	Title Time	Crn Location	Cap	Enrl	Avail	Instructor Credits	Dates Addl Chrgs
<a href="#">ANTH 102</a>	Introduction to Human Origins	12749				Rollins, Alyson Marie	01/09-03/22
SSC DELIVERY Online-Asynchronous SST DELIVERY Online	N/A	ONLINE ASNC	25	24	1	5	\$298.00 Per/Cr
Restrictions:	OV Self-Sustaining tuition is \$298 per credit which is not included in 10-18 credit tuition costs.						

### Web4U Registration Process

During the Web4U registration process, students are provided with information about tuition and fees for self-sustaining sections. Tuition and fees are made available to students on their tuition bill for review.

### Supporting Evidence/Documentation:

- [WesternOnline Term-Based Tuition and Registration Information](#)
- [WesternOnline Self-Paced Tuition and Registration Information](#)



## Regular and Substantive Interaction

**Prompt:** Academic policies and procedures for instructors to implement requirements for regular and substantive interactions in Distance Education courses or programs.

**Response:** Western has a multi-layered approach to ensuring quality in online course design and delivery, specifically surrounding issues of regular and substantive interaction (RSI).

- **College Level:** Each academic college or unit has an online modality policy that describes the academic approach to delivering online courses and programs.
- **Curriculum Review and Approval Level:** Academic Curriculum Committee provides overall guidance and review of online course proposals prior to them being offered to ensure they account for course credit hour requirements and provide definitions, examples, and considerations related to Regular and Substantive Interaction. Review [ACC Policy on Credit Hours](#) for more information.
- **Online Instructional Design Level:** WesternOnline provides guidance to faculty around RSI in the form of consultations, faculty development workshops, informational sessions, the WesternOnline Resources website, and the creation and implementation of the [WesternOnline Indicators](#).
  - **Faculty Consultations, Development, and Workshops:** WesternOnline staff participate in delivering a collaborative faculty development workshop to campus by providing a 5-week stipend workshop about Instructional Design for Online and Hybrid Courses. Faculty experience an online, asynchronous course and learn best practices, including a section on RSI. WesternOnline has also provided various information sessions around online teaching and learning, which also included a session addressing RSI.
  - **WesternOnline Resources:** WesternOnline's website includes a page about RSI which includes the regulation's language and examples for faculty to review.
  - **WesternOnline Course Design Indicators:** These are a holistic set of best practices in online instruction related to course design and include metrics around instructor communication, feedback, and involvement, which meet criteria for RSI.
  - **WesternOnline Course Review and Development Funds:** Faculty interested in receiving development funds for new online courses receive a course review using the Indicators from WesternOnline, which provides the faculty with information regarding portions of their course that are either meeting requirements or could benefit from improvements. The implementation of these metrics are up to the individual instructor.

### **Supporting Evidence/Documentation:**

- [WesternOnline Faculty Development Proposal with Review of Online Learning Consortium \(OLC\) Scorecards \(December 2021\)](#)
- [WesternOnline: Online Teaching and Learning Compliance and Regulations \(April 2021\)](#)
- [WesternOnline Resources: Regular and Substantive Interaction](#)
- [WWU Faculty Senate: ACC Policies and Guidance](#)
- [WWU Faculty Senate: ACC Policy on Credit Hours](#)
- [WWU Teaching and Learning Cooperative \(TLCo-op\) Website](#)
- [WWU TLCo-op Heuristic for Inclusive Instructional Design](#)
- [WWU TLCo-op Faculty Professional Development Workshops](#)

### **Mission and Vision**

**Prompt:** The institution's Distance Education programs are consistent with the mission and educational objectives of the institutions (Standard 1.C.1).

**Response:** WesternOnline's overview, mission, vision, values, and strategic goals are provided below. These are written in direct response to Western's mission, goals, and core themes.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Western had only two undergraduate degree programs and one graduate degree that were designed and intended to be delivered fully online; typically, just less than 2% of course sections were taught in a fully online format. The pandemic forced a rapid pivot to fully online instruction, and led to a strategic institutional re-evaluation of the role that distance learning should play. In January, 2022, the Provost, in consultation with faculty leadership, decided that the approach to any expansion of distance learning would be determined by the needs of different disciplines, professions and student populations, and articulated through the development of modality policies in each of the colleges and other academic units at Western. In the development of these policies, faculty and Deans were asked to evaluate and follow a set of rigorous guidelines to assure alignment with the mission and objectives of the university [see Western Washington University – College Modality Guidelines in Appendix III, attached].

In Fall 2023, [modality polices](#) for each college at Western were approved by the Provost. These plans recognize the disciplinary differences in how distance education can serve the strategic goals of departments and colleges to meet the emerging needs of their students. The plans were developed within the boundary conditions created by federal requirements, NWCCU's policy on distance education, and the guidelines developed through faculty governance [for example, how to meet requirements for substantive and regular interaction as articulated through the [credit-hour policy](#)]. These new policies also recognize that distance education will play a much greater role at our off-campus educational sites. For example, our

development of a branch campus in Poulsbo in collaboration with Olympic College will involve, initially, the development of three new 2+2 degree options that will be offered primarily through hybrid and online instruction.

### **WesternOnline at Western**

WesternOnline partners with academic units across campus to offer online opportunities to students, including courses that meet General University Requirements (GURs), upper-division writing proficiency requirements, electives, and requirements for Western majors and minors. Many of the courses offered through WesternOnline are open to anyone - both Western students and the public. Degree seeking students should verify requirements for degree/major with the academic department.

WesternOnline provides faculty and academic units with course and program planning services, instructional design consultations, teaching and learning resources, development stipends, course review, and faculty professional development. We help academic units create meaningful, equitable, accessible, and high-quality learning experiences to meet the needs of diverse learners and improve access to Western's educational opportunities.

*WesternOnline partners with other institutional units to help foster best practices in instructional design as a coordinating office for the Teaching and Learning Cooperative.*

**Mission:** We are Western's source for supporting and delivering online teaching and learning opportunities.

**Vision:** Leading access to intentionally designed, equitable, and accessible online learning pathways.

**Values:**

- **Integrity:** Upholds the mission, vision, and values of Western and WesternOnline by operating through ethical and inclusive partnerships.
- **Compassion:** Humanizing the online teaching and learning experience.
- **Leadership:** Applies thoughtful and informed practices and partnership to move online teaching and learning initiatives and forward.
- **Inquisitive:** Stays engaged with the online learning community by participating in regular development opportunities.
- **Collaboration:** Engages with faculty and other units at Western in the design and delivery of intentionally designed learning opportunities.
- **Student-Centered:** Prioritizing the student experience through learner-centered design.

### Strategic Goals:

1. WesternOnline provides faculty and academic program support with research-based and mission-driven strategies for online teaching and learning.  
*(Connected to WWU Goal #1; Core Theme: IWI, EAE)*
2. WesternOnline provides faculty development to support individuals with meeting their online teaching and learning goals.  
*(Connected to WWU Goal #3; Core Theme: EAE)*
3. WesternOnline supports faculty in designing and developing online courses that are centered around equitable design, accessibility, diversity and representation, promotion of inclusivity, and rooted in anti-racist practices.  
*(Connected to WWU Goal #4; Core Theme: AIS; EAE)*
4. WesternOnline provides access to a Western education to learners who may be place-bound or who prefer or need a more flexible modality to participate in educational opportunities.  
*(Connected to WWU Goal #2; Core Theme: AIS, IWI)*
5. WesternOnline provides student and support services that contribute to the student experience.  
*(Connected to WWU Goal #3; Core Theme: AIS)*

### Supporting Evidence/Documentation:

- [WesternOnline Home Page](#)
- [WesternOnline Mission, Vision, and Values \(WesternOnline Resources Website\)](#)
- [WesternOnline Mission, Vision, and Values \(September 2022\)](#)

### Assurance of Student Learning

**Prompt:** Institutions that offer courses or programs via multiple delivery modalities ensure learning outcomes and levels of student achievement are comparable across modalities (Standard 1.C.6).

**Response:** WesternOnline offers various opportunities to help faculty create alignment in their online courses.

WesternOnline supports faculty via professional development (like the workshops offered through our membership in the Teaching and Learning Cooperative) that focus workshop content around creating aligned curriculum with measurable and assessable learning outcomes. We provide opportunities to support instructors by offering platforms for faculty to engage with one another. This has included mentorship roles and course awards which recognize elements of best practices in course design. Our office is also available and provides consultations, by faculty or department request, to assist in helping instructors design online courses to ensure student learning. As part of these consultations, we refer to the WesternOnline

Indicators to guide faculty's creation of effective instruction to meet course and program goals.

As described in the response above to 1.C.1, in January, 2022, the Provost, in consultation with faculty leadership, decided that the approach to any expansion of distance learning would be determined by the needs of different disciplines, professions and student populations, and articulated through the development of modality policies in each of the colleges and other academic units at Western. In the development of these policies, faculty and Deans were asked to evaluate and follow a set of rigorous guidelines to assure alignment with the mission and objectives of the university (see Western Washington University – College Modality Guidelines in Appendix III). Key among these was the guideline that proposed syllabi meet the [ACC syllabus requirements](#), including an accounting of course time that demonstrates regular and substantive interaction that meets the credit hour requirements for contact time. This should include a clear listing of in-person and/or synchronous meeting times and a clear explanation of any time spent in asynchronous instructional activities.

The intention of these guidelines and reviews is to ensure that the intended learning outcomes are the same for courses regardless of modality, and that instructional methods and faculty/student engagement are designed to produce comparable quality in learning experiences between modalities.

With the completion and approval of these policies in fall 2023, colleges and departments are now moving forward with new proposals for permanent online delivery of courses and degrees. For example, a new 2+2 degree in Sociology with a Focus on Helping Professionals will be taught primarily through distance learning and offered at our educational site in Poulsbo, Washington, on the campus of Olympic College. Three other new degrees in Poulsbo will be in the curriculum approval pipeline in fall 2024.

To ensure comparable student achievement, departments with courses and degrees being offered in multiple modalities are being asked to revise their plans for assessment of student learning to compare student achievement between modalities. University guidance for these comparisons is provided in the [Western Washington University Academic Outcomes Assessment Plan](#). Several approaches are encouraged, including:

- Comparison of grade outcomes for students of comparable academic preparation in online and face-to-face sections of the same course.
- Comparison of performance in subsequent courses for students of comparable academic preparation in online and face-to-face sections of the same course.
- Comparison of student employment outcomes for students enrolled in face-to-face and online versions of the same degree.

Thus far, one study directly comparing student learning outcomes at Western across modalities has been completed [presented in Appendix V, attached]. This study looked at 54 courses that were taught in multiple modalities across many departments and tracked students into 187 courses for which the original courses served as prerequisites. Grade outcomes in the prerequisite courses taught online and face-to-face were statistically indistinguishable, but it found that there was a small but significant deficit in student learning outcomes among those in the online course when self-selection and other factors were controlled for, especially for those who had earned a lower passing grade in the online prerequisite course. This information was shared with course faculty for their use in program improvement efforts.

**Supporting Evidence/Documentation:**

- [WesternOnline Resources: Course Design and Development Processes](#)
- [WesternOnline Resources: Course Development Considerations](#)
- [WesternOnline Resources: Faculty Engagement](#)
- [WesternOnline Resources: Consultations](#)
- [WesternOnline Resources: Course Design Indicators](#)
- [Teaching and Learning Cooperative Workshops](#)
- [WWU Assessment of Student Learning](#)
- [Western Washington University Academic Outcomes Assessment Plan](#)