

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

**TO:** Members of the Board of Trustees

**FROM:** Sabah Randhawa, President  
Faith Pettis, Board Chair

**DATE:** April 11, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Extension of Strategic Plan through 2028

**PURPOSE:** Action Item

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**Purpose of Submittal:**

To request Board approval for an extension of the 2018-2025 Strategic Plan through 2028.

**Background:**

On April 12, 2018, the Western Washington University (WWU) Board of Trustees adopted the 2018-2025 Strategic Plan that established three core themes for the strategic direction of the University: *Advancing inclusive success; Increasing Washington impact, and Enhancing academic excellence*, and four related goals: provide a transformational education grounded in the liberal arts and sciences, and based on innovative scholarship, research, and creative activity; advance a deeper understanding of and engagement with space; foster a caring and supportive environment where all members are respected and treated fairly; and pursue justice and equity in its policies, practices, and impacts. During its February 2024 Retreat, the WWU Board of Trustees moved to reaffirm its commitment to the 2018-2025 Strategic Plan framework and to extend the Plan through 2028 with increased emphasis on positioning Western as the region's premiere public comprehensive university dedicated to providing accessible, high-quality postsecondary education to the residents of the State of Washington, the broader Northwest region, and beyond.

**Proposed Motion:**

MOVED that the Board of Trustees of Western Washington University, upon the recommendation of the President, approve the 2024 Update to the Western Washington University Strategic Plan as presented. This document reaffirms the Board's commitment to the 2018-2025 Strategic Plan framework and extends the Plan through 2028.

**Attachments:**

2024 Update to Strategic Plan

Western Washington University  
Board of Trustees  
2024 Update to Strategic Plan:

*Positioning WWU as the State of Washington premiere public comprehensive university dedicated to providing access to high quality postsecondary education.*

**Introduction**

On April 12, 2018, the Western Washington University (WWU) Board of Trustees adopted the 2018-2025 Strategic Plan that established three core themes for the strategic direction of the University: *Advancing inclusive success; Increasing Washington impact; and Enhancing academic excellence.* During its February 2024 Retreat, the WWU Board of Trustees moved to reaffirm its commitment to the 2018-2025 Strategic Plan framework and to extend the Plan through 2028 with increased emphasis on positioning Western as the region’s premiere public comprehensive university dedicated to providing accessible, high-quality postsecondary education to the residents of the State of Washington and the broader Northwest region.

**Emerging Issues Since 2018**

The 2018-2025 Strategic Plan was driven by the State’s goal that at least 70 percent of Washington high school graduates complete a postsecondary education credential by age 26, a goal that is reflected by both an economic imperative to meet workforce projection needs and a moral imperative to increase access and degree attainment, particularly for populations historically underrepresented in higher education. Those two drivers are still as relevant today as they were in 2018.



Much has also changed since the 2018-2025 Strategic Plan was adopted. Declining birthrates across the U.S. are contributing to a sharp decrease in the traditional college age population, a demographic trend known as “the enrollment cliff,” while at the same time, an increasing share of Americans are skeptical of the value of a college degree, with more and more students and families deciding that college is no longer worth pursuing. The COVID 19 pandemic exposed social and economic inequalities within systems and institutions across society, including within higher education, where students from marginalized backgrounds were the most negatively impacted. Pell-eligible students accounted for 85% of the sharp drop in enrollment between 2020 and 2021 among Washington’s public universities and colleges. Prior to the pandemic, Washington already lagged well below the national average in the percentage of high school graduates enrolled in a postsecondary institution within a year of high school graduation, and college enrollment and completion rates in the state have dropped even more since the

pandemic. Today, only 40% of all Washington high school graduates are expected to complete a 2-year or 4-year degree by age 26, and fewer than one-third of Native American, Hispanic/Latino, and Black high school students in Washington are projected to earn a degree. This is in direct contrast to the fact that 90% of Washington high schoolers indicate they want to pursue a postsecondary degree after graduation, and the growing knowledge-based economy will continue to require more jobs be filled with individuals with a college degree. In Washington, well over 70% of jobs will require a college degree, with 68% of family wage jobs in the state requiring a 4-year degree or more.

### ***Emphasis on Expanding Access and Maintaining Excellence***

A review of Western's strategic plan in 2024 shows Western's goals and performance to be fundamentally sound. The board continues to strongly support the University's focus on the core strategic themes of *Advancing inclusive success; Increasing Washington impact; and Enhancing academic excellence*, which remain relevant and responsive to the State's challenges related to postsecondary educational attainment and creating a skilled workforce to meet industry demand. The board commends the many efforts initiated across the University since the plan was adopted aimed at advancing these strategic themes. In the area of inclusive student success, WWU has seen an increase in representation among students of color, as well as an increase in support services aimed at supporting an increasingly diverse student body and creating a sense of belonging across the campus community. Western also continues to make a positive impact to the State of Washington in a myriad of ways, including but not limited to increasing the number of students graduating with high-demand degrees, as well as an increase in degree programs offered in locations beyond WWU's Bellingham campus, which aim to serve students across a wider geographic area. Many positive developments have also occurred in the last six years in the area of enhancing academic excellence, including but not limited to an increase in academic programs and tenured faculty teaching those programs, establishing an honors college, and year-over-year increases in faculty-sponsored research projects that include student participation.

At the same time, given the low college enrollment and completion rates among Washington's young adults, coupled with the fact that WWU aspires to serve more low-income and first-generation students and students of color, the board also recognizes that WWU has the potential to do even more to support the state's educational and workforce needs. In the coming years, WWU should increase efforts to expand access to students who have historically been underserved by higher education. This will mean undertaking more efforts to meet students where they are, such as increasing outreach initiatives for Washington high school students who might otherwise not attend college, increasing enrollments at WWU-Peninsulas, and enhancing academic support services to ensure students have the support they need to succeed once they are enrolled at Western.

Western must also identify and implement strategies to enhance the University's tradition of academic excellence. This will require continued investments in WWU's world-class faculty who are the foundation of the University's core academic mission, as well as supporting other initiatives such as faculty and student-initiated research, and expansion of undergraduate and graduate degree programs needed to address the challenges of today and the future.

As part of the 2024 Update to the Strategic Plan, the board also expects WWU to respond nimbly, leaving room for innovation and exploration of new challenges and new ways WWU can be a leader in addressing some of the most pressing challenges facing the State of Washington and the nation.