Fall 2018 Enrollment Likely to Exceed 16,000

As of the date of this submittal, new student enrollment for Fall 2018 has slightly exceeded enrollment attained for Fall 2017. In addition, we are pleased to see what appears to be an increase in the retention of returning students from Spring 2018 to Fall 2018. These factors lead us to conclude that Fall 2018 enrollment will likely exceed 16,000.

Enrollment will continue to shift as students add and drop classes until the end of the peak date of October 5, with compilation of data occurring as soon as possible thereafter on October 8. Healthy enrollment of new and continuing students is the result of the myriad of strong collaborations and partnerships that have occurred on a campus wide basis to recruit and retain students.

Increased Student Demand for Fall Advising and Orientation

Most first-year students and accompanying family members attend Western’s Summerstart programs to receive comprehensive advising, registration and orientation, coordinated by New Student Services and Family Outreach. In fact, students and family members are strongly encouraged to attend Summerstart to help assure a smooth transition to Western’s campus. However, we have seen a 34% increase of approximately 300 attendees who have postponed these essential processes until the very last minute, specifically the Sunday and Monday before classes begin, by signing up for Fall Advising & Orientation instead. We have found that a larger proportion of nonresident students and their families are doing this to reduce the number of trips they make from their respective states to Western’s campus. In addition, we are seeing increases in attendance among students and families who have high financial need, to reduce travel costs.

The 34% increase in attendance places a great deal of pressure on a session structure that was designed to support a much smaller group of students and family attendees. Over the next few months, New Student Services and Family Outreach will pull multiple offices together to evaluate these impacts and discuss both capacity issues and quality of experience, with the goal of re-evaluating the Fall Advising & Orientation structure for possible changes as early as Fall 2019.
Western's low default rate can be attributed to the character of our students and their families, our students’ ability to become employed after graduation and the success of our Financial Aid Counselors and the Student Business Office to support informed borrowing. In addition, on a funds-available basis, Financial Aid provides financially needy students who have accumulated approximately $20,000 in debt with targeted grant and part-time employment opportunities to help with college expenses and keep borrowing at manageable levels. The most recent educational indebtedness data we have is from 2017, showing that 51% of Western Washington University students receiving bachelor’s degrees had educational debt averaging $15,663. This compares to 52% borrowing an average of $23,936 statewide and 65% borrowing an average of $28,650 nationally. Western remains an excellent financial value.