TO: Members of the Board of Trustees  
FROM: President Sabah Randhawa on behalf of Melynda Huskey  
DATE: December 11, 2020  
SUBJECT: Enrollment Management Summary  
PURPOSE: Information Item  

I. Enrollment  

The pandemic has rewritten so much of our work and continues to reset enrollment expectations with each phase of the national story.  

Fall 2020 Enrollment  
While the census day numbers for fall are set and were reported to the Board of Trustees in a presentation at their October meeting, that is not the end of the story. What happens with those students through this quarter has important implications for Winter 2021 and for the commitment those students make to persist to a degree at Western. As of December 1, we had almost 3000 students elect to take at least one class under pass/no pass grading and almost 5000 total pass/no pass elections made by course, signaling the stress that is continuing to impact students during the pandemic. The Enrollment and Student Services team is working diligently to conduct meaningful outreach to students and to provide students with unique opportunities to connect to the Western community. This is vital in the effort to retain students at a time when students find it more difficult to identify their place in a virtual Western.  

Important in our enrollment planning is the loss that we experienced between Fall 2019 (total enrollment = 16,142) and Fall 2020 (total enrollment = 15,197). Within that gap of almost 1000 students were about 600 lost new first-year students and approximately 100 lost new transfer students. We have a chance to recapture some of those losses through deferrals from Fall 2020, but the vast majority of those losses will not be recaptured by recruitment efforts in the coming year. In short, that enrollment gap will stay with us as the Fall 2020 cohort moves through their college years. We will make every effort to recapture continuing students who may have stopped out of college during the pandemic, and we will work to win each deferral back for the 2021 cohort.  

Winter 2021 Enrollment  
The tables below show comparative data on applications, admits, and confirmations for winter, as of Wednesday, November 25, 2020, and compared to the same date in recent years. Noteworthy is the fact that deferrals from Fall 2020 provide a boost in the number of new first-years in our pipeline. So far, we are seeing a capture rate of about 2/3 on deferrals from fall. That said, new first-year students are always a small portion of our new
student population for winter. The majority of our new student population in winter is always transfer students. As community colleges in the state take larger enrollment hits, we are seeing a precipitous decline in transfer applications and confirmations. In short, we are expecting about 70 fewer new students (first-year and transfer combined) in Winter 2021 than we enrolled in Winter 2020.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New transfers—Bellingham</th>
<th>Applied</th>
<th>Admitted</th>
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<tr>
<td>2021*</td>
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<td>463</td>
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<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>712</td>
<td>571</td>
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<th>New transfers—other locations</th>
<th>Applied</th>
<th>Admitted</th>
<th>Confirmed</th>
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<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New first-year students—Bellingham</th>
<th>Applied</th>
<th>Admitted</th>
<th>Confirmed</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>97</td>
<td>62</td>
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<tr>
<td>2019</td>
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<td>75</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Winter 2021 includes 50 first-year deferrals and 66 transfer deferrals from Fall 2020. Of those (all of whom are reported in the applied and admitted categories), we have confirmations from 34 first-year deferrals and 43 transfer deferrals.

Fall 2021 Outlook and Insights

In anticipation of a highly competitive admissions cycle, our admissions team is admitting at a much faster pace than in recent years. As of December 2, 2020, we had admitted 23% more first-year candidates than we had at the same time last year. While our applicant pool is up slightly following our early action deadline, it is premature in this admissions climate to make comparisons to prior years. To give a sense of the volatility of the pool of college-bound students, we can share that among the Washington 4-year public institutions, we have admissions offices that are up as much as 16% as to applications and others that are down by 30% or more. In the February report to the Board of Trustees, we will be able to provide information about the Fall 2021 applicant pool with greater confidence.

National trends point to a particularly difficult year. Platforms like The Common Application and The Coalition for College Success are reporting declines in first-year applications submitted (source: https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2020/11/16/college-applications-are-decreasing). Forbes, relying on data from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, reports that Fall 2020 freshman enrollment is down 13% across the country and that community college enrollment is down about 19%. (source: https://www.forbes.com/advisor/student-loans/fewer-high-school-seniors-are-submitting-the-fafsa/) FAFSA submission is also down compared with Fall 2020 (source: https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2020/10/27/new-dashboard-tracks-fafsa-
completion-rates --down 16% as of the submission of this report, from the website https://formyourfuture.org/fafsa-tracker/). We are cooperating with Marketing & Community Relations and the Office of Financial Aid in the production of an advertising campaign to students and families that aims to inform and educate students about FAFSA/WAFSA completion and how to access state and federal grants. That campaign is designed to connect Western with financial support for education in the minds of Washingtonians. We anticipate increased opportunity—perhaps necessity—to operate as messengers of public information and resources beyond the immediate message about Western and its programs.

Administrators and teachers from the state’s high schools are expressing concern about student underachievement. Zoom Fatigue (read: lack of engagement), poor attendance, and larger numbers of failing grades often come up during conversations with colleagues from the other side of the desk. Rightfully, questions remain about how lower grades may affect students’ opportunities for admission and eligibility for merit awards. We will continue to commit to a holistic review process for admission to Western and seek to take into account the full scope of each student’s experiences and accomplishments.

An SAT/ACT optional admissions process was given temporary approval through Fall 2021 and has been in use by the admissions team. This fall, the Faculty Senate voted to endorse a proposal that Western move to a test-optional admissions process on a permanent basis, and the President’s Cabinet and President Randhawa have made official the move to a test-optional admissions process. Going forward, Western will no longer require students to submit ACT or SAT scores as part of their application for first-year admission. Students have the option to submit scores, and if submitted, those will be considered alongside other materials as part of our holistic review process. We are proud to join a growing national movement, recognizing the systemic inequities that students from underserved communities have on their path toward higher education.

We will continue to think creatively about how to connect with more students—particularly those most at risk for “under-engagement” (e.g. lack of access to technological resources or time with school counseling staff). We hope to feature content that is fun (e.g. social media quizzes) and informative (e.g. Financial Aid info sessions) in a manner that appeals to both students and families. As expressed previously, our collaboration with internal stakeholders and external partners will be among the most significant factors in successfully recruiting the Fall 2021 class.

II. Registrar

The Registrar’s Office continues to review policies and procedures relating to registration, class scheduling, grading, academic standing, degree evaluation and commencement, in an effort to improve the student experience in a remote environment. A challenge has been finding the best way to keep the campus community informed of temporary policy changes and changes to long-standing practices, understanding many are experiencing information overload.

- School Withdrawals – We have a number of indications that our students continue to struggle in the remote learning environment. School withdrawals are one such indicator. Despite the lower total enrollment in Fall 2020, we have a higher number of school
withdrawals this fall (with two weeks left to go) than we did in all of last fall, and that is with
pass/no pass as an option for all classes.

- **Fall 2020 Election of Pass/No Pass** – Also important in signaling the academic challenges
  students continue to face, is the rate at which they are seeking the pass/no pass option for
  grading. Approximately 19.4% of our students (2,921) elected to have one or more courses
  graded on a pass/no pass basis this quarter. Almost half of our classes have at least one
  student registered for pass/no pass grading, with a total of 4,810 pass/no pass options
  elected for fall classes. More than 500 students are taking all of their classes under pass/no
  pass grading.

- **Collecting Tribal Affiliation and Enrollment Information** – To achieve key initiatives
  related to our institutional relationships with Native American communities and tribes and to
  better serve Native American students, the Registrar’s Office, in collaboration with the
  Executive Director of Tribal Relations and Tribal Liaison, is creating an online tool for
  collecting and recording tribal affiliation and enrollment information for our continuing Native
  American students.

- **Degree Works Upgrade** – The Systems Team completed a major upgrade to our degree
  audit system which positions us for future enhancements to include ADA compliant
  accessibility and a mobile-friendly platform. The Registrar’s Office has developed a
  relationship with the Degree Works principal software developer, and we are providing
  feedback to improve the product to better support student time-to-degree.

- **Enhancement to the Student Success Navigate System** – In an effort to foster a
  respectful and inclusive university community, the Registrar’s Office has partnered with the
  LGBTQ+ director and Student Success Initiatives to facilitate programming required to
  provide faculty and advisors the ability to view student pronouns in the Navigate system.

- **Winter Course Scheduling** – We have completed the complicated work of rebuilding
  the winter schedule, utilizing the new instructional modalities developed for remote teaching
  during the pandemic. Between 6 and 7% of our winter classes are scheduled to be held
  face-to-face or with some face-to-face component (hybrid). Again, we have worked with
  campus partners to ensure that all face-to-face and hybrid 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

**2019-20 Financial Aid Disbursements: $144 Million to 10,807 Western Students**

Financial aid disbursements for the 2019-20 school year exceeded $144 million to 10,807
student financial aid recipients. (This compares to $145 million in aid disbursements to
10,919 financial aid recipients the year before.)

- Grants: $46.8 million
- Scholarships: $23.8 million
- Student Employment: $13.4 million
- Educational loans: $59.6 million
- Miscellaneous: $.4 million
Important Notes on 2019-20 disbursements:

- The $46.8 million in Federal grants included $4.7 million in Federal Higher Education Emergency Relief Funding “CARES” grant disbursed to students who incurred expenses due to campus disruption from COVID-19.
- Washington College Grant disbursements increased from $18.1 million in 2018-19 to $20.4 million in 2019-20, as a result of increased investment by the state.
- Financial Aid accepted an additional $158,361 in Washington College Grant de-obligated by other schools and awarded it to Western students.
- Financial Aid accepted an additional $80,000 in State Work Study de-obligated by other schools and awarded it to Western students.
- The Financial Aid Student Employment Center worked with supervisors of student employees to support continued employment of students in a remote environment. Despite the impact of the pandemic, 80% of Western’s student employees continued to work remotely during 2019-20.

Although some financial aid pays for expenses due and payable to Western on student accounts, a significant portion of financial aid is disbursed to students to pay for other educationally related expenses, such as rent and food expenses associated with living off campus, transportation, child care, etc. Financial aid is funding for student recipients as opposed to revenue to the University. Aid is disbursed to students in accordance with prescribed regulatory requirements, which includes application to specific charges on student accounts. Often, there is aid remaining after allowable expenses have been paid on student accounts. This aid is disbursed to students, which they use to pay for educationally related expenses that are not due and payable to Western.

Federal HEERF CARES Grant Update

A projected 99% of the $5,820,847 in Federal HEERF CARES allocation has been disbursed to an estimated 5,078 Western students. The balance remaining has been reserved for students who will incur health care, quarantine, and isolation expenses from COVID-19. Any funds remaining will be disbursed to Western students at the beginning of Winter 2021.

The University was specifically directed to be “mindful of socioeconomic status” by the U.S. Department of Education. For all CARES grant funds disbursed since April 2020, an estimated 83% have been awarded to students with financial need calculated from the FAFSA. An estimated 57% of
all CARES disbursements were made to Pell-eligible students, a subset of students with financial need. (Not all needy students are Pell-eligible.) An estimated 17% of CARES grants were awarded to students without calculated financial need from the FAFSA, but who were otherwise CARES-eligible at the point of awarding and had situational need from campus disruption due to COVID-19. Financial Aid did not use race/ethnicity as a basis for awarding CARES funds, and in fact is prohibited from doing so, but data shows that an estimated 40% of CARES disbursements were made to students of color.

So far, CARES grants have been awarded based on the following expenses:

- Housing: 31.90%
- Technology: 22.45%
- Relocation: 20.10%
- Food: 07.86%
- Utilities: 07.26%
- Course materials: 04.75%
- Transportation: 02.46%
- Health care: 02.03%
- Child care: 00.63%
- Other: 00.56%

Total: 100.00%

FAFSA Fridays, WASFA Wednesdays
Financial Aid routinely provides one-on-one FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) completion support to our local community by partnering with Futures Northwest and Whatcom County high schools. To provide an additional level of support during these difficult times, Financial Aid initiated “FAFSA Fridays” by offering virtual appointments every Friday to new and current students and families to assist with FAFSA completion. In addition, Financial Aid is reaching out to campus partners to initiate WASFA Wednesdays to assist undocumented and DACA-eligible students with the Washington Application for State Financial Aid.

Marketing Campaign Focused on Financial Aid
Western’s marketing team is creating a marketing campaign to highlight the availability of support staff to assist in all matters of financial aid. The advertising campaign will invite prospective students to meet with financial aid team members, as well as help students navigate to specific sections of the financial aid website. University Marketing is in the process of creating a landing page and consumer-facing front end page on the financial aid website. The advertising campaign will promote FAFSA completion, the Washington College Grant, and Western’s financial aid support services. Student contact information will be captured for recruitment purposes.

Western’s Fiscal Year 2017 Federal Cohort Default Rate: 2.7%
The newest three-year federal cohort default rates have been issued, and Western’s rate remains unchanged at 2.7%. This rate reflects positively on the character of Western students and their ability to keep up with their loan payments. The federal default rate includes students who have borrowed through the Federal Subsidized and Unsubsidized Direct Loan programs. The national average of cohort default rates is 9.7%. Of the six Washington four-year public institutions, three cohort default rates increased, two decreased, and one (Western’s) remained the same as calculated for the prior year. Western has the second lowest default rate—second only to UW. Limitation or termination
of participation in Federal Student Aid programs becomes an issue when cohort default rates are 30% or more, so Western remains in good standing in this regard.

IV. New Student Services/Family Outreach

New Student Services/Family Outreach has three primary areas of focus as we reach the end of Fall 2020 and move into Winter 2021.

Winter Orientation, Advising, and Registration Programs
The first is supporting new Winter 2021 students as they navigate their orientation, advising, and registration process. This year, four sessions are set in partnership with Academic Advising and the Registrar's Office; we have completed two, with two to go. Previously, three sessions were set up: two in November for transfer students around the time of Phase I registration opening, and one in January for transfers and all first-year students that was held the day before classes. With an increased number of first-year students opting to defer from Fall to Winter quarter, and considering the requirement of first-year students to attend a session, Academic Advising set a new, fourth session in mid-December that is open to both transfer and first-year students. Like the session for first-year students in January, they will also be able to register for classes at the time of the program in December. The reservations and attendance count of the Winter sessions so far are looking strong, and quite comparable to years past. We expect the December session will prove influential for enrollment, by anchoring students in their classes earlier and with more support.

Review and Assessment of Fall Programming
Another area of focus is assessment. Notably, NSSFO and campus partners will begin review of the survey results from the Fall Orientation, Advising, and Registration programs, including experiential feedback from both transfer and first-year students. With a complete transformation of process and delivery for all the components of orientation for new students, our assessment questions had a different approach, focusing on critical areas of experience: 1) quality/clarity of communications; 2) quality/use of resources (web and print); 3) quality of experiences; 4) knowledge acquisition; and, 5) quality of connection to Western.

While we will begin reviewing and interpreting the results with campus partners in the next month, the initial read of results appears fairly positive, and of similar timber and tone to the in-person experiential feedback received previously. An area of challenge in the remote/virtual environment is still cultivating a feeling of connection to place. Immersion in the physical environment of Western is impactful. In our current environment, we can see and feel the emotional impact of COVID-19 on our new students who are navigating a remote/virtual experience that "doesn't feel like their choice". The innovations and insight for the orientation, advising, and registration programs moving to virtual delivery, however, have had some very positive outcomes and opportunities. While components of the virtual delivery do support students and families in new, positive ways, a challenge ahead for us, and campus as a whole, is how we continue "nurturing the heart" and well-being of our students through this broader pandemic experience and evolution.

Some initial highlights on the programs and takeaways from the student surveys:
• Attendance rates were slightly lower than in previous years. (Attendance rate: the difference between the initial number of reservations and the number who actually showed up—which is affected by withdrawals and deferrals, among other things.) The transfer student attendance rate was 92.2% (compared to ~95% / 4-year average), and first-year student attendance rate was 93.66% (compared to ~98% / 4-year average). This seems in keeping with attendance rates for virtual events of all kinds.

• Overall Attendance was down commensurate with the decline in enrollment, impacted by the effects of COVID-19, increased deferrals, and other intervening factors. Transfer students are not required to attend an advising and registration session, but first-year students are. Transfer attendance was 839 (vs. 887 / 4-year average); first-year attendance was 2,557 (vs. 3,105 / 4-year average).

• Satisfaction rates for class schedules also remained high, similar to our experience in recent years. Transfer students reported ~77% being "very" or "moderately" satisfied with their schedule (vs. ~74% / 4-year average). First-year students reported ~90% being "very" or "moderately" satisfied with their schedule (vs. ~86% / 4-year average).

• Two years ago, NSSFO began contracting with a vendor for language translation services for our new student and family handbooks and WWU calendars. This year for the first time, students were able to make a request for Spanish-language materials on the reservation form when they signed up for an advising and registration session. We were also able to ask students in their survey for examples of other preferred languages for materials, and students indicated Russian, Chinese, Lao, Vietnamese, and Braille. We look forward to continuing work with our vendor to expand our offerings moving forward.

Departmental Assessment
Moving into December and into Winter quarter, the NSSFO staff will also begin a new round of Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) reviews for both the Orientation Programs and the Parent/Family Programs. We look forward to this assessment process in light of the many new iterations of service and program delivery, with the goal of finishing the reviews by the end of winter quarter.