

# WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

## Strategic Plan 2018-2024

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a leading public comprehensive institution, Western Washington University serves the state of Washington and beyond through a focus on academic excellence and inclusive achievement by its students, staff, and faculty.

Western prides itself on providing quality education and a broad range of programs that lead to professional and academic careers. Western grounds every program in the liberal arts and sciences, enhancing student knowledge, skills, and creativity, and developing engaged citizens who are prepared to solve the increasingly complex and interdisciplinary challenges facing the state, the nation, and the world.

Established in 1893, Western is one of the top public Master's granting universities in the nation. Western is the highest-ranking public, master's-granting university in the Pacific Northwest and ranked second in the West, according to the U.S. News & World Report college rankings. Kiplinger's ranks Western among the top 100 public colleges and universities in the nation that offer the best quality and affordability. Western's recognition for academic excellence is further underscored by its third-place ranking among all master's-granting institutions nationally, for the number of its graduates awarded Fulbright Fellowships and by its ninth-place ranking, among all masters-granting institutions nationally, public or private, for the number of undergraduates who go on to earn doctorates.

Western's Strategic Plan provides a roadmap and vision for our future. Led by a university-wide Strategic Planning Committee, the process actively and extensively engaged the university community and relevant external stakeholders in the development of the plan.

The plan recognizes that higher education in the U.S. faces significant challenges, including affordability and student debt, stagnating graduation and retention rates, growing achievement gaps for historically underrepresented groups, public skepticism of the value of college education, globalization and the role of technology, and diminishing state and federal investments in higher education. It is informed by the Washington Student Achievement Council's Roadmap Report on education attainment goals and the projected workforce trends in the state. Most of all, this plan reaffirms our commitment to higher education as a public good which should be accessible to all qualified students.

The Strategic Plan (SP) articulates four goals to advance Western:

1. Provide a transformative education grounded in the liberal arts and sciences and based on innovative scholarship, research, and creative activity.
2. Advance a deeper understanding of, and engagement, with place.
3. Foster a caring and supportive environment where all members are respected and treated fairly.
4. Pursue justice and equity in its policies, practices, and impacts.

The strategic goals and objectives make good on our commitment to an equitable and transformative education for all students, and on our commitment to increasing Western's impact in Washington and beyond. Three unifying and recurring ideals emerge from the four goals and associated objectives—Advancing Inclusive Success, Increasing Washington Impact, and Enhancing Academic Excellence. These ideals are the essential pillars of institutional mission fulfillment and represent our commitment to each other, to our communities, and to the state of Washington.

## CONTEXT FOR THE PLAN: CHALLENGES FACING HIGHER EDUCATION

While there is much to celebrate about Western’s success over the past decade, higher education is faced with pressures and challenges that we must address, intentionally and effectively.

The Roadmap Report produced by the Washington Student Achievement Council, and adopted by the Washington legislature in 2013, set the foundation for Washington's educational attainment goals, that by 2023:

- All adults in Washington, ages 25–44, will have a high school diploma or equivalent
- At least 70 percent of Washington adults, ages 25–44, will have a postsecondary credential

Currently, these numbers are 90 percent and 51 percent, respectively. In the next decade, workforce projections in Washington indicate that two-thirds of the jobs in Washington will require some form of post-secondary education, yet Washington currently ranks 46<sup>th</sup> in the nation in college continuation rates. Additionally, there are about 700,000 adults in the state who have earned some college credits, but haven’t completed a degree; nationally, this number is nearly 40 million.

In addition to the economic imperative, we also believe there is a moral imperative to improving degree attainment. Six-year graduation rates from four-year college degree programs have been relatively stagnant, varying between 53 and 58 percent, and graduation rates of underrepresented groups are even lower—between 1970 and 2013, degree attainment for students from the bottom family income quartile has remained essentially constant at about nine percent. We are going to see increasingly more students attending our universities from the bottom family income quartiles, which also tend to be more ethnically and racially diverse.

The country as a whole is experiencing significant differences by region in high school graduates, with the Northeast and Midwest showing a continued and steady decline. According to the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, the projected total increase in high school graduates from 2017-18 to 2022-23 in the state of Washington is a mere 0.8 percent, with the white, non-Hispanic population expected to decrease by 2.7 percent, while the Hispanic population is expected to increase by 34.3 percent.

Government funding for higher education has been declining since the start of the Great Recession, and though funding has recently rebounded as the economy has steadily improved, Washington state still experienced a 20 percent decrease in state spending per student, after inflation adjustment, between 2008 and 2016. At the same time, the future of federal funding for academic research, grants and loans is, at best, uncertain.

The decline of state and federal funding has shifted more of the cost burden for higher education to students and their families, with the price of attending college rising significantly faster than growth in median income. Current student debt, not including family debt, is about \$1.45 trillion; nationally, for the graduating class of 2016, the average student debt was \$31,172, up six percent from the previous year. Consequently, students and their families, who are paying for an increasingly larger proportion of educational expenses, are asking for the “return on their investment.” There is a growing expectation from the public and lawmakers for institutions to demonstrate relevance and outcomes, with several states now experimenting with performance-based funding measures.

Competition for recruiting and retaining human talent—faculty, staff and students—has intensified nationally, as well as globally, as countries outside the U.S. place greater emphasis on higher education, and an increasing array of online educational offerings and providers are reshaping the higher education landscape. Artificial intelligence, machine learning, adaptive learning, robotics, and cloud technology are just

a few of the innovations changing the nature of jobs in the future. Employers expect that institutions will graduate students who are better prepared and workforce ready, including proficiency in skills like communications, critical thinking, problem solving and emotional intelligence, which are critical to the life-long learning and growth of individuals and their organizations.

The extraordinarily complex and important challenges facing our world, including issues like climate change, biodiversity, sustainable energy, and physical, mental and psychological health, require an interdisciplinary and integrative approach to education and research, and an educational model that extends beyond the traditional programmatic structures and more intentionally engages undergraduate and graduate students in the creative work of faculty to understand and address those issues.

Higher education is being challenged in many additional ways. Increased compliance laws have placed significant financial burden on many institutions. Campus health and wellness services are being stretched due to increased mental health and disability service needs, and sustaining a campus climate and an institutional culture that addresses sexual violence, promotes student safety, and encourages conversation on controversial issues, while affirming the fundamental dignity and respect that people of all identities deserve, are issues that will continually challenge campus communities.

Our 2018-2024 strategic plan is informed by our challenges and constraints, but it is not limited by them. The plan asserts our uncompromising commitment to student success, to positively impacting the state of Washington, the nation, and the world, and to further strengthening our academic and co-curricular programs.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN 2018-2024**

Western prides itself on providing quality education. A major strength of Western is our liberal arts and sciences foundation. We believe that preparing students for a job is not enough. The world needs graduates who have a strong foundation in the liberal arts and sciences—already a major strength of Western—so that they can become life-long learners, creative thinkers and determined problem solvers. Another strength of Western is the emphasis upon faculty/student interactions in research, scholarly and creative activities, classes, and community engagement. These strengths help foster informed, engaged, and creative graduates. Western is committed to enabling all students to have high-impact experiences and finding resources to allow all this to occur. We recognize that more can be done to prepare our graduates for success and are committed to continually improving our programs.

We recognize the importance of investing in a faculty culture of innovation and creativity that cuts across disciplines and integrates knowledge and exploration in our undergraduate and graduate programs. An innovative culture also means that we are open to new opportunities, including partnerships with other educational institutions and community organizations, public-private collaborations, new models for providing support services, and creatively and selectively using technology to enhance our institutional impact.

Western's location, on the Salish Sea, near an international border, among sovereign Native nations, positions us to better engage with the environment, communities, and cultures, both local and global. To do this, we must respect and better understand the varied cultures and histories of the Pacific Northwest and the world at large in our teaching, research, and service.

Western aspires to be a caring community. Our greatest strength is our people—our students, staff, faculty, and alumni. Our community cannot be taken for granted, and much work needs to be done to ensure that

every individual at Western can thrive professionally and personally. We must aim at student success, at a workplace where all employees have a voice that is heard and the opportunity to grow. It also means we must connect students, staff, faculty, and alumni to support and sustain each other.

Western is committed to justice and equity, to inclusive achievement and academic excellence, and to providing a safe, just, and equitable University for all students and employees. We must open our doors wider to welcome a more diverse student body, and we must ensure that we provide the environment and resources all students need to be successful. We must also ensure that Western more closely reflects the local and global diversity in which we live and we seek to advance. As such, we are committed to cultivating global citizenship in our graduates so they have the perspective to make well-informed judgements, the curiosity to learn about others' values and cultures, and the wisdom to challenge their own preconceived notions.

## **MISSION AND VALUES**

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

## **VISION**

Western Washington University prepares and inspires individuals to explore widely, think critically, communicate clearly, and connect ideas creatively to address our most challenging needs, problems, and questions.

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The Strategic Plan articulates four goals to advance Western. Our approach is somewhat non-traditional; we articulate our goals as *values* that we aspire to advance.

This work complements another important effort completed recently, the Sustainability Action Plan: 2015-2035, which builds on Western leadership in many areas of sustainability to define a comprehensive sustainability plan for the future (<https://sustain.wvu.edu/sustainability-action-plan/>).

A comprehensive list of institutional performance associated with each of the four goals is provided at <http://www.wvu.edu/provost/strategicplanning/index.shtml>.

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

*Western's educational experience will continue to be rooted in an active teaching and learning environment with a liberal arts and sciences foundation and robust co-curricular, internship, research, creative, and community engagement opportunities. Western will prepare students to be successful and engaged members of society, and will provide the tools to work in and across disciplines to identify and creatively solve key societal problems, both local and global. Western will recruit the best faculty and staff to support the growth and sustained flourishing of programs, departments, and centers that do this vital work.*

- A. Strengthen the liberal arts and sciences foundation to ensure and expand student access to the breadth of our undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs.
- B. 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.
- C. Increase support and infrastructure for all types of scholarship, research, and creative activity.
- D. Ensure that all students have access to high quality educational experiences beyond the classroom.
- E. 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.
- F. Through shared governance, align budgeting, capital planning and development to allow for agility in response to changes in student interests, state needs, and knowledge production and dissemination.
- G. Provide technological and other academic infrastructure to support curricular innovation, research, scholarship, and creative activity, civic engagement and social justice.

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

*At Western, we seek to engage place in all of its complexity. Place calls us to recognize debts and obligations to indigenous and Native nations, to the environment and sustainability, and to diverse and rich cultures within and across borders. Place inspires us to study with rigor and precision the complexity, vibrancy, and beauty of land and sea in Washington State and in the Pacific Northwest. Place moves us to think and act thoughtfully and creatively about where we are and how we connect with the wider world. Place beckons us to look at the past with care and to envision the future with curiosity, innovation, and creativity.*

- A. Take steps to acknowledge and honor the richness and multiple meanings of place, from local to state, national, and global.
- B. Support teaching, learning, research, scholarship, creative activity, and programming that engages with place in a respectful way.
- C. Support experiences inside and beyond the classroom that help develop an understanding of the region and its communities in all their natural and cultural richness and complexity.
- D. Recognize, honor, and respect the cultures, traditions, languages, rights, and knowledge of the indigenous and Native nations in the region.
- E. Weave the ecological, social, and economic dimensions of sustainability into and through the University's practices.
- F. Give all students educational experiences both in and beyond the classroom that help them develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities to nurture and create the conditions for people and planet to thrive.
- G. Increase engagement between Western and local communities.

- H. Increase the experiences through which students, staff, and faculty can engage with communities and environments in multiple regions in the world, both inside and beyond the classroom.

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

*Western's greatest strength is the outstanding students, faculty, staff, and alumni/ae who make up its community. Western supports an inclusive governance structure for all and provides a learning and working environment in which everyone can thrive.*

- A. Strengthen shared governance to ensure that students, staff, and faculty are meaningfully empowered in the university's policies, decisions, and direction.
- B. Support student, staff, and faculty wellbeing, including physical health and wellness, mental health, and disability resources based on universal design.
- C. Enhance student services and co-curricular opportunities to foster students' intellectual, personal, and professional development and success.
- D. Improve climate and working conditions for student employees, staff, and faculty at all locations.
- E. Provide competitive compensation and professional development for student employees, staff, and faculty.
- F. Expand networks between students, staff, faculty, and alumni/ae.

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

*Western sees equity, justice, inclusion, and diversity as fundamental principles calling for authentic engagement. Western acknowledges that, as an institution, it has failed to meet the needs of people of many races, ethnicities, creeds, socioeconomic classes, gender identities, sexual orientations, and disability statuses. WWU will contribute to redressing these inequities by transforming policies, structures, and practices to ensure meaningful inclusion.*

- A. Foster a positive and collaborative campus climate, including the physical environment, that welcomes and affirms the diversity of individuals, groups, cultures, and ideas.
- B. Establish, fund and sustain practices of self-examination and continuous improvement to identify, understand, and remediate structural injustices and inequities at Western.
- C. Recruit, retain, and support more underrepresented and first-generation students at the undergraduate and graduate levels.
- D. Implement model practices to improve our recruitment and retention of a diverse staff, faculty, and administration.
- E. Increase affordability of and access to high quality undergraduate and graduate education at all Western's locations.
- F. Support and strengthen curricula and other programming that engage issues of access, equity, power, and privilege in and across disciplines.
- G. Expand professional development opportunities for all staff and faculty to provide for additional leadership capacity in the effort toward equity and justice.
- H. Expand and support respectful collaborative relationships with community partners and underrepresented groups to advance equity and social justice.
- I. Pursue just action by taking all appropriate steps to protect survivors and to prevent sexual and other types of violence, discrimination, harassment, and bullying.

## **CONCLUSION: ACHIEVING OUR MISSION**

The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, the regional accreditation body for Western, requires that the institution define overarching constructs essential for advancing the institutional mission. Advancing inclusive excellence, increasing Washington impact and enhancing academic excellence represent those overarching constructs. While informed by our work on goals, objectives and associated performance metrics, we believe that progress on advancing institutional mission and vision requires making significant and continuous progress on these ideals.

### 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 are going to see increasingly more students attending our universities from the lowest family income quartiles, which also are more ethnically and racially diverse. At the same time, jobs in our global, knowledge-based economy, increasingly require postsecondary education, as reflected in the statistics that workers with a bachelor's degree or higher accounted for 73 percent of the 11.6 million jobs gained in the recovery after the great recession.

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.

### Increasing Washington Impact

In the next decade, two-thirds of the jobs in Washington will require some form of post-secondary education. According to the Washington Roundtable, there will be 740,000 job openings in Washington in the next five years, yet only 31 percent of Washington high school seniors go on to earn a postsecondary credential today.

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 significantly changing the nature of work and relationships.

### 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.

Western is well positioned to increase its impact and contributions in ways that build upon and maintain the essence of what has made us distinctive. 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 recognize that excellence and diversity go hand in hand. Our community will be richer and stronger if members of our community—students, faculty, staff and administrators—are drawn from the widest possible

range of socioeconomic and multicultural groups. 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.

### Benchmarks for Success

A comprehensive list of performance measures associated with goals and objectives is provided at <http://www.wvu.edu/provost/strategicplanning/index.shtml>. The following is a summary of some of the most important metrics which we believe are critical to mission fulfillment.

Metric	2015-16	2016-17	Target 2024-25
<b><u>INCLUSIVE SUCCESS</u></b>			
First-year Retention Rate			
Overall	82.4%	82.1%	87-90%
Students of Color, Underrepresented	80.0%	79.8%	87-90%
Pell Grant Eligible	78.4%	79.5%	87-90%
Six-year Graduation Rate			
Overall	71.2%	69.5%	75-80%
Students of Color, Underrepresented	61.8%	64.8%	75-80%
Pell Grant Eligible	65.4%	65.4%	75-80%
Transfer Four-year Graduation Rate			
Overall	77.6%	71.9%	75-80%
Students of Color, Underrepresented	72.6%	69.5%	75-80%
Pell Grant Eligible	73.6%	72.4%	75-80%
<b><u>WASHINGTON IMPACT</u></b>			
Degrees Awarded			
Total	3,645	3,783	4,300-4,600
Graduate	309	293	350-375
State's High Need Areas	1,207	1,276	1,450-1,500
Students of Color, Underrepresented	24.9%	25.3%	30-35%
Enrollment FTE for Off-campus & Extended Education	6.2%	6.5%	8-10%
<b><u>ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE</u></b>			
Tenure/Tenure-track Faculty			
Total Faculty	500	514	600-625
Faculty of Color, Underrepresented	15.2%	15.7%	18-23%
Students Graduating with High-Impact Experiences			
Research			
Research & Sponsored Programs Annual Revenue	\$12.5M	\$9.9M	\$15-20M
University Supported Research & Creative Activity	\$4.5M	\$5.9M	\$7-9M