

**WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
ITEM SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees

FROM: President Sabah Randhawa on behalf of Melynda Huskey

DATE: October 9, 2020

SUBJECT: **Enrollment Management Summary**

PURPOSE: Information Item

I. Enrollment

On every front, we have had to re-imagine the work of enrollment in higher education: family programming, recruitment, events, advising, orientation, outreach, awarding aid, reporting, scheduling classes, grading, maintaining accreditation, registration, support for the other locations, tracking physical location, housing, graduation, supporting veterans and special populations, evaluating candidates for admission, and communicating all of that to our constituents. We have not succeeded on each front and in each effort, but the work we have done as a university is extraordinary, and it is ongoing.

Summer 2020 Enrollment

Summer census day occurs very late into the summer at Western. In fact, it happened during finals week on August 18. Our final summer enrollment total was 4,398, which is the highest level of summer enrollment in recent history. The closest we were to that in recent years was 4,269 in 2017. We had seen drops in summer enrollment each of the last two years, but this year we had a healthy jump (an 11.5% increase from summer 2019).

Fall 2020 Enrollment—pre-census day*

As of the first day of Fall quarter (Wednesday, September 23rd), we had a total student count of 15,060. As of Monday, September 28th, our total student count was 15,209. It is important to note that census day numbers lock overnight on Sunday, October 4th. So, as of Monday, October 5th, we will be able to report on final fall enrollment numbers. Enrollment at 15,209 reflects a 5.8% drop from overall enrollment at census day in Fall 2019. This is extraordinarily good news considering the environment in which we have been operating and market expectations. Institutionally and up until Labor Day, we had been preparing for a 10% drop in overall enrollment for fall.

Our biggest losses are in the population of new first-year students, down about 20% from Fall 2019. We are also experiencing significant losses in the new transfer population for Bellingham specifically—down about 10%. While these losses do not necessarily set us apart from other similarly situated institutions, they do present us with ongoing challenges. Particularly noteworthy is the increase in deferrals. Of our would-be first-year students, 278 have been granted deferrals to a future term, as compared to 103 in Fall 2019. Transfer students requested deferrals at a higher rate as well: 75 this year as opposed to 32 in Fall of 2019.

We anticipate that graduate enrollment will be up approximately 10% from Fall 2019 and more modestly (likely around 4% up) from 2018. With some programs bringing in new cohorts every other year, the two-year comparison is important to note. New opportunities are on the horizon for graduate enrollment, with initial discussions on marketing, a strategic enrollment plan, and new programs.

As of the first day of fall quarter, I can offer that our enrollment of students of color was holding at 28.2% of total fall enrollments. That would be a record high, if it holds through census day.

In short, we will see

- a slight increase in students of color as a percentage of total enrollment (Fall 2019—26.9%)
- a slight decrease in first generation students as a percentage of total enrollment (Fall 2019—30.8%)
- a slight decrease in PELL eligible students as a percentage of total enrollment (Fall 2019—23%)
- a slight decrease in nonresident students (including international) as a percentage of total enrollment (Fall 2019—12.3%)

Recognizing that “slight increase/decrease” is quite vague, (but again recognizing that we cannot be precise prior to census day and that there will be continued movement until then), more detail is warranted. In each of the bullets listed above, we expect to see a change of about one percentage point up or down for each category.

It is heartening that our overall drop in nonresident enrollment is modest, considering pandemic-related expectations. Importantly, our first-year nonresident numbers are actually slightly better as a percentage of first-year enrollment than they were last year. After our first year of concerted out-of-state marketing—thanks to investment from the Foundation and some institutional funding—we can see the value in marketing. University Marketing and Communications and Donna Gibbs led the effort, partnering with Admissions, and did extraordinary work in this regard. Next tier public institutions like Western were expecting to take their most considerable losses among nonresident first-year students. We clearly mitigated those losses.

News stories continue to emerge regarding the state of nationwide enrollment realities for Fall 2020, and the narrative is a one of mixed results. *Inside Higher Ed* reports that “*undergraduate enrollment fell at all types of colleges, including private nonprofit four-year colleges (-3.8 percent) and private for-profit four-year colleges (-1.9 percent). The decline was more modest at public four-year colleges (-0.4 percent), although there were differences across public four-year institutions according to location, with rural institutions seeing the biggest decline (-4 percent) and urban institutions seeing slight gains (+0.5 percent).*” There are differences from region to region and public to private within those regions. Early on in the pandemic, there was an expectation that public flagships would fare the storm without losses, and that appears to be holding true. Schools at the next tier felt those losses, as flagships made adjustments in their admissions processes. Meanwhile, we are hearing from our colleagues at the other public 4-year institutions in Washington (other than UW) that they are experiencing enrollment variations for this fall that are similar to ours. Other noteworthy reports include the 20% drop in Harvard’s undergraduate enrollment and

reports suggesting that community college enrollment is suffering with drops of 5-10%. We expect to start seeing reporting on enrollment results as they relate to the choices that institutions made this fall about their instructional method, as we know students sat out at a higher rate when they did not believe that they could get the on-campus experience that they wanted in Fall 2020.

The following charts are far less helpful in assessing what fall enrollment will be, as we now have actual enrollment numbers. However, these reflections on the final work of admissions may be of interest in seeing where the weak spots were during the pandemic. It is clear that converting offers to confirmations was the challenge this year. That matches with what happened across higher education. These charts represent application status as of the first class day, compared to the same time last year.

New Fall first-year students—Bellingham

	Applied (% change 2019 to 2020)	Admitted (% change 2019 to 2020)	Confirmed (% change 2019 to 2020)
2020	10,206 (-2.8%)	9,545 (.5%)	2,629 (-18.2%)
2019	10,503	9,495	3,213
2018	11,112	9,739	3,236

New Fall transfer students—Bellingham

	Applied (% change 2019 to 2020)	Admitted (% change 2019 to 2020)	Confirmed (% change 2019 to 2020)
2020	2,039 (-1.5%)	1,672 (-1.8%)	1,025 (-8.6%)
2019	2,070	1,703	1,122
2018	2,210	1,728	1,151

New Fall transfer students—other locations

	Applied (% change 2019 to 2020)	Admitted (% change 2019 to 2020)	Confirmed (% change 2019 to 2020)
2020	251 (12.6%)	167 (0%)	152 (-1.9%)
2019	223	167	155
2018	222	166	145

New Student Recruitment and the Admissions Cycle—Fall 2021 and Fall 2022

With this year's class secured, we are dedicating more time and attention to identifying trends by demographic and geographic indicators where we over- and under-performed in relation to last year. While the dynamics caused by the pandemic make for tricky direct comparisons, we hope to glean information as we accelerate our recruitment efforts for the Fall 2021 and 2022 cohorts. An environmental scan points to five main themes that are likely to challenge admissions and enrollment leaders in the upcoming cycle.

The emergence—and likely permanence—of the **test-optional movement** is, by most measures, a positive. Following a decades-long outcry by access advocates and debate among students, parents, school counselors, researchers, university officials, and others,

the movement reached a pivotal point following the widespread cancellations of tests (ACT and SAT) as a result of the pandemic. On the other hand, for many years testing agencies have provided an important conduit for colleges and universities to directly market to nearly 3 million high school seniors each year. Consequently, colleges will have to rely on other methods to identify, engage, and convert students from unknown college prospects to applicants in an environment where there will be significantly less demand or incentive for students to take college entrance exams. We are contracting with additional college search sites, pursuing name buy opportunities from other sources, creating new data sharing agreements, increasing digital marketing, and working with colleagues at Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) and around the state to open every door to get contact information on college bound students so that we can work to recruit them directly.

Continued closures of high schools and community colleges (relying on remote instruction) will keep a significant number of **recruitment staff place bound** during the height of the college search season and reduce our access to prospective students. Additionally, elimination or reduction in travel, combined with restricted access to college facilities, will **keep many families from visiting college campuses**. Virtual and technology-dependent solutions are key.

Early surveys suggest that depressed economic conditions—magnified by the pandemic—have created more significant disparities between students at the higher and lower economic quintiles as it relates to **accessing technological resources** to connect with admission representatives. Additionally, fewer families will have the means to plan for trips or vacations which traditionally involved a stop at a college or university on a student’s “short list.”

Zoom Fatigue in the high school is as real of a phenomenon as it is in collegiate, professional, or home spaces. Though secondary schools are slowly deploying hybrid learning models to engage students and educators with in-person instruction, high schools have eliminated traditional college fairs or canceled visits by college recruitment staff. Though there have been a number of online fairs sponsored by leading higher education organizations and school districts, early indicators suggest that attendance at exploratory virtual programs has been significantly (even shockingly) lower than in-person events.

Western’s Office of Admissions continues to adjust to this “new normal”. Our activities have focused on enhancing our personal connections and information sharing in a way that reaches college-aged prospects. We are attempting to be as proactive as possible by engaging students and families to think about what is next and by welcoming them to directly connect with staff and current students in a number of recorded and live sessions and experiences, in group settings or private appointments:

- High school visits (hosted sessions for students from the same high school)
- “Applying for College” sessions (partnering with Community-Based Organizations)
- Spanish language tours
- Residence Hall tours
- “Selfie” tours by Admissions tour guides
- Themed information sessions (e.g. honors, housing, athletics, clubs, STEM, Art, Multicultural Center)
- One-on-one chats with current Western students

- Contests for giveaways on social media posts (Instagram)
- Fun videos on Tik Tok

We continue to learn in these new spaces, and we regularly capitalize on opportunities for innovation. We hope that this blend of engagements in the digital environment will benefit students and families. The sustained collaboration with internal stakeholders and external partners will play a significant factor in our ability to successfully recruit for the Fall 2021 class.

II. Registrar

The Registrar's Office remains focused on student service as well as creating and implementing new systems and processes, as we continue to work remotely due to the global pandemic.

- **Implementation of House Bill 2513, Higher Education Debt Collection** – Effective June 11, 2020 the Legislative Session Report included [HB 2513](#), which prohibits institutions of higher education from withholding a student's official transcripts or registration privileges as a tool for debt collection, except for debt related to unpaid tuition, fees, room and board expenses, or financial aid funds owed. In partnership with the Student Business Office, the Registrar's Office has reviewed all current University hold processes to determine any holds for indebtedness outside the allowed categories, removed all holds which do not comply with HB 2513, and adjusted hold processes to incorporate the new legislative requirements. In keeping with the intent of HB 2513 and in the interest of transparency in our work with students, the university has eliminated all holds on access to transcripts related to indebtedness.
- **Census Date Programming** – Several new processes were developed to streamline the coordination of capturing data for reporting to state and federal agencies following census day.
- **COVID Clearance Tracking** – For the health and safety of our campus community, the Registrar's Office partnered with the Student Health Center to develop a method for indicating when students who live in campus housing or are taking face-to-face courses have a COVID-19 clearance.
- **Dean's Withdrawal** - The Registrar's Office partnered with the Office of Student Life to implement a new Dean's Withdrawal Policy, designed to streamline University processes to best support students leaving the University temporarily. A new internal coding system has been developed to provide key offices an easy way to identify a withdrawal that requires the support of the Office of Student Life and therefore may be sensitive in nature and warrant special processing.
- **New Student Convocation** – The Division of Enrollment and Student Services and the Provost's Office partner each year to produce New Student Convocation to welcome students to Western's academic environment. This ceremonial event was delivered virtually on Tuesday, September 22nd. It serves as the introduction to the collegiate intellectual experience in the same way that commencement serves as the conclusion. The RO commencement team coordinated the event planning, including organizing approximately 40 discussion sessions in Zoom rooms at the end of the virtual production to add a layer of socialization and engagement to this virtual event.
- **Grade Mode Change Request Form** – With the continuing need to move traditional paper-based and in-person processes to online forms and automated processes, the Registrar's

Office developed a web-based process for students electing to be graded on a pass/no pass (EP/NP) basis rather than a letter grade basis. This has been adapted for use under the temporary grading policies in place for Fall 2020.

- **Temporary Grading Policy Implementation** – As we continue to adjust to remote instruction, Western still recognizes a need to accommodate students in these unusual circumstances. To that end, temporary grading policies for undergraduate and for graduate students are in place for fall. These differ from the temporary grading policies that were in place for spring and summer, and the Registrar’s Office has undertaken the programming work to accommodate those policies, including the establishment of new web-based processes for requesting to be evaluated in the EP/NP grading mode.
- **Winter Course Scheduling** – After the complicated work of rebuilding the fall schedule twice, the Registrar’s Office is prepared to rebuild the winter course schedule, utilizing the new instructional modalities developed for remote teaching during the pandemic. Again, we will work with campus partners to ensure that all face-to-face courses are scheduled in classrooms with sufficient capacity for appropriate social distancing and to ensure that we utilize spaces with the most effective HVAC systems for those face-to-face offerings.

III. Student Aid

Financial aid has disbursed smoothly for Fall 2020, despite ongoing changes to regulations, changes to fees, and updated guidance on several fronts.

Federal Requirements for Adjustments to Cost of Attendance

We anticipated that the U.S. Department of Education would extend (from Spring 2020 to Fall 2020) the flexibility to refrain from recalculating costs of attendance and aid eligibilities when students changed their living arrangements from that reported on their aid applications. Upon receiving Federal guidance that Federal flexibilities had not been extended, Financial Aid informed student aid applicants—through Western’s Financial Aid website and through emails to nearly 12,000 students—of the requirement that they update the Financial Aid department in writing of changes to their living arrangements. Within the next two days, in late August, the U.S. Department of Education extended the flexibility to refrain from recalculating through December 31, 2020, or the end date for the COVID-19 Federally declared emergency, whichever occurs later. With that allowance, Financial Aid reached out again to let students know that their Fall 2020 aid would not need to be adjusted and that we would keep them apprised of developments.

Ongoing Adjustments for Individual Circumstances

Requests for additional financial support are coming in from students and parents who have suffered financial losses from COVID-19 and from wildfires, and those are being considered on a case-by-case basis.

Washington College Grant

The 2020-21 school year serves as the inaugural year that the Washington College Grant will be an entitlement. In previous years, students eligible for the Washington College Grant were not guaranteed funding because funds were limited by institutional allocations. In addition, eligibility was expanded for 2020-21, so that more low- and middle-income families qualify. Examples:

- An eligible student from a family of four with a family income of \$50,000 or less per year will receive the maximum Washington College Grant of \$7,381 for the academic year at Western.

- An eligible student from a family of four with a family income of \$97,000 (approximately the state's median family income) will receive a Washington College Grant in the amount of \$738 for the academic year.

Recruitment Awards

Admissions and Financial Aid must overcommit available recruitment scholarships and tuition waivers to recruit new students. This year we offered \$16.6 million in funding to yield approximately \$5.7 million in projected disbursements for the 2020-21 academic year.

Emergency Support for Students

Financial Aid continues to review Federal CARES grant applications from students who have incurred expenses related to campus disruption from COVID-19. Requests for CARES funds have exceeded available funds. Approximately \$1.1 million, reserved for Fall 2020 out of Western's \$5.8 million allocation, will be disbursed throughout fall quarter to help keep students in school.

CARES grants were recently awarded to 72 incoming first-year students who expressed the need for financial assistance for technological expenses related to taking classes remotely. In addition, 17 students within our graduate-level Speech/Language Pathology and Audiology program received CARES funding for virtual audiometer simulation software to support their remote studies.

The Scholarship Center continues to award students emergency microgrants through the Western Foundation Student Emergency Fund as well as through other Foundation accounts. When appropriate and possible, awards are being augmented by Western Grant, derived from tuition revenues, to make Foundation funds stretch further.

Student Employment Update

The Student Employment Center continues to place Western students in part-time on- and off-campus jobs. The demand for federal, state and institutional work study student employees remains strong because funding for wages is provided centrally. Therefore, departments do not need to incur direct costs for student wages. However, fiscal constraints and changes in the need for student employees in the remote working environment are reducing the number of departmentally-funded student employment positions available for the upcoming year.

We anticipate that a high proportion of student employees will be able to earn their scheduled wages through remote work. Survey results from last spring showed that 80% of our student employees were able to continue to earn wages by working remotely, despite COVID-19 disruption.

Unlike most universities, Western provides an institutional work study program funded from tuition revenues to increase on-campus work opportunities. During the 2019-20 school year, 273 Western students earned a total of \$607,591 through Western's institutional work study program.

In addition, the Student Employment Center is assisting with the identification of student employees who will work on campus to help ensure that they undergo required testing for COVID-19.

Imaging System Migration

Financial will complete migration of over one million documents from our current Nolij imaging system to Hyland OnBase on November 9, necessitated by a Nolij software end-of-life date of December 31. Implementation of additional functionalities to replace e-sign forms will occur over the course of the upcoming academic year.

Gearing Up for 2021-22

Financial aid is already preparing for 2021-22. Filing of the 2021-22 FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and WASFA (Washington Application for State Financial Aid) begins on October 1, 2020. Western's Financial Aid department is collaborating with the Washington Student Achievement Council, Western's Admissions Office and others to organize and provide virtual FAFSA and WASFA completion events statewide to make students and families aware of how to apply for financial aid, as well as help them through the application process.

IV. New Student Services/Family Outreach

Advising & Orientation Fall Wrap Up

The New Student Services/Family Outreach office has helped wrap up the final session for the Fall Advising & Orientation program, with the last session completed on September 21st. In continued partnership with colleagues from Academic Advising and the Registrar's Office, we completed a record number of 25 orientation, advising, and registration sessions serving 3,396 new students (839 transfers and post-baccalaureates; 2,557 first-years). Moving the programs to online platforms and virtual delivery posed a number of challenges, notably a compressed amount of time to design and coordinate our processes. Colleagues across campus continued to provide support from the first program to the last, with communications, marketing, web development, tech support, presentation development, and hosting live events—all with a very collaborative and willing spirit. While feedback from participants about the program offerings and processes will continue to be gathered over the coming months, the general feeling from campus partners is that our programs were a success.

The planning staff for the events will also engage in debriefs and reflection on the programs and processes with a goal of continuing to strengthen these delivery modes through the COVID-19 circumstances and beyond. While the challenges faced were likely similar in theme to what any department or institution has faced in the current circumstances, it is also worth noting the new endeavors, program enhancements, and benefits that emerged.

Orientation Materials Now Web-based

NSSFO worked with the Web Tech staff and central University Communications to produce a more comprehensive [Orientation website](#) to highlight resources, FAQ's, live events, pre-recorded information videos about academic departments and majors, as well as instructive videos from student service areas about how to access and utilize campus resources. Featured on the page is a Welcome Anthem, produced by our creative team in University Communications, as well as video welcome messages from President Randhawa and Vice President Huskey, messages from faculty, a much-viewed video from our Health and Wellness team, and a message of inclusion offered by Professor Francisco Rios.

By developing this type of in-depth informational website, more students and their families had much faster and more equitable access to critical information to help them get started at Western. Students and families had more time to review campus resources and information at their own pace. The virtual delivery of orientation allowed Western to offer programming that would not have been possible with the space and time constraints of our previous in-person events, and the opportunity to blend asynchronous programming with scheduled live events gave students and families many more choices and the flexibility to take in pieces of orientation on demand. Additionally, there is now a bank of resources that can remain online for the duration of the academic year, for students entering Western during any quarter. It has been impossible in the past with in-person programming to replicate for students entering in Winter, Spring, or Summer the orientation experience that the Fall students and families experience, despite our best efforts. The curation of a deep bank of resources can now serve all new students every quarter and is a strategy to continue.

Winter Advising & Orientation Planning

With the Fall Orientation, Advising, and Registration programs complete, we now turn to preparations for the Winter Quarter 2021 programs, which will also be delivered virtually. NSSFO is in the midst of finalizing dates and processes for sessions; sessions are anticipated to begin in mid-November as they have in previous years.

Other Welcome Events

During the opening week around the first day of classes, NSSFO participated in Zoom-based info sessions with the Associated Students' Info Fair and New Student Convocation. In past years, NSSFO annually hosted an in-person Out-of-State Student Dinner prior to classes starting. This year, we hosted a virtual Out-of-State Student Mixer. During our pandemic reality, we have also planned some alternative points of connections with those students and families at a distance. Our first mixer event had close to 30 student participants, giving us clear feedback that out-of-state students want to connect with Western and with classmates. NSSFO will look to plan additional events, likely in smaller groups by state or region, in the coming months.

Fall Family Weekend

NSSFO will host our annual Fall Family Weekend program via a virtual experience over the weekend of October 16-18, 2020. As mentioned in the last report, the Office of Admissions will be hosting their virtual Fall Admitted Student Day over the same weekend, so our offices are collaborating on ways to overlap some of our offerings and invite prospective students and families to join select events as part of Fall Family Weekend.

As with the Orientation programs, the schedule of events will be adjusted to match our delivery mode, and we are excited about the schedule that is coming together. While final details have yet to be confirmed, we're anticipating some really fun virtual events, including

- cooking demos by Huxley faculty member Gigi Berardi (cheese and breadmaking),
- pumpkin carving with our Orientation Student Advisor staff—complete with downloadable WWU stencil for a Viking-themed pumpkin,
- Planetarium shows, and
- links to resources that continue celebrating Huxley College's 50-year anniversary.

We're also working to continue our community partnership with Bellewood Farms to provide an online ordering option for "Brunch in a Box." Instead of our annual, in-person Brunch on the Farm, Bellewood is curating a box of starter items that can be shipped anywhere in the U.S. and features local products and recipes for an inspired meal at home.