Western State Colorado University
2015-2018 Draft Strategic Plan

Submitted by President Salsbury and Cabinet
(September 30, 2014)

WESTERN STATE COLORADO UNIVERSITY

Learning, Elevated.

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2015-2018 Draft Strategic Plan

Introduction and Overview

This 2015-2018 Western Strategic Plan outlines initiatives to raise the visibility and reputation of Western and better enable the institution to fulfill its mission, while adhering to the five Board of Trustees' values: quality, achievement, innovation, growth and fiscal responsibility. Related to every part of the campus, the goals of the strategic plan aim to leverage the university's distinctive advantages: first, the special bonds cultivated between students, faculty, staff and Western's stakeholders; second, the natural, social and cultural environment that provides a world-class setting for education; and third, the value of an affordable, high-quality education.

These goals are critical for the campus. As we realize them, Western's fiscal health, the vibrancy and energy that comes from more students, and its reputation will all improve, elevating the entire university community.

The strategic plan's five goals, with associated metrics and initiatives, are:

1. **Increased Enrollment**, as measured by annual increases in headcount, Full Time Equivalent Students (FTES) and number of diverse students. Increased enrollment will lead to higher tuition revenues, along with more efficient use of facilities and staff resources. This aligns with the Trustees' value of growth. Initiatives include:
    - Marketing-mix and advancement development efforts.
    - Growth of Concurrent Enrollment programming.
    - Expansion of the School of Business.
    - Increased enrollment of diverse students.
    - Increased enrollment of international students.
    - Expansion of graduate programs.

    Lead: Marketing & Institutional Advancement.

2. **Improved Institutional Outcomes**, as measured by either annual improvement or continued, favorable peer-group comparisons, regarding: freshman-to-sophomore retention rate, six-year graduation rate, student debt levels and student loan default rates. Furthermore, during the period of the strategic plan, we will establish a post-graduate-placement tracking system, along with metrics detailing graduate school attendance and employment. Improved institutional outcomes include growth in student success, faculty productivity, and academic integrity and quality. This aligns with the Trustees' values of quality and achievement. Initiatives include:
    - Retention programs for first- and second-year students

- Engagement of students through intensive coursework, undergraduate research experiences, co- and extra-curricular activities, and leadership development.
- Exploring bridge programs, summer school and gap-year options.
- Internationalization and diversification of curricula.
- Ensuring a safe and secure campus environment.
- Campus-to-career programming.

Lead: Academic Affairs, in collaboration with Student Affairs and Marketing & Institutional Advancement.

3. **Increased Funding**, as measured by growth in annual revenues from donor support, partnerships and collaborations, grants and sponsored programs, and cash-funded programs. In the face of uncertain state contributions, Western must aggressively pursue funding sources beyond increased tuition and student fees, such as gifts and donations, industry collaborations, grants, and sponsored research. This effort aligns with the Trustees' value of fiscal responsibility.
   - Marketing and Institutional Advancement and School of Business outreach to potential donors and partners.
   - Increasing reach of Office of Sponsored Programs to promote grant activity.
   - Increased offerings of graduate programming.

   Lead: President.

4. **Enhanced Operational Efficiency**, as measured by administrative expense as a portion of overall costs, when compared with peers. Concurrent with efforts to broaden the financial base through increased enrollment and other funding, resources should be used optimally and responsibly. Western aspires to be the most efficient institution possible in this context, maximizing operational and fiscal efficiency. This priority aligns with the Trustees' values of fiscal responsibility, innovation and quality. Initiatives include:
   - Process Improvements and Administrative Effectiveness.
   - Evolution of the Academic Administrative Structure.

   Lead: Finance & Administration.

5. **Improved Third-Party Assessments**, as measured by annual accumulative awards, rankings and evaluations by third parties, as tracked by the university. Western's reputation plays a major role in: student and faculty recruitment; donors' and grant agencies' willingness to support the institution; and the public and private entities' interest in partnering with us. Such external evaluations are often widely shared. Institutional action can, to some degree, influence such reviews. These efforts align with the Trustees' value of achievement. Initiatives include:
   - Revisiting the mission statement to include distance education and graduate programs.

- Strengthening the General Education curriculum to reflect the values of a liberal arts education.
- Increasing the diversity of students, faculty, and staff (see separate Strategic Planning Initiative).
- Strengthening support for faculty and student research.
- Improving the system of performance evaluation for faculty and staff.

Lead: Marketing & Institutional Advancement.

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Initiatives and Tactics for Goals

Goal 1: Increased Enrollment

Enrollment growth is a principal goal in Western's strategic plan. A decade of slow decline has hurt the university, prompting concern among the community, alumni, legislators and other constituents. With steadily decreased state funding and limited tuition increases, growing enrollment offers the clearest path to revenue gains and fiscal health. Beyond financial benefits, higher enrollment helps fulfill Western's educational mission, with synergies gained from a larger and more diverse student body. Finally, enrollment growth will provide opportunities for the campus community to realize objectives from the Board of Trustees' Value Statement. It could, for instance, attract investments for innovation and to support student achievement.

The initiatives and tactics for increasing Western's enrollment include:

a. Marketing-mix and advancement efforts.
b. Growing concurrent-enrollment programming.
c. Expanding the School of Business.
d. Increasing enrollment of diverse students.
e. Increasing enrollment of international students.
f. Expanding graduate programs.

Increased enrollment will be measured by:

- Annual increases in total headcount.
- Annual increases in total FTES.
- Annual increases in headcount of diverse students.

Initiative 1a: Marketing-Mix and Advancement Efforts

Marketing and institutional advancement includes messaging, outreach and relationship management to increase understanding and support among Western's key constituents. These include prospective students and their families, alumni and friends, government policy makers, the news media, members of the community, and philanthropic entities of all types.
The university will create a division for Marketing & Institutional Advancement led by a vice president. The new division will include our existing Admissions, Student Financial Services, University Communications and Alumni Relations departments.

A primary responsibility of the Advancement team will include crafting *The Western Story* to effectively communicate the value of a Western education. They will engage and train the campus community to deliver *The Western Story*, helping all become expert recruiters. This will position the university for ongoing success in student recruitment, fundraising, general awareness and brand building, all of which support Western's role and mission, along with the values established by the Board of Trustees.

Development of the university advancement area will include, but not be limited to, expanding recruitment in Western's primary market, brand building, donor development, engagement of faculty and staff in the recruitment and fundraising process, and meaningful engagement of alumni.

Initiative 1b: Growing Concurrent Enrollment Programming

Concurrent Enrollment includes high school students taking university courses that lead to dual credits – contributing to both high school and higher-education degrees. Concurrent Enrollment counts directly toward Western's headcount and credit-hour production for participating academic programs. It is included in FTES metrics. For all courses, except those at the remedial level in schools beyond Gunnison and Chaffee counties, the university is also eligible to receive College Opportunity Fund stipends for participating high school students.

Further advantages include building relationships with high school students early on, since they receive classes and on-campus programming. Successful concurrent students also qualify for scholarships, which encourage them to enroll as degree-seeking students at Western in future years. Given the diversity of school districts with which Western collaborates, the Concurrent Enrollment program may draw more diverse and higher-ability students.

Western has a distinctive model for Concurrent Enrollment that helps participating teachers with professional development. This teacher-mentor program allows Western to build productive relationships with high school instructors and administrators across the region. This helps the university recruit master's degree-seeking teachers, place student teachers in the districts, expand Teacher Institute programming, and find partners for grants and research projects in the region.

Initiative 1c: Expanding the School of Business

Expanding the School of Business aims to increase the enrollment in and reputation of Western's Business, Accounting, Economics and Marketing programs. This will help attract needed resources and top-notch faculty. The school will pay particular attention to increasing career success, retention and graduation rates, to the internationalization of its programs, and to the continued development of their curricula. The school will investigate the feasibility of adding master programs, degree-completion programs and specialized accreditation.

A second, important aspect of the expansion will be the building and strengthening of relationships with alumni, donors and corporate partners. As part of this initiative, the school has added a speaker series that features alumni and other prominent business leaders.

Initiative 1d: Increasing Enrollment of Diverse Students

This initiative proposes a range of measures to recruit and retain more diverse students. It aligns with *Colorado Competes*, the state's higher education master plan and Western's performance contract with the State of Colorado, which requires increased diversity among Western students, as we seek to reach more underserved populations, particularly Hispanic students. These initiatives also include plans to maintain and expand outreach to the Ute tribes. Few Native American students enroll at Western, because other institutions in the state are designated and funded to support them. Those who, nonetheless, come to us are academically successful and report a positive educational experience.

Statistically, those from underrepresented groups are often first-generation college students, often know little about higher education and may face linguistic challenges, both in their native language and in English. In Colorado, they also tend to come from economically disadvantaged households. While the proposed initiative contains a range of interventions to address these challenges, it is important to acknowledge that "diverse" students are not a homogeneous group. Western must create specific promotions and programming geared toward their unique needs. We must also adopt best practices to consistently avoid inadvertent stereotyping and discrimination.

Along with ethnic diversity, Western's enrollment team focuses on gender balance across campus. Many of the university's offerings and the outdoor opportunities of the Gunnison Valley have traditionally attracted male students. The enrollment team will reach out to prospective female students to help balance the Western's gender gap.

This is a large and transformative initiative that requires contributions and support from units and offices across the campus. The different goals for this initiative are divided into the following categories, each with a list of specific tactics:

- Targeted university communications, marketing and outreach.
- Recruitment and retention of diverse students.
- Academic programs that support diversity education.

Initiative 1e: Increasing Enrollment of International Students

Traditionally, Western has not attracted many international students. We recruit most based on their athletic talents. So far, we have not offered specific services and programs to support them. Nevertheless, most students who come here from overseas have been successful. They have graduated at significantly higher rates than domestic students.

Western presents an extraordinarily attractive destination for international students. With some enhancements in services and the addition of English language support, it should be possible to significantly increase their numbers.

Since international students, by and large, require the same types of support as diverse domestic students, Western should capitalize on services geared toward increasing diversity. In addition to the benefit of the university receiving higher out-of-state tuition rates from international students, there are advantages in "bringing the world to Gunnison." This allows all our students the opportunity to encounter cultural and linguistic diversity in our classrooms, preparing them for success in an increasingly diverse society and global economy.

Initiative 1f: Expanding Graduate Programs

The reintroduction of graduate programs at Western since 2010 has been an unmitigated success. High-quality programs with steady growth and high returns on investment have added to the university's visibility and reputation. They have facilitated connections to several regional, national and international partners to whom Western and its students would otherwise have less access. Further, graduate programs provide opportunities to connect with and engage undergraduate alumni. They help the university successfully seek grants and private contributions.

In the next three years, we will consider or add four or five additional graduate programs: Master of Science in High Altitude Exercise Physiology, Master of Arts in Health Education, Master of Arts in Exhibit Specialization & Gallery Management, and possibly a Master of Business Administration or similar programming. Further, the Master of Fine Arts program is contemplating an additional, possibly residential track; Education is exploring the addition of a Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics or Environmental Education track, and the feasibility of a terminal degree; and the Master of Arts in Gallery Management program could easily add a track in Museum Management, collaborating with History and Anthropology faculty.

Goal 2: Improved Institutional Outcomes

Improved Institutional Outcomes quantify the academic success of students and faculty at an institution of higher learning. They focus on the ways in which students move through their academic programs, the quality of their instruction and support they receive, and the success they find after graduation.

These metrics measure accreditation, financial aid eligibility and levels of state support. They are essential to the institution's continued viability. More importantly, the qualities measured indirectly by these metrics relate to the heart of Western's mission and purpose, which is to strive for excellence in instruction and serve students to the best of our abilities. The initiatives and tactics for improving Western's core institutional outcomes include:

a. Retention programs for first- and second-year students.

b. Engagement of students through intensive coursework, undergraduate research experiences, co- and extra-curricular activities, and student leadership development.
c. Exploring bridge programs, summer school, and gap-year options.
d. Internationalization and diversification of curricula.
e. Ensuring a safe and secure campus.
f. Campus-to-career programming.

Improved Institutional Outcomes will be measured by:

- Freshman-to-sophomore retention rates, with either increased annual improvement or continued, favorable, peer-group comparisons.
- Six-year graduation rates, with either annual improvement or continued, favorable peer-group comparison.
- Establishment of a post-graduate placement tracking system and metrics quantifying graduate school attendance and employment.
- Student debt levels falling annually or continuing to compare favorably with our peer group.
- Loan default rates falling annually or continuing to compare favorably with our peer group.

Initiative 2a: Retention Programs for First- and Second-Year Students

Every experience a student has on campus – from classroom learning to co-curricular activities to interactions within the Residence Life system – is liable to impact a student's decision to stay for another semester. To the degree it is within the university's control, faculty and staff must identify and remove obstacles to persistence, creating a positive and supportive environment conducive to engagement and success.

Western's retention has grown by almost 20 percent in recent years, earning an improvement by 100 points in *Forbes'* annual rankings, and catapulting us into the list of top 500 U.S. colleges, and the top 100 institutions in the West. We seek to build on these gains and translate them into correlating graduation numbers in the coming years.

Tactical objectives to support increasing retention and graduation rates of Western students include:

- Further assessment and development of the First-Year Experience and SophoMORE Experience.
- Investigating further implementation of Living/Learning Communities.
- Academic program building for retention.
- Building co- and extra-curricular academic communities.
- Bridge, summer and gap-year programming for underclassmen.
- Recruiting and coaching to engage and retain, along with investigating Assessment, Coaching & Engagement software solutions.
- Assessing the value of a co-curricular transcript.

Born from the previous Western strategic plan, the First-Year Experience has improved retention. However, the program needs additional development, particularly with the Living/Learning Communities. A few such communities, such as the Honors grouping, have thrived. But all have not. Also worth exploring, are communities that revolve around lifestyle interests, such as outdoor recreation or sustainability. We must further assess and consider FYE development.

Institutional Research shows successful completion of Essential Skills courses (Mathematics and Writing) in the General Education curriculum forms a foundation for student success. Hence, in 2014-2015, Western will add Supplemental Academic Instruction to help students quickly complete any required remediation. For GE courses with higher DFW rates (the percentage of a class that earns a D, F or withdraws without completing), Western offers Supplemental Instruction. SI provides academic support through peer-assisted study sessions. The SI program expanded over the past two years, and faculty and administrators should continue assessment of this investment.

Finally, Western should develop Third-Year and Fourth-Year experiences. Consistent with developing federal policies around outcomes for graduates, the Third- and Fourth-Year experiences will focus on major-specific advising. This will encourage appropriate academic achievement, participation in the academic communities within students' disciplines and access to resources focused on post-graduate opportunities. This effort includes developing a new Career & Internship Center, offering more students internships during their junior and senior years, career- and graduate school-related programming, as well as implementing academic capstones in all majors, as signature experiences for a completed Western education.

Initiative 2b: Engagement of Students Through Intensive Coursework, Undergraduate Research Experiences, Co- and Extra-curricular Activities, and Student Leadership Development

Students only spend 12 to 18 hours each week in the classroom, leaving engagement outside of class as a core opportunity to build a successful, residential-campus learning experience. This initiative and its tactics are grounded in research that shows how campus involvement leads to student development.

Both academic and support staff will lead the engagement effort, which will include intensive coursework, hands-on research experiences, co- and extra-curricular activities, along with enhanced training and opportunities for student leadership.

Academic departments and academic support staff must continually improve programming aimed at engaging students and boosting the quality of student interactions with faculty and staff. They must document in their program assessments and reviews how their programs' rigor compares to national standards, which practical and hands-on experiences they offer, how they

support students in undergraduate research, and how they engage students in co-curricular programming. Likewise, all Student Affairs staff must engage in offering campus activities, enabling involvement, creating community, and developing personal and leadership skills in Western students.

Initiative 2c: Exploring Bridge Programs, Summer School and Gap-Year Options

Offering credit-bearing activities outside of regular fall and spring semester schedules provides several advantages for students. These offerings can take the form of:

- Summer bridge programming.
- Summer school programming development.
- Gap-semester programming.

Summer bridge programming could include remedial courses for incoming freshmen before they begin their first semester at Western, providing an opportunity to earn more credits in a shorter time and/or distribute academic workloads more conveniently. This programming, combined with a Wilderness Education course, could create community, engagement and a sense of accomplishment. It could ensure academically underprepared students have a good start. With five or six credits successfully earned, these students would also be less vulnerable to Financial Aid probation or suspension if their first semesters do not go well. This would help a challenged student through his or her crucial first year.

Summer school could attract students from across the country and from abroad for a one-of-a-kind academic experience deep in the heart of the Rockies. Such programming could enhance Western's visibility and reputation. It would help recruitment of transfer students. Summer school could also offer programming for middle and high school students, and it could further help alleviate capacity issues experienced with popular introductory courses – without having to increase full-time-equivalent faculty.

Gap-semester programming consists of a semester or year of credit-bearing learning experiences outside the classroom. Extended Studies could offer courses such as wilderness-based education, service learning and/or study-abroad options. Such a semester could appeal particularly to incoming, undecided freshmen, as well as to students seeking a break or a fresh experience. It, too, could bolster recruitment and retention of students.

Initiative 2d: Internationalization and Diversification of Curricula

Diversifying academic programming and internationalizing the curricula aim to offer opportunities for global engagement for faculty, staff and students. It could increase Western's reach and reputation among local and prospective students interested in other cultures and study abroad, and conversely, international students seeking academic opportunities at Western.

Ultimately, this initiative will engage all students in coursework and/or co-curricular programming related to multicultural and global issues. It will improve the currency and value of Western degrees in an increasingly globalized culture and economy.

Initiative 2e: Ensuring a Safe and Secure Campus

A safe and secure campus is fundamental to student success. To recruit, retain and help students persist to graduation, we must ensure their basic needs for a safe and orderly environment. According to a recent, online student survey by Strategic Enrollment Management, campus safety perceptions were key to many students' and parents' decisions for or against particular colleges and locations (SEM Works, 2007)[1]. In a survey of more than 12,000 college-bound students in 20 states, more than 80 percent said safety was a very important factor when choosing a college. Among female students, safety was the second or third most important factor when considering a university.

The following strategies can ensure a safe and secure campus: enhancing the security of our campus facilities, offering more preventive education focused on social interactions, and increasing the number of campus constituents participating in wellness training and activities. These efforts and outcomes must be communicated to various constituents, prospective students and the public, in a positive manner that reflects Western's core values.

Tactical objectives to support this initiative include, among others: safe university transportation; enhanced campus-safety promotional campaigns; increased security services, with 24/7/365 professional staffing; full implementation of federally mandated Title IX education; and holistic wellness programs.

Initiative 2f: Campus-to-Career Programming

Institutions of higher education face increasing pressure from federal and state agencies to produce high career-placement rates. More importantly, many of today's incoming students enroll in college for the primary purpose of career placement or advancement.

This impetus aligns well with our institutional mission to deliver academic programs that provide a foundation for professional careers or graduate study. This initiative proposes expansion of the Career Services office, which will help students transition into their chosen professions, better align academic programming such as internships with regional and national employers, and help improve tracking and documentation of students as they move from campus to career.

[1] SEM Works, http://www.semworks.net/papers/sem-works-report-campus-safety.php

An enhanced Career & Internship Center will further benefit the university by increasing the job-placement rate of graduating seniors, employer and alumni involvement and the number of internship providers. It will bolster our ability to track students' success after graduation. It will fundamentally increase the value proposition of a Western education.

Tactical objectives in support of this initiative include:

- Marketing and outreach to employers and internship providers.
- Streamlining of administrative processes.
- Enhanced career-readiness programming.
- Exchange programs and internationalization agreements.
- Tracking student placement.

Goal 3: Increased Funding

In the face of long-term declining state contributions, Western must aggressively pursue sources of revenue beyond tuition and student fees. Such sources include gifts, donations, industry collaborations, grants and sponsored research. This effort aligns with the Trustees' value of fiscal responsibility.

Increased funding will be measured as growth in increased annual revenues from:

- Donor support.
- Partnerships and collaborations.
- Grants and sponsored programs.
- Cash-funded programs.

While the Western Foundation handles donations, relationships with donors and university supporters are a campus-wide responsibility. Managing these relationships falls partially to the Advancement unit on campus, but we must call on faculty and staff members to represent the university well to constituents, and to positively and productively engage graduates and alumni for the long term. Furthermore, we must establish and maintain a prioritization process for campus projects that optimally aligns the university's objectives and donor interest.

Partnerships and collaborations that provide opportunities for faculty, staff and students to participate in paid or supported projects with external partners offer yet more ways to expand funding for facilities and equipment, as well as for student and faculty summer employment. Many additional advantages flow from such collaborations with private and public partners. They range from keeping faculty current in their professional fields to creating internship opportunities and campus-to-career bridges for graduates.

Grants and sponsored programs are ways to receive outside funding, not only for faculty but also for many other groups on campus. Compliance with state and federal guidelines and proper documentation are imperative, and current processes need improvement. To help faculty compete more effectively for major grants, the university must recognize and support faculty and student research. Such improvements may result not only in higher grant-funding rates but also in greater faculty satisfaction and retention – as well as increased visibility, reputation and third-party assessments of the university.

Last but not least, cash-funded programs have successfully expanded the university's funding base and ability to support facilities and programming. As noted above, the growth of graduate programs, of wilderness-based education in collaboration with NOLS, of community education, of summer programs, of remedial education at collaborating high schools and possibly of study abroad are all likely to increase funding for the university as a whole. This will help entrepreneurial departments expand their programming beyond the narrow confines of general budgets.

Initiatives include:

a. Advancement and School of Business outreach to potential donors and partners.
b. Increasing the reach of Office of Sponsored Programs to promote grant activity.
c. Increased offerings for graduate programming.

Initiative 3a: Advancement and School of Business Outreach to Potential Donors and Partners

Among the principal reasons for developing the Advancement area and the School of Business is to identify and recruit donors who will support the university. Hiring a vice president for Institutional Advancement and a dean for the School of Business represent first steps toward this objective. We also must involve faculty in fundraising, increase on-campus giving, cultivate second-tier donors and develop more meaningful relationships with alumni.

Initiative 3b: Increasing the Reach of Office of Sponsored Programs to Promote Grant Activity

Increasing grant revenue to the campus must take place within the context of pursuing Western's mission, the Trustees' objectives and our strategic goals. Several steps will ensure support for grant applications across the campus and support faculty research. These include: further institutionalization of the Institutional Review Board with its subcommittees, the Human Subject Research Committee and the Institutional Animal Care & Use Committee; fully documenting the grant review process; offering incentives to increase grant applications; ensuring post-grant documentation; strategically using the Office of Sponsored Program resources; and more recognition for faculty and student research to promote engagement, visibility and achievement.

Initiative 3c: Increased Offerings of Graduate Programming

As noted in Goal 1, reintroducing graduate programs at Western has been a success. Graduate programming has had consistent student growth, generated revenue for the campus, and increased both the university's visibility and reputation. Over the life of this strategic plan and consistent with the campus process, high-quality graduate programs and other cash-funded programs will continue to develop.

Goal 4: Enhanced Organizational Efficiency

As important as increasing funding for the university through the measures discussed above is to keep costs for all operations as low as possible and to spend all dollars wisely. To remain viable, we must regularly evaluate costs and returns on investments in administrative processes.

Customer satisfaction is equally important. Serving every constituent with the utmost professionalism and reliability will directly contribute to student and staff satisfaction, increase positive engagement, and reduce costs for recruitment of students and employees. The same is true for engaging all outside constituents, from town-and-gown relationships to donors.

Initiatives and tactics to enhance organizational and operational efficiency include:

a. Improvements in process and administrative effectiveness.
b. Evolution of the academic administrative structure.

Improved organizational and operational efficiency is measured by:

- Administrative costs as a portion of overall costs, when compared with peers.

Initiative 4a: Improvements in Process and Administrative Effectiveness

Operational efficiencies are always important, and Western takes pride in keeping its operation costs lower than at peer institutions. But we must further improve as we face financial constraints and sensitivity to tuition increases.

To improve efficiency, we must evaluate all processes and systems. A committee of mid-managers and faculty will document, measure and evaluate every critical process at Western.

Tactical objectives to support this goal include:

- Digital workflow and document management.
- Coordinating institutional scheduling.
- Improving operational efficiencies and service delivery [e.g., electronic timecards, purchasing].

Initiative 4b: Evolution of the Academic Administrative Structure

When opportunities for program building appear, the academic administrative structure at Western should continue to evolve to better serve academic programming through opportunistic growth and restructuring.

The previous strategic plan assessed the chairs structure at Western. Its strengths include: a flat administrative structure; accountability to faculty through the existing system of recommendation of chairs; and cost efficiency. The greatest drawback is the sometimes overwhelming amount of "administrivia" for chairs, leading to a lack of time and vision for strategic leadership. This can lead to neglecting student recruitment, pursuit of grants and donor development. Lacking deep bench of potential department leaders results in faculty members feeling compelled to take chair positions out of a sense of duty, rather than from a desire to contribute. Finally, there is a potential for conflicts of interest as a chair evaluates his or her colleagues and then rejoins the faculty to be evaluated by a colleague who is the new chair.

Given weaknesses in the existing structure, the preparation of this strategic plan included assessing the value of a dean model. A new structure with four schools or colleges with deans would be considerably more expensive than the chair model, the advantages of which would be lost. Finally, that structure might promote a "silo effect" on a small campus, leading to less, rather than more, collaboration.

The best solution to this conundrum lies in the acceptance of an asymmetrical administrative structure, constituted by dean(s), chairs, directors and/or executive directors. Where a change in leadership structure offers significant strategic gains, and where entrepreneurial solutions can pay for it, we should pursue such restructuring. Departments, centers and programs – such as Education, Environment & Sustainability and Recreation, Exercise & Sport Science – have grown in complexity while cash-funded graduate programs have provided resources and opportunities to create dean or executive director positions to better address external constituencies. When such opportunities occur during the life of this strategic plan, we will assess whether and which solutions to implement. Finally, the 2012-13 Higher Learning Commission report emphasized the need for more professional development for academic managers, which we must systematically address.

A second area of administrative structure is related to optimal grouping of academic programs. Along this line, Western will explore the potential for a Department of Visual and Performing Arts, which would include grouping programs such as Art, Music, Communication and Theatre. Advantages include the potential for curricular cross-fertilization and a larger pool of potential leaders.

Goal 5: Improved Third-Party Assessment

Western's reputation plays a major role as students and their families choose which campus to attend. Our reputation is also important when recruiting faculty, attracting donors and grants, and encouraging partnerships, both public and private. External evaluations are often widely shared, and the Western community can, to some degree, influence them by actions we take or avoid. Such efforts align with the Trustees' value of achievement.

Three primary types of external assessments play a role for the university:

a. Accrediting bodies.
b. Awards and rankings from academic organizations and other agencies.
c. Rankings and evaluations in popular print and online media, from which students and their parents often decide which university to attend.

The metric for this initiative will be the annual accumulative awards, rankings and evaluations by third parties, as tracked by the university.

Initiative 5a: Accrediting Bodies and National Standards

Accreditation plays an important role to ensure Western meets high standards, as judged externally. It is significant to the university's reputation. Some prospective students and their families also look for accreditations when choosing a university or academic program. The most important accrediting body for Western is the Higher Learning Commission. To move academic excellence and integrity forward, we will implement the following 2012-13 Self-Study recommendations advanced through Higher Learning Commission review:

- Revisit the mission statement to include distance education and graduate programs.
- Strengthen the General Education curriculum to reflect the values of a liberal arts education.
- Increase the diversity of students, faculty, and staff (see separate Strategic Planning Initiative).
- Strengthen support for faculty and student research.
- Improve performance evaluations for faculty and staff.

Further, several departments are pursuing or considering additional, specialized accreditation. The Education Department is planning to apply for CAEP accreditation in 2016-17. Exercise & Sport Science is considering accreditation of their Sport Management program through COSMA. Music Education is accredited through NASM. The Business School is assessing accreditation through AACSB or ACBSP. And the proposed Pre-Engineering program would have to align with ABET standards to ensure students' successful transitions to accredited Engineering programs.

Initiative 5b: Awards and Rankings

Various organizations provide contests or invite regional, state or national comparisons in many categories. In general, the university encourages participation when it aligns with institutional goals and does distract from a department's or unit's core objectives.

When we earn awards or favorable rankings, the university must publicize such outcomes to fully capitalize on the achievement of students, faculty and staff at Western.

Initiative 5c: Popular Rankings and Assessments

It benefits the institution to collect and analyze all popular rankings and evaluations that include Western, from websites viewed by students to rankings in national news media. It is especially important to correct false or outdated information on such websites, and to consider criticisms presented in such formats.

For rankings built on categories that matter to us, we should consider how to improve outcomes and become more competitive. Favorable rankings should be included more intentionally in recruitment, alumni and donor-engagement publications.