2022–23

HONORING OUR PROMISE

ANNUAL REPORT

Western Carolina University

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FROM THE CHANCELLOR

The Honoring Our Promise strategic plan is Western Carolina University's roadmap to success, and the progress made this year illustrates the resilience and excellence of our students and of our faculty and staff. This annual report highlights achievements and progress made towards each of the goals and initiatives of the plan. Approved by the WCU Board of Trustees in June of 2021, the plan reflects WCU's historic commitment to Western North Carolina and the regional significance of this university to the economic and social prosperity of our region, state, and beyond.

I am immensely grateful for our dedicated faculty and staff who continue to work hard to achieve our goals and make a positive difference in our community and region. Some of this year's highlights include:

- Enrolling the fourth largest first-year and second largest transfer student cohorts in WCU history.
- Exceeding the UNC System strategic plan five-year stretch goal for critical workforce degrees awarded.
- Promoting awareness of indigenous American populations through Mountain Heritage Day, special exhibitions, and events and activities supported by WCU's Cherokee Center.
- WCU's first winning season in football since 2017, and five Catamount teams finishing top three in conference.
- Promoting admission applications from underrepresented populations by waiving application fees and joining the Coalition for College.
- Expanding instructional space at WCU's Biltmore Park instructional site to facilitate growth in healthcare programs.
- Gradating twenty-two students from the Finish Line program.
- Providing salary adjustments to 400 faculty and staff to address labor market, equity, and retention concerns.
- Implementing flexible work arrangements for 132 staff.
- There was a 15% increase in the number of research grants awarded to faculty and staff.

I remain humbled by the evidence of just how much we have accomplished this past year, and I am privileged to remain in service to our faculty, staff, students, and the citizens of our region and state.

Sincerely,

Kelli R. Brown

Kelli R. Brown
Chancellor

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1: **ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE**

Accomplishment Highlights

- **New program development** – WCU's masters in accountancy program has been approved for online delivery. Other programs being developed include an innovative master's entry program in Nursing, focusing on rural health, a new program in Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner within WCU's existing doctor of nurse practitioner degree, and a new master's degree in engineering.

- **Student community engagement** – WCU students completed 9,770 community service hours in academic year 2022–23. Fifty–five Service–Learning designated course sections were offered with 877 students enrolled. Sixteen graduates received the WCU Lily Community Engagement Award, and fifteen students received a Jacob Medford Scholarship for exemplary commitment to community service.

- **Faculty Fulbright Scholars** – Two WCU faculty received Fulbright Scholar awards in 2022–23. John Carzoli, assistant professor, and associate department head in the Physical Therapy Program, worked on improving pedagogy in partnership with public and private entities in Bolivia, including the University of Saint Francis Xavier. Diane Martinez, an associate professor in the Department of English Studies conducted a project entitled "Creating Cross–Cultural Student Experiences through Internationalized Curriculum Development," at Ludwigsburg University of Education in Germany. Additionally, Vladislav Slavov from the Technical University of Sofia in Bulgaria, became the second Fulbright Visiting Scholar in the university's history, working with students in the electrical engineering program.

- **Undergraduate research** – The Honors College hosted the annual Conference on Undergraduate Research and Engagement for over 400 students in September to promote undergraduate research, service learning, and interdisciplinary learning. In academic year 2022–2023, 760 honors college contracts had deliverables or outcomes associated with research and scholarly contributions.

- **New student enrollment rebound** – Updated enrollment strategies contributed to the fourth largest first–year and second largest transfer cohorts in WCU history. The application fee was waived for 2023. The Brinson Honors College Guarantee was introduced. WCU piloted a new undergraduate scholarship approach (Catamount Commitment). Three community college Guaranteed Admission Partnerships were added.

- **Critical workforce credentials** – WCU exceeded the UNC System strategic plan stretch goal for critical workforce degrees awarded. WCU realized a 36% increase in critical workforce credentials against the 5–year goal of a 24.2% increase.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1: Academic Excellence

We commit to providing our students with a 21st century rigorous curriculum that is composed of the intellectual, creative, cultural, and personal outcomes necessary to advance and excel.

GOAL 1.1: High-Quality Educational Programs

Deliver high-quality educational programs that enhance students' intellectual, creative, personal, and social development and prepare them for career fields as well as to advance and excel as 21st century citizens

Strategic Initiatives	Key Stakeholders	Summary of results to date
1.1.1: Ensure and promote relevant, high-quality undergraduate and graduate degree programs by implementing ongoing reviews and instituting curricular and program improvements based on WCU's standards for academic programs. Academic programs include on-campus, off-campus, online, and international degree programs.	University Curriculum Committee Vice Provost	Over the past year, 131 academic programs across the university gathered and analyzed data relating to student learning outcomes for the purpose of 1) highlighting their program's strengths, and 2) identifying incremental curricular or program changes that might inform improvements in the student educational experience. Every academic program submitted their continuous improvement report this year, which was the first time we achieved a 100% response rate. Our Liberal Studies courses undergo a similar quality improvement process, with faculty submitting for analysis completed student work aligned with program-level student learning outcomes. This year, the Liberal Studies program collected approximate 2,400 assignments aligned with the Means of Expression, Information Literacy, and Awareness of Self outcomes. The resulting evaluation of that work, as well as detailed formative feedback on assignment design, is shared each year with the Liberal Studies program, department heads, and participating faculty.
1.1.2: Identify, pursue, and promote opportunities for new and revised academic programs of quality, relevance, and sustainable demand with the capacity, resources, and ability to grow enrollment	University Curriculum Committee Curriculog Administrator	Expansion to online delivery of the existing residential master's in accountancy was approved through the UNC Board of Governors and final approval from SACSCOC is anticipated in the summer of 2023. Planning for enrolling students in the online MAcc in January 2024 is underway. Development of the innovative master's entry program in Nursing, focusing on rural health, continues with completion of the Request for Preliminary Authorization to be submitted to the UNC System Office in summer 2023. A new program in Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner within the DNP degree was added. Planning for a potential new MS in Engineering degree is underway in the college.
1.1.3: Incentivize and support programs and courses that include cross-curricular, interdisciplinary, and experiential learning.	Center for Community Engagement & Service Learning Center for Career and Professional Development	WCU added three undergraduate programs and twenty-three courses identified as cross-curricular, interdisciplinary, or experiential. The total UG programs in the inventory is 144. Twenty departments/programs reported integration their curricula. The Center for Career & Professional Development (CCPD) advertised 199 hiring events, career fairs, panels, information sessions, or other career-related educational programs and activities. Forty-seven were dedicated to teaching career skills and expanding knowledge of industries. Two hundred twenty-four students participated in credited internships administered. Twenty students participated in the SECU Public Fellows Internship Program, and 1 student participated in the Capitol Hill Internship Program.

		The Center for Community Engagement and Service-Learning (CCESL) reports students completed 9,770 community service hours; with 4,149 of those hours were tied to the Lily Award for Community Engagement initiative. Fifty-five Service Learning (-SLC) designated sections were offered with 877 enrolled. Sixteen graduates received the WCU Lily Award. Fifteen students received a Jacob Medford Scholarship for exemplary commitment to community service. Four students received Civic Fellows stipends.
1.1.4: Expand experiences that enhance a global awareness and cultural understanding among WCU students and promote integration of international components into existing and new curricula.	Office of Global Engagement Office of Multicultural Affairs DegreePlus Program Associate Provost	Student mobility is one way that WCU has expanded opportunities and provided greater access for all students. For fall and spring, we have averaged approximately 122 international students, with increasing diversity in terms of origin and disciplinary focus. This provides benefits not only for those international students, but all WCU students who interact with these diverse influences and perspectives, both in and outside the classroom. Additionally, data over the last 20 years indicate that students studying abroad result in higher GPAs, better retention rates, and higher graduation rates. We increased international engagement participation by over 100% this past year with 191 unique students participating in international experiences from WCU. Our faculty-led programs with travel components also continue to rebound. In addition to two fall programs and two spring programs, the traditional summer season had 10 successful trips with 109 students. We also were awarded a grant from the Institute of International Education to provide free passports to 25 students in need. Additionally, WCU will launch our own US Passport facility this fall enhance international opportunities.
1.1.5: Expand educational programming around academic integrity and truth seeking to promote a culture of (student) academic honesty.	Dean of Students College Deans	Expanded programming included on-going efforts and new initiatives. CFC provided faculty resources on using AI to encourage academic honesty and held two faculty workshops on ChatGPT. Librarians expanded in-class workshops on citing, copyright, and fair use for 1189 students in 70 course sections this year. The School of Teaching and Learning held a faculty forum on ChatGPT with academic integrity as a main topic. Interior Design implemented an in-class exercise on sources of information and citing sources. College of Business continues to use Ouriginal and Respondus Lockdown Browser with Webcam Monitoring. The Associate Dean in the College of Engineering and Technology continues to visit all freshman courses to discuss academic integrity and how principles are related to professional practice. All introductory biology courses include modules to reinforce academic integrity. In CAS, students cited for plagiarizing are required to complete the *How to Avoid Plagiarizing* guide prepared by the WaLC and pass the self-test. World Languages faculty were reminded of definitions and process for suspected violations. Graduate students in biology complete a module on academic integrity for teaching assistants and thesis preparation.
1.1.6: Coordinate, integrate, and highlight WCU's learning goals and co-curricular outcomes into curricular and co-curricular experiences.	Office of Institutional Assessment	Our institutional outcomes are reflected within the student learning goals for the Liberal Studies program, and those eight goals include inquiry, information literacy, critical thinking, problem solving, communication, awareness of self, and awareness of cultural diversity. And these institutional goals integrate and coordinate extensively with curricular and co-curricular experiences in most of our undergraduate programs. To

			explore this further, the Office of Institutional Assessment analyzed all student learning outcomes associated with 84 undergraduate programs (to include both majors and minors) and found ~40% of total outcomes align with WCU's broader institutional learning goals. Means of expression, diversity, inquiry, and problem solving were the most popular alignments, but all goals were represented in some respect. Thus, our institutional student learning goals are assessed within the Liberal Studies program but are also evaluated within the context of the undergraduate program continuous improvement process.
	Goal 1.2 - Teaching Excellence Promote teaching excellence as the successful engagement of our students in learning, experimenting, creating, and achieving their full potential.		
	Strategic Initiatives	**Key Stakeholders**	**Summary of results to date**
	1.2.1: Enhance faculty professional development opportunities with a focus on a pedagogical approach and curriculum design that engage students through high-impact learning and evidence-based practices.	Coulter Faculty Commons	New Coulter Faculty Commons (CFC) Mission Statement: The CFC advances excellence in teaching, learning, and scholarship by partnering with the WCU community through collaboration, creation, and celebration. Three faculty fellows joined the CFC this year. The new CFC Advisory group is made up of 15 staff and faculty who represent a variety of academic and administrative departments. CFC activities in academic year 2022-23 include: 74 Consultations, 15 workshops, 152 attendees at signature events, and 12 candidate visits. Signature Events include: - New Faculty Orientation, 2 days, August 11 - 12, 2022 42 attendees - Faculty Forward, one-year teaching and learning workshop series, 18 participants - Online Course Design and Teaching Institute - Fall T&L Day: *Ungrading* featuring Dr. Susan Blum guest presenter, 43 attendees. - Spring T&L Day: Neurodiversity in the Classroom, John Wilson, Exec. Director of SOAR, Inc. 30 Attendees - Summer Institute for Teaching and Learning, 2 days, May 18 & 19, 2023 33 attendees, 11 faculty and staff presenters. - Spring Reading Groups, 2 groups; 15 total participants - Online Learning Maturity Project - Year 1: formed a working group of faculty and staff, and completed writing draft of OLMP Strategic Action Plan.
	1.2.2: Update departmental collegial review documents to align with university policies on engaging students, innovative teaching, advising, scholarship of teaching and learning, and support of our community and region	Associate Provost	Given significant updates to Department Collegial Review Documents (DCRDs) in the previous cycle, only minor updates to select DCRDs were made at the discretion of colleges and departments in the last year. It is anticipated that significant DCRD updates will be required soon with changes to UNC System policies, including new requirements around reporting faculty workload.
	1.2.3: Recognize, promote, and celebrate outstanding programs,	Provost Vice Provost	Recognitions this year include: UNC BOG Award for Excellence in Teaching; Chancellor's Distinguished Teaching Award; Star Staff Award; Bright Idea Staff Award; Judy H. Dowell

faculty, staff, and students that contribute to 1) teaching, research, and service; 2) the promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion; 3) leadership roles; 4) service to the regional community; 5) advising/mentoring; 6) demonstration of ethical decision-making; or 7) innovative idea or program implementation.	College Deans Dean, Graduate School & Research Office of Student Retention Center for Community Engagement & Service Learning Center for Career & Professional Development Office of Equal Opportunity & Diversity Programs	Outstanding Support Staff Award; Paul A. Reid Distinguished Service Award; University Scholar Award ; Excellence in Teaching Liberal Studies Award; Innovative Scholarship Award; Excellence in Community Engagement Award; Student Nominated Faculty of the Year Award; Program of Excellence Award; Academic Program & Administrative Program; Irene Welch Program; Scholarly Development Assignment Program; CAS BOG Teaching Award; COB BOG Creative & Innovative Teaching Award; CEAP BOG Award for Superior Teaching Award; CET BOG Distinguished Teaching Award; BCFPA BOG Teaching Award CHHS BOG Innovative Teaching Award; Provost's Scholarship Development Award; Hunter Library Hunter Scholar Award; Graduate School & Research Million Dollar Circle Award. Two faculty: Fulbright Scholar awards in 2022-23. One Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities; Inclusive Excellence Award for Faculty, Staff, & Students; The Senior Leadership Program 3 attended UNC Executive Leadership Institute: Cohorts 1-3 (2020, 21, 22). 77 grants: $7,502,895.58.

Goal 1.3 Cultural, Environmental, Economic, And Regional Development

Promote and enhance cultural, environmental, economic, and regional development through educational programs, scholarship/creative activity, and service.

Strategic Initiatives	**Key Stakeholders**	**Summary of results to date**
1.3.1: Provide learning opportunities for students to engage in the natural landscape and cultural heritage of the Southern Appalachian region	Natural Resources program faculty History program faculty Cherokee Studies program faculty Cherokee Center Mountain Heritage Center	WCU students engaged with Appalachian cultural heritage through public history internships at regional repositories, historic sites, tourism centers, and museums for academic credit; by conducting oral histories with local community leaders; curating "Mountain Persistence: Western North Carolina Adapts to Change" companion to Smithsonian exhibit “Crossroads: Change in Rural America” at the Mountain Heritage Center (MHC); and pre-orientation students attended Mini-Mountain Heritage Day. “Away from Home: American Indian Boarding Schools” at MHC and the Cherokee Center’s “We Will Not be Silenced: Standing for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women” at the Fine Arts Museum synergized student learning across campus. WCU students engaged with the natural landscape through courses in Biology, Geoscience, Anthropology, and Cultural Resource Management where the outdoors served as a learning laboratory; a project with Special Collections about the effects of local dams on human displacement and environmental impact; “Water is Life” connecting Indigenous beliefs with art and medicine installed at Health & Human Services; continued research and employment at Highlands Biological Station.
1.3.2: Continue building a campus culture of service; one that focuses on community engagement, is broadly available, and maintains high rates of student participation that is inclusive, thus positioning	Center for Community Engagement & Service Learning Center for Career and Professional Development	In fiscal year 2023, WCU students completed 9,770 community service hours with 4,149 of those hours completed by students enrolled in the Lily Award for Community Engagement initiative. During the 2022-2023 academic year, there were 36 designated service-learning course sections offered by 28 faculty across seven disciplines. A total of 604 students successfully completed SL designated courses. In fiscal year 2023, sixteen WCU graduating Seniors completed the requirements to receive the WCU Lily Award for Community Engagement. CCESL also awarded 15 Jacob

WCU as a leader in the state, region, and nationally.		Medford Scholarships, totaling $10,285, to students demonstrating a commitment to community engagement and service-learning. Recognition was also given to four WCU Student Democracy Fellows, one NC Campus Engagement Community Impact Student Award recipient, and two WCU student organizations and their community partners for receipt of the WCU Community-engaged Outreach Award. In Spring 2023, 2,609 newly admitted students completed the "Introduction to Community Engagement at WCU" pre-orientation module and 230 students completed the *Find your Spark. Make a Difference. Live Western* community engagement leadership workshop.
1.3.3: Enhance, incentivize, and highlight scholarship, research, teaching, creative inquiry, and cultural activity that contribute to regional/community development that positively impact North Carolina or the Western North Carolina region.	Office of Research Administration University Research Council	Western Carolina University works to recognize our students, staff, and faculty who excel in scholarship, research, and creative inquiry to celebrate their success. The Research and Scholarship Conference (RASC) that integrates both the Graduate Research Symposium and the Undergraduate Expo will now incorporate the Faculty and Scholarship Conference into the RASC in Spring 2023. This will create a more public facing event that will help to attract outside individuals and business that wish to support and stimulate faculty, staff, and student research and scholarly endeavors at WCU. In Fall 2022, we held our 9th annual Three Minute Thesis competition that highlights our best oral research presentations by graduate students. Nicole Cook from the Department of Biology won the competition. In Spring 2023, we held our second annual Faculty Three Minute Research oral competition won by Dr. Dustin Evatt from the Department of Human Services.
1.3.4: Encourage interdisciplinary initiatives in academic programs, research, and/or academic centers that connect business, sciences, engineering, technology, entrepreneurship, as well as the arts, education, recreation, and health professionals	Office of Economic Development and Regional Partnerships Small Business and Technology Development Center WCU Programs in Asheville	Throughout the 2023-2024 academic year, WCU has convened with regional community college, industry, and economic development partners to further the discussion on how the university can best serve their needs, relative to workforce development and resource assistance. Examples of these discussion include the integration of engineering with logistics and supply chain management, and the positioning of computer science, computer information systems, and computer engineering curriculums to better serve today's critical needs. In addition, the university's health science programs have developed cross-disciplinary pathways to promote education and career opportunities in critical need fields.
1.3.5: Encourage external collaboration of faculty, staff, and students with industry, start-ups, research institutes, non-profits, and government agencies.	Office of Economic Development and Regional Partnerships Small Business and Technology Development Center RAPID Center	The Office of Economic Development &Regional Partnerships continues to function as conduit for connecting WCU faculty, staff, and students to economic engagement opportunities. Tuition reimbursement programs have been initiated by several of our key hospitality and tourism partners, to enhance their workforce needs. We have been successful in enhancing our efforts with the Outdoor Recreation Industry, to include Engineering, Educational Outreach, and the College of Business as active partners in those respective activities. We have executed the 1st Summer Mentorship program in conjunction with the NC School of Science and Math, exposing their students to WCU faculty and research projects.

Goal 1.4 - Scholarship, Research, Creative / Cultural Activity Promote excellence in scholarship, research, creative inquiry, and cultural activity		
Strategic Initiatives	**Key Stakeholders**	**Summary of results to date**
1.4.1: Value, promote, and provide opportunities for faculty-student scholarly collaborations with undergraduate and graduate populations.	Associate Deans Office of Undergraduate Research	This initiative spans diverse units, yet data demonstrates WCU efforts in this goal continued to be bolstered. Across colleges, common efforts emerge in prioritization of mentorship and grant funding of faculty/student scholarly pursuits, engaging students in scholarly publications and dissemination events, and through curricular experiences that engage undergraduates and graduates in research, scholarship, and creative inquiry capstones/theses. Several departments now require scholarly work as part of their graduation requirements. The Office of Research Administration reports that faculty received $1,545,686 in salary compensation from sixty-two different grants in fiscal year 2023. There was $2,403,919 in educational awards distributed to students from fifteen unique grants and $330,861 in student wages from thirty-one unique grants: thus, demonstrating a robust support of scholarly collaboration in the sponsored research realm. The Brinson Honors College (BHC), in collaboration with faculty and instructors has also supported this initiative. In academic year 2022-2023 BHC honors contracts numbered 1,320 of which 760 (58%) had deliverables or outcomes associated with research and scholarly contributions.
1.4.2: Improve internal and external promotion of scholarship, research, creative, and cultural activity	Office of Research Administration	Western Carolina University works to recognize our students, staff, and faculty who excel in scholarship, research, and creative inquiry to celebrate their success. In Fall 2022, we held our 9th annual Three-Minute Thesis competition that highlights our best oral research presentations by graduate students. Nicole Cook from the Department of Biology won our WCU competition. In Spring 2023, we held our second annual Faculty Three Minute Research oral competition and Dr. Dustin Evatt from the Department of Human Services won the event. To create a more public-facing celebration of scholarship on campus, the annual Faculty Scholarship Celebration was combined with the Research and Scholarship Celebration (RASC), which includes both the Undergraduate Expo and the Graduate Research Symposium. In fiscal year 2023 staffing changes and organizational restructuring in the Office of Research Administration impacted programmatic offerings but plans for fiscal year 2024 include bringing coordination of undergraduate research programs under the purview of the office, as well as, expanding the staff by including a new Research Programs Coordinator tasked with facilitating a broad portfolio of scholarly programs.
1.4.3: Promote interdisciplinary learning, research, engagement, and idea exchange.	Office of Research Administration Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning	WCU does not have formal systems to track interdisciplinary learning, however, there are multiple examples of this initiative. Endowed Professor, Lisa Bloom, hosted six Innovation Friday events, a weekly campus-wide Teaching Innovation Group, and two campus wide events, Connectivity, and Panel Discussion on AI for faculty to gather informally and discuss interdisciplinary ideas and research, etc. The Honors College hosted the annual Conference on Undergraduate Research and Engagement for over 400 students in September to promote undergraduate research, service learning, and interdisciplinary

		learning. Sponsored Research successfully implemented InfoEd, a new UNC System level software platform to capture, process, and report on faculty and staff research; captures grants and external disciplinary and community engaged funding. Community Engagement and Service Learning is exploring software to track, assess, and report on community engagement efforts, including those with an interdisciplinary approach. CCESL also hosted a national summit on experiential learning in conjunction with the American Education Research Association with representatives from 10 states and 21 universities.
1.4.4: Increase the number offered and the amount of support provided for research assistantships, tuition waivers, and student stipends through external funding and internal support.	Office of Research Administration	The $100,000 in recurring tuition scholarships for graduate students was supplemented with $90,000 from the Graduate School scholarship funds. A total of $190,000 of scholarship money was allocated in the 2022-2023 academic year. Twenty-five Invest in Teachers scholarships were awarded from a pool of 47 qualified applicants who submitted 3 essays around their teaching philosophies and how their educational practices could inspire systemic change. The number of graduate research assistants funded by a grant budget for fiscal year 2022-23 was as follows: Summer 2022-one award at $3,000; Fall 2022-four awards totaling $21,000; Fall 2023-three awards for $13,500. 99.99% of the State of NC funding allocated for graduate assistantships and waivers was invested in our graduate students. The Graduate School and Research has submitted budget requests for several years to increase the overall assistantship budget, but no increase has occurred. A tuition increase was proposed and accepted for graduate students only. Monies generated from the increase will be earmarked for better financial support of graduate assistants.
Goal 1.5 – Capacity to Serve Students and Eliminate Barriers Expand and support WCU's capacity to serve students and eliminate barriers to program and resource access.		
Strategic Initiatives	**Key Stakeholders**	**Summary of results to date**
1.5.1: Expand and enhance networks of regional advisory committees to strengthen communication and collaboration among K-12, community college, and WCU in the areas of 1) curriculum goals and transferability; 2) the importance and value of higher education and the best strategies for marketing and recruiting; and 3) admissions and financial aid.	Undergraduate Admissions Advising Center Office of Financial Aid	In 2022-23, undergraduate admissions participated in 368 college fairs, 153 in NC. Admissions also participated in all 32 Community College Fairs. WCU Admissions and Financial Aid partnered with Smoky Mountain High School, Talent Search, Southwestern Community College, WCU Homebase, WCU Educational Outreach, WCU Graduate School, Asheville High Schools, and WCU Athletics to provide 19 FAFSA and 4 Transfer Day events. Admissions also initiated Whee Retreat, bringing high school guidance counselors and community college advisors in WNC to campus to interact with Advising, Financial Aid, and Scholarships. Undergraduate admissions also started outreach to homeschool families via online webinars. There are no organized fairs for homeschool students. The Advising Center provides a dedicated Senior Advisor of Transfer Services to work with transfer counselors at feeder institutions and connect prospective transfer students with professional advisors who are liaisons to WCU departments. For example, the Sr. Transfer

		Advisor conducts a transfer drive-in for CC counselors titled Catamount Advising for Transfer Success (CATS); this year's event served 24 guests from across NC.
1.5.2: Determine institutional capacity for resident and distance summer session offerings for a wide variety of learners: undergraduate, K-12, and graduate students; adult and life-long learners.	Educational Outreach Office of the Registrar Associate Provost Residential Living Auxiliary Services	While the summer session organizational model is decentralized at Western Carolina University, Academic Affairs (Educational Outreach and leadership from each college) enhance summer session offerings to accommodate a wide variety of learners, both on-campus and through distance learning. Tracking Learners Preferences: using guidance from data-driven practices, program needs, and student feedback to determine offerings. tracking past enrollment patterns. defining who are summer students are and what motivates them to enroll. Diversifying Course Delivery Methods and Options: utilize a mix of course delivery methods, participate in internships, independent studies, and travel course opportunities. Coordinated efforts are in place to track and report summer results to address information gaps and capacity needs for future predictions. Summer Session is forming a taskforce to resolve issues of logistics and processes and make recommendations based on input from all stakeholders. We will analyze additional summer data, share reports and recommendations, look for new trends in student demographics, graduations rates affected by summer enrollment, and changes in financial needs.
1.5.3: Increase communication and marketing of summer opportunities in academic programs, short-term programming, research opportunities, internships, and other practical experiences for both students and others who reside in WNC.	Educational Outreach Advising Center University Communications & Marketing	Summer Session at WCU historically focuses on degree completion as a main motivator to enroll in classes during the summer. Summer Session has made a dedicated effort to increase communication and marketing to reach a broader audience including educating students on the cost effectiveness of summer courses under NC Promise tuition and the ability to take courses online while they are away for other summer opportunities. Comprehensive Online Presence: robust online presence has been established. optimized website. ensue website serves as a central hub for summer session opportunities, providing comprehensive information about courses, schedules, and links to all needed services. Social Media Campaigns: targeted marketing campaigns on various platforms. Engaging content. reach potential learners based on their interests and demographics. Targeted events on campus and online inform students and potential students about opportunities for summer programming offerings. These events allow participants to interact with summer session representatives, explore opportunities, ask questions, and gain a clearer understanding of what they can expect from summer offerings.
1.5.4: Assure affordability of summer school offerings for both WCU degree-seeking students and those seeking credits for other institutions by adopting financial supports such as summer employment opportunities, NC	Office of Financial Aid Center for Career & Professional Development Associate Provost	In response to the financial challenges faced by students, NC Promise is available for summer enrollment making Summer Session affordable for students and aiding in the path to degree completion. Tuition Reduction by NC Promise: use value of NC Promise school establishing a tuition plan that increases access to education by reducing student costs. The state of North Carolina is supplementing this cost by matching dollar for dollar the difference between WCU's full cost of tuition and the NC Promise Tuition Plan. This is an incredible saving to

Promise funding for summer sessions, and other financial aid opportunities.		students. This reduction alleviates the financial burden on students and allows students to get ahead or make up credits to stay on track to graduation and attracts new populations of learners. Summer Scholarships and Grants: To further support students seeking summer education, WCU has established summer-specific programs and opportunities for funding. On-Campus Housing Options: For students who would like to live on-campus during Summer Session, there are two on-campus residential halls available located a short walk from most academic buildings.

Goal 1.6 – Enrollment and Retention

Continue to coordinate WCU's student enrollment and retention strategies to ensure strengthened balance of access, diversity and student success, institutional mission, and sustainable revenue sources.

Strategic Initiatives	Key Stakeholders	Summary of results to date
1.6.1: Refine and adapt the strategic enrollment plan to meet student enrollment targets while maintaining academic rigor in our educational programs.	Enrollment planning committee	Thanks to interventions in 2021-22, WCU bucked the UNC System trend, reversing a 1st-year student decline and enrolling the largest 1st-year class (1932) since COVID. But anemic cohorts during COVID and record setting WCU graduation cohorts resulted in total enrollment decline (UNC System: from 244,500 to 239,663; WCU: from 11,877 to 11,635). WCU continued strategies that drew the 4th largest 1st-year and 2nd-largest transfer cohorts ever and initiated new-student strategies to build enrollment. The application fee was waived for 2023. The Brinson Honors College Guarantee was introduced. WCU piloted a new undergraduate scholarship approach (Catamount Commitment). Three community college Guaranteed Admission Partnerships were added, and Educational Outreach obtained a grant to expand recruitment. Fall 2023 projections point to a sizeable increase in the entering 1st-year class, a transfer class comparable to last fall's 2nd-largest cohort, and an uptick in new graduate students. It may take one more cycle for new-student enrollment to offset continuing student declines, but successive years of significant new-student growth is setting the stage for positive total headcount in 2024.
1.6.2: Increase and track student diversity, ensuring that support services are in place to enroll and meet the needs of a diverse student body that reflects state, national, and international demographic trends.	Institutional Planning & Effectiveness Office of Student Success Student Affairs	WCU undertook several initiatives to positively impact enrollment and diversity. This included a reconfiguration of scholarship and aid communication, awarding, and packaging, which involved the introduction of a new program called Catamount Commitment. Additionally, WCU introduced a new undergraduate application avenue, Coalition for College, for the 2022-23 cycle, and waived the application fee for all 2023 entry terms to reduce barriers and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). WCU also established the Enrollment Planning Committee (EPC), comprising an Enrollment Data and Projections Committee and an EDI Task Team, to guide enrollment strategies. The introduction of new undergraduate admission reports in 2022-23 offered more comprehensive, comparative data. The Brinson Honors College Guarantee was piloted to increase honors college participation and enhance diversity. WCU further ensured inclusivity by providing translators for events such as new student orientation, convocation, and commencement.

	1.6.3: Continue to develop innovative data-driven methods of monitoring and enhancing student success at the individual level.	Office of Student Success Institutional Planning & Effectiveness	As part of our ongoing commitment to student success, we have integrated the Navigate platform into our advising system, allowing advisors to access real-time information and data insights on student progress, engagement, and potential areas of concern. The Navigate platform offers faculty/staff valuable information through Issue Alerts, notes, and summaries, enabling effective support and engagement. Student Success employs two predictive analytic tools: the Catamount Institutional Research Adjustment Model, which predicts first-semester GPA, and EAB's Student Success Predictive Model. These models enhance targeted interventions by identifying students at the highest risk. To identify key trends in student performance, CATalytics, OIPE, and Student Success have made improvements to dashboards, including the Student Success Factors and Student Achievement. Additionally, we have revised our advising model. This data-driven approach enables advisors to proactively identify students who may need additional support and intervene in a timely manner. With these updates, we aim to provide personalized and proactive support, ultimately enhancing academic success and overall experience.
	1.6.4: Meet or exceed UNC System designated institutional goals in support of the WCU mission: 1) Prioritize low-income and rural enrollment and completion, as well as critical workforce credentials. 2) Improve five-year graduation rates and efficiency in undergraduate degrees and undergraduate achievement gaps. 3) Increase research productivity.	Undergraduate Admissions Office of Student Success Office of Research Administration	WCU exceeded UNC System designated goals for four of the nine metrics. WCU exceeded goals for critical workforce degrees awarded (1,505 vs. goal of 1,372), undergraduate degree efficiency (27.4 vs. goal of 26.0), achievement gaps in undergraduate degree efficiency among male students (25.8 vs. goal of 25.3), and research productivity ($6.6M vs. goal of $6.4M). WCU did not meet designated goals for low-income enrollments (3,066 vs. goal of 3,706), rural enrollments (4,590 vs. goal of 4,975), low-income completions (1,009 vs. goal of 1,140), rural completions (1,245 vs. goal of 1,263), and 5-year graduation rate (61.8% vs. goal of 64.7%).

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2: **STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

Accomplishment Highlights

- **Indigenous American exhibitions** – The Mountain Heritage Center hosted Away from Home: American Indian Boarding School Stories from the Heard Museum of Phoenix. Almost 900 people visited the exhibit. The Bardo Fine and Performing Arts Center hosted We Will Not Be Silenced: Standing for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. The exhibition included a series of photographs and sculptures that bring voice to the international Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) movement.

- **Athletic success –** Catamount Athletics had a successful year of competition. The Catamount Tennis and Women's Golf programs won more matches than they have in the history of the programs. Three different teams (men's basketball, women's golf, and volleyball) participated in post season play - a record number of teams for one season. Catamount Football earned its first winning season since 2017. Five Catamount Athletic teams finished in the top-3 of the Southern Conference.

- **DegreePlus turns five –** The DegreePlus program was initiated five years ago as WCU's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), a requirement for maintaining SACSCOC accreditation. In July 2023, SACSCOC accepted WCU's QEP Impact Report without additional reporting required. In 2022-23, the DegreePlus program offered 28 Leadership events with 533 attendees, 23 Teamwork events with 256 attendees, 144 Cultural Responsiveness (Equity & Inclusion) events with 2,179 attendees, and 51 Professionalism (Career & Self-Development) events with 2,081 attendees.

- **Student participation in high impact practices –** During 2022-23, student participation in high-impact practices included 224 students enrolled in internship opportunities, 604 students completing at least one designated service-learning course, and 182 students participating in WCU Global programming, with 43 students participating in international exchange within 15 different countries. A total of 120 students and 12 faculty participated in international faculty-led programming within 10 countries and representing 13 different academic disciplines. There were forty-one academic project grants funded for undergraduate research in 2022-2023 and a total of 85 undergraduate research conference presentations.

- **Career and professional development –** The Center for Career and Professional Development presented in information in sixty-seven classes and 100 workshops, met with 2,133 students, and supported 224 student internships. Over 400 students used the Canvas Career Collection, a self-paced professional development course.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2: Student Experience

We will enrich the student experience through creating intentional cocurricular and curricular programs, which will prepare students to successfully engage in a vibrant, complex, and culturally diverse world.

Goal 2.1 – Perspectives of Others

Create opportunities for students to explore points of view on different issues and to understand the perspectives of others through civil and informed discourse and debate.

Strategic Initiatives	Key Stakeholders	Summary of results to date
2.1.1: Create opportunities for students to explore points of view on different issues and to understand the perspectives of others through civil and informed discourse and debate utilizing campus partners.	Center for Community Engagement & Service Learning Office of Equal Opportunity & Diversity Programs	Based on Cultural Responsiveness Activities data compiled from Degree+ for fiscal year 23, there were 144 activities offered with 2,179 students participating. These numbers include events hosted by Intercultural Affairs, Campus Activities, Center for Community Engagement and Service-Learning, Residential Living, etc. Examples of specific activities include the Tunnel of Oppression with 103 participants, Project C.A.R.E. mentorship program with 76 participants, and SafeZone Certification with 144 registrants. The 2022-2023 Intercultural Affairs Council consisted of 16 student leaders, there were six Student Democracy Coalition student leaders, and eight additional recognized student organizations committed to creating opportunities for students to explore points of view on different issues and to understand the perspectives of others through civil and informed discourse and debate utilizing campus partners and community stakeholders. WCU also hosted a 2022 Democracy Day Candidate Forum to promote civic (and civil) dialogue across differences. This event was attended by 100 students.
2.1.2: Create and track opportunities for student membership and leadership on institutional decision-making committees and organizations.	Office of Campus Activities	Student voices vital to student experience, WCU providing opportunities, educational experience & growth. Res Living Dinner with 8 Strangers, Etiquette Reception (collaboration with Center for Career and Professional Development), Mental Health Aid training, Financial Aid education, ICA education, Sad Boyer Hours, Human Dev & Leadership Retreat. 1st year/sophomore students discover themselves as leaders, urge involvement & support inclusion. College of Arts & Science 12 students Dean Advisory Board, 5 English Studies student ambassadors, 3 Criminology & Criminal Justice students Police Advisory Board, 1 Secondary English Edu Program Student Advisory Board. GSED 3 governing councils, opportunity to engage vibrant, complex & culturally diverse orgs. NPHC Etiquette & Lambda Pi Chi INACAs opportunity to explore cultural identities, understanding others & eagerness to learn. Shared Leadership Minor, help leadership positions & real-world experience. Urged attending programs, broaden minds culturally & diversely. DCA partner with Braver Angels, talk political beliefs, bridge divide to build strong community. SGA's Core & THRIVE, RSO trainings effective in leadership & success. Student voices heard impacts campus community & experience by SGA committees.

2.1.3: Implement diversity and inclusion initiatives to enhance students' understanding of other ethnicities and cultures.	Office of Equal Opportunity & Diversity Programs College Deans	The Mountain Heritage Center hosted Away from Home: American Indian Boarding School Stories from the Heard Museum of Phoenix. Almost 900 people visited the exhibit. WCU classes visited due to the exhibit's themes of cultural inclusivity, assimilation, resistance, and self-determination, and the tie to the Mental Health and Wellness Campus Theme. Bardo hosted the Grammy-nominated wind quintet Imani Winds, who presented their show Black and Brown, a performance celebrating composers of color. It had an attendance of 500. Bardo's exhibitions included We Will Not Be Silenced: Standing for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, the exhibition included a series of photographs and sculptures that bring voice to the international Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) movement. The Way I'm Wired: Artist Reflections on Neurodiversity exhibition invited artists to share their lived experiences with neurodiversity and how these experiences have impacted their work. These exhibitions had between 1,900 - 2,500 visitors. DCA (via LMP) hosted several relevant programs including International Music Day celebration, Diwali Celebration, LGBTQ + Trivia Night, and Hayden Kristal, ASL comedian.
2.1.4: Leverage intercollegiate athletics to instill pride among students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends of the University.	Division of Athletics Office of Alumni Engagement Advancement Services Orientation Programs University Communications & Marketing	Pride for Athletics at WCU stems from competitive success. This year Catamount Athletics has had a tremendous amount of success across the board and provided a tremendous amount of optimism in our fanbase including students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends of the University. This past Athletic season saw the Catamount Tennis and Women's Golf programs win more matches than they have in the history of the programs. Three different teams (men's basketball, women's golf, and volleyball) participated in post season play - a record number of teams for one season. Catamount Football earned its first winning season since 2017. Overall, five Catamount Athletic teams finished in the top-3 of the Southern Conference. Positive campaign momentum through gift announcements and the acquisition of a design firm has instilled pride and optimism for our future among the same constituent group.
Goal 2.2 – Institutional Pride Instill institutional pride through more visible recognition and celebration of university achievements and traditions.		
Strategic Initiatives	**Key Stakeholders**	**Summary of results to date**
2.2.1: Create experiences that strengthen students' connection to their university and emphasize engagement with alumni and friends of the University as students prepare for a professional career.	Catamount Club Alumni Engagement Orientation Programs University Communications & Marketing Advancement Services Center for Career and Professional Development	1. Legacy Pinning Ceremony-In conjunction with Family Weekend over 300 parents and freshman celebrated their Catamount legacy connection with a pinning ceremony 2. Freshman Student Sendoffs- Alumni leaders assisted in hosting freshman sendoffs to welcome over 400 students & parents to the Catamount family 3. P.A.W.S.(Professional Alumni Working with Students) Mentoring Program- program was expanded to all academic colleges matching successful alumni with current students for mentoring 4. 1889 Club- For a gift of $18.89 students are recognized and made aware of the importance of giving back to their alma mater

2.2.2: Build and sustain educational programs that recognize, respect, and celebrate Western North Carolina culture, including Cherokee history and traditions.	Provost's Office Academic Deans Mountain Heritage Center Cherokee Center Library Bardo Arts Center Intercultural Affairs Campus Activities Residential Living	There are multiple examples of our implementation of this strategic initiative. However, data collection is not centralized. The Mountain Heritage Center, Cherokee Center, and many of our academic and co-curricular offerings increasingly emphasize our WNC culture, heritage, and traditions. This year, we implemented the Land Acknowledgement statement that is read at the beginning of events to recognize and our Cherokee relationship and honor their heritage.

Goal 2.3 – Career Exploration and Skills

Create opportunities for skill development and career exploration through involvement in experiential activities.

Strategic Initiatives	Key Stakeholders	Summary of results to date
2.3.1: Expand the utilization of the DegreePlus and other programs that promote transferable skill development for students.	Center for Career and Professional Development Campus Activities Center for Community Engagement & Service Learning	The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) defines career readiness as a "foundation from which to demonstrate requisite core competencies that broadly prepare the college educated for success in the workplace and lifelong career management.". There are eight core competencies that are identified: Career & Self-Development, Communication, Critical Thinking, Equity & Inclusion, Leadership, Professionalism, Teamwork, and Technology. This year Western Carolina University offered events through the DegreePlus program that meet NACE career competencies. The university offered 28 Leadership events that had 533 attendees, 23 Teamwork events with 256 attendees, 144 Cultural Responsiveness (Equity & Inclusion) events that had 2,179 attendees, and 51 Professionalism (Career & Self-Development) events that had 2,081 attendees. In addition, LMP and DCA hosted several programs that touched on these skills: "Hayden Kristal, ASL Comedian/Speaker" (Equity & Inclusion); "The Movie Sowing of Till" (Equity & Inclusion); "Florence Williams: Renowned Author" (Career & Self-Development & Leadership)
2.3.2: Promote student engagement in high-impact practices connected to professional development such as undergraduate research, service-learning, internships, and study abroad.	Center for Community Engagement & Service Learning Center for Career and Professional Development Office of Global Engagement Office of Undergraduate Research Honors College Office of Student Success	Students are encouraged to participate in high-impact practices. During fiscal year 2023: There were 224 students enrolled in internship opportunities managed by CCPD, totaling 861 internship credit hours received. There were 36 Service-Learning designated courses offered by 28 faculty members from 8 different disciplines. A total of 604 students successfully completed at least one designated service-learning course during the 2022-2023 academic year. There were 182 students participating in WCU Global Sponsored Programming, with 43 students participating in International Exchange & Affiliate Programming within 15 different countries. A total of 120 students and 12 faculty participated in International Faculty-led Programming within 10 countries and representing 13 different academic disciplines. A

		total of 19 students and two faculty members participated in Domestic Faculty-led Programming within two US states. There were forty-one Academic Project Grants funded for undergraduate research in 2022-2023 and a total of 85 UG research conference presentations, including SURF (10), RASC (51), and NCUR (24).
2.3.3: Develop co-curricular experiences that enhance classroom learning and professional development.	Campus Activities Center for Community Engagement & Service Learning Center for Career and Professional Development Writing & Learning Commons	CCESL supported thirty-six SL-designated courses and tracked 9,770 community service hours.16 students received the Lily Award, fifteen students received Jacob Medford Scholarships for community engagement, and four student Civic Fellows received $1000 stipends. The WALC incorporated NACE career competencies into the student employment program and surveyed employees about which skills had most improved & which would be most useful after graduation. Employees rated professionalism & communication as skills that were most improved and useful. DCA hosted an American Sign Language comedian for a keynote with thirty-six attendees. The Braver Angels program allowed fourteen students to participate in facilitated conversation designed to promote understanding across political differences. Author Florence Williams spoke to eighty-nine attendees about scientific evidence supporting the cognitive and mental health benefits of nature. The CCPD presented in sixty-seven classes & 100 workshops, met with 2,133 students, and supported 224 students with internships. Over 400 students used the Canvas Career Collection, a self-paced professional development course. DegreePlus tagged 246 events offering transferable skill development.
2.3.4: Identify and promote existing opportunities at WCU, the WNC region, and North Carolina, where DegreePlus students can engage in reflection and articulation.	Center for Community Engagement & Service Learning Center for Career and Professional Development Intercultural Affairs Office of Equal Opportunity & Diversity Programs	The DegreePlus (DP) program has three levels. Level 3 is an opportunity for Reflection & Articulation in which students reflect on the application of their skills through interactive poster presentations. 58% of the 2022/2023 DP events focused on Cultural Responsiveness. The DP3 Experience provides a meaningful lab in which students can explore inclusivity by applying the learning outcomes for the CR skill. Nine students completed Level 3 of DegreePlus through poster presentations. The student who presented on Cultural Responsiveness examined Queer Events in the South. Additionally, 24 WCU students participated in the first-ever WeSpeak WNC Workforce Conference at Harrah's Cherokee Convention Center. It was hosted by a partnership of 9 regional organizations, including WCU and Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.
Goal 2.4 – Wellbeing and Full Potential Create avenues to empower students to achieve their best possible wellbeing and cultivate a campus environment in which students can reach their full potential in all facets of their lives, both in and out of the classroom.		
Strategic Initiatives	**Key Stakeholders**	**Summary of results to date**
2.4.1: Create and implement programs that embrace the	Student Affairs, Health & Wellness Campus Activities	The Campus Theme Mental Health and Wellness, Support, and Community Care allowed us to showcase existing student wellness efforts, as well as open additional partnerships

elements of wellness to build and sustain a collaborative, comprehensive framework approach, with innovative strategies for engagement to help students be healthy and well.	Academic Affairs, Provost's Office	regarding health, wellness, and student support. By exploring the broad impacts of mental health and wellness, we can create a community of support and care for students, employees, and communities. Ten sessions of Mental Health First Aid offered taught students how to assist someone experiencing a mental health challenge. Other program offerings; Barbershop Talk with Intercultural Affairs. Exercise is Medicine Program with Counseling and Psychological Services, Health Services, Campus Recreation and Wellness (CRW). CRW personalized Fitness Orientations, a new PT Package and Exercise is Medicine referral option; Campus Theme and One Book Committee Yoga in the football stadium; Florence Williams Lecture and Guided Trip; Campus Theme and DCA focus on Wilderness is Wellness using nature as medicine; Campus Recreation started American Red Cross private swim lessons for students. Dr. Jessica Ange, Medical Director, completed Koru Mindfulness teacher training which promotes improvement in participant's perceived stress, sleep problems, mindfulness, self-compassion. Several Koru courses were offered for students.
2.4.2: Utilizing the elements of wellness (environmental, social, intellectual, spiritual, occupational, physical, and emotional) as a comprehensive framework approach to increase cross-campus awareness of current programs, services, and resources that support and assist students in engaging in a holistic, total college experience.	Student Affairs, Health & Wellness Campus Activities Academic Affairs, Provost's Office Cherokee Center Counseling & Psychological Services Intercultural Affairs Office of Student Success Center of Career & Professional Development	In response to the Campus Theme Mental Health and Wellness, Support, and Community Care, created eight videos highlighting the comprehensive approach to wellness and resources available. Health & Wellness Fair highlighted elements with campus partners showcasing their programs and services for student success. Restructure of new student orientation allowed interconnectedness through the health and wellness hub, as well as other student resource hubs. Students were required to view the elements of wellness video before attending orientation. Exercise is Medicine Program with Counseling and Psychological Services, Health Services, Campus Recreation and Wellness offered personalized Fitness Orientation package, both a new PT Package and Exercise is Medicine referral option. The weekly student newsletter, *Highlights*, featured a wellness puzzle piece each month dedicated to resources and services related to the specific puzzle piece. USI presentations on health and wellness introduces the puzzle pieces to new students and provides an overview of the programs and services available on campus. The Koru Mindfulness program beneficial to students struggling with stress management anxiety, insomnia, concentration, or attention challenges were offered to students.

Goal 2.5 – Sense of Belonging

Create opportunities that increase a student's ability to find their sense of belonging

Strategic Initiatives	**Key Stakeholders**	**Summary of results to date**
2.5.1: Provide programs and initiatives, both formally and informally, for students living off-campus and on campus in residence halls designed to create a sense of belonging among incoming and continuing students.	Residential Living Greek Life Campus Activities Intercultural Affairs Dean of Students Counseling & Psychological Services Office of Student Success	Multiple departments contributed to events and programs related to this initiative during 2022-2023. There were more than forty-one large-scale events/programs that were specifically meant to build students' connection to WCU. More than 1,100 programs were offered throughout campus centered around building connections among students and the institution. Connecting individually with students remained a focus for many units. Attempts to contact and talk to newly enrolled students were made in their first semester to discuss

		Center of Career & Professional Development	their experience, including their sense of belonging. Residential students had 6,053 one-on-one conversations with their RAs during the year. Groups aiming to provide support to and a sense of belonging for students, including support and therapy groups and student organizations, we facilitated across campus. In addition to these co-curricular offerings, students participated in first year transition courses and academic learning communities. New initiatives including *RISE*, the sophomore residential experience and *Battle of the Greeks*, with a Good Neighbor program marketed to be coming for fall 2023.
	2.5.2: Create a plan to gather data on sense of belonging from graduating students.	Graduate School & Research Student Affairs, Health & Wellness Office of Student Success	To collect and measure sense of belonging data throughout a student's journey at Western, the Division of Student Success purchased ISSAQ, a non-cognitive skills assessment that specifically measures sense of belonging data. Student Success will implement this assessment tool into various programs/initiatives to support and increase sense of belonging. Graduate School developed a several questions on the Graduate Student Exit Survey that investigated students' sense of belonging to their academic program as well as the university. Surveys were distributed December 22, May 23 and August 23 to all students who had applied for graduation. Data suggest that students report a higher sense of belonging to their academic programs than the university. The Graduate School will meet with programs individually throughout the 2022-2023 academic year to discuss student responses. Additionally, The Graduate School has redesigned one of its student support services positions to focus more intentionally on graduate students' support to increase sense of belonging to the campus community.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3: **INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE**

Accomplishment Highlights

- **Removing admissions barriers** – WCU added a new undergraduate application avenue, Coalition for College, whose mission is working with students from communities that are marginalized and underrepresented in higher education. WCU waived the fee for both undergraduate and graduate applications to reduce the cost of applying.
- **Faculty Diversity Officer program** – The Faculty Diversity Officer (FDO) program is designed to develop faculty to serve as peer search committee members with a particular focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and attention to implicit bias that may occur in faculty searches. FDOs are assigned to searches outside of their home colleges to bring outside perspectives to the search process.
- **Inclusive pedagogy** – One of the Coulter Faculty Commons faculty fellows is dedicated to supporting Inclusive Pedagogy and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB). The Inclusive Pedagogy and DEIB fellow facilitated eight workshops during the 2022–23 academic year. The CFC incorporates inclusive pedagogy and universal design for learning practices into all course design consults and workshops to include the Online Course Design and Teaching Institute and the Faculty Forward Symposium for new faculty.

Strategic Direction 3: Inclusive Excellence

We commit to creating a campus reflective of our core values and we offer curricular and co-curricular educational programs that prepare our students for the diverse world in which they live.

Goal 3.1 – University Community

Foster an inclusive University community

Strategic Initiatives	Key Stakeholders	Summary of results to date
3.1.1: Administer a campus climate survey every three years and develop a university plan to address the results.	Office of Equal Opportunity & Diversity Programs Institutional Planning & Effectiveness Vice Chancellors	WCU contracted with the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) to conduct a Campus Climate Study. Part One of the plan was to create a Climate Survey Team in accordance with Strategic Plan Directive 3.0. Part Two of the plan was to conduct a Faculty Climate Survey, Staff Climate Survey, and a Student Climate Survey. All three surveys have been administered. The Student Climate Survey had an 8.1% response rate. The Staff Climate Survey had a response rate of 34%. The Faculty Climate Survey had a response rate of 35%. Results are forthcoming.
3.1.2: Develop and implement a robust university diversity and inclusion plan informed by SACSCOC standards and position statements.	Office of Equal Opportunity & Diversity Programs Office of Assessment Institutional Planning & Effectiveness Blue Ribbon Task Force	Preliminary work is being conducted to prepare for the anticipated approval of a revised SACSCOC diversity, equity and inclusion position statement, and updated expectations to ensure student achievement gaps are being addressed.

Goal 3.2 – Recruit, Retain, and Develop

Broaden our commitment to diversity and inclusion by recruiting, retaining, and developing a diverse community of faculty, staff, and students.

Strategic Initiatives	Key Stakeholders	Summary of results to date
3.2.1: Build a more diverse and inclusive student, faculty and staff community to provide an environment in which all can be successful academically and professionally.	Office of Equal Opportunity & Diversity Programs Enrollment Planning Committee Office of Student Success Student Affairs Human Resources Black Faculty & Staff Assembly	WCU added a new undergraduate application avenue (Coalition for College) to aid diversity and waived the application fee for all levels (UG and GR) for all 2023 entry terms to remove a financial barrier to applying. WCU piloted two new initiatives, the *Brinson Honors College Guarantee* and *Catamount Commitment* to help enhance diversity and inclusion. The Faculty Diversity Officer (FDO) program continues with thirteen trained faculty members serving as peer search committee members, focusing on diversity, equity, inclusion, and attention to implicit bias that may occur in faculty searches. A total of 50 searches have benefited from the addition of an FDO. Also, The Office of the Provost, CFC, and Chief Diversity Officer continued to support the DEIB Community of Practice to advance inclusive excellence across the university. The Community of Practice developed three focus areas that include: building community, using data, and professional development & training. A new curated resource repository was created as a Hunter Library Research Guide to support faculty, staff, and students' independent professional development on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

3.2.2: Establish an accountability model in which all units create goals and metrics around university policy on equity, non-discrimination, compliance, and equal employment opportunities that reflect our commitment to diversity and inclusion.	Office of Equal Opportunity & Diversity Programs Human Resources Provost's Office Student Affairs	To promote compliance, the University has standardized communication processes in place (examples include New Faculty and Staff Orientation; Annual Policy Communication to Campus Community; Search Committee training to include compliance/EEO and diversity obligations; Mandatory supervisory training). Additionally, to ensure accountability in this area, several divisions incorporate diversity goals into respective annual goals. Examples include Academic Affairs: Equity Diversity, and Inclusion prioritized as a top division goal; Administration & Finance: Requirement for each work unit to include diversity and inclusion goals/initiatives in annual goal setting process; General Counsel: Implementation of requirement for any university policies reviewed/revised/written during fiscal year 2023 to consider strategic goals about equity, non-discrimination, compliance, belongingness, and equal opportunity.
Goal 3.3 – Scholarship and Teaching Support innovative and inclusive scholarship and teaching.		
Strategic Initiatives	**Key Stakeholders**	**Summary of results to date**
3.3.1: Ensure that diversity, equity, and inclusion are foundational aspects of educational offerings.	Provost Office of Equal Opportunity & Diversity Programs College Deans	Completed work from the Blue-Ribbon Commission. Continued Inclusive Excellence Day.
3.3.2: Provide ongoing, appropriate professional development on innovative and inclusive practices for faculty and staff.	Human Resources Office of Equal Opportunity & Diversity Programs Coulter Faculty Commons	Faculty Diversity Officer program (FDO): The program is designed to develop faculty to serve as peer search committee members with a particular focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and attention to implicit bias that may occur in faculty searches. FDOs are assigned to searches outside of their home colleges to bring outside perspectives to the search process. The program is a collaboration between the Provost, HR, and the CDO and has continued since its launch in Fall 2021. The CFC has three faculty fellows for the 2022-23 academic year with one dedicated to Inclusive Pedagogy and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB). The Inclusive Pedagogy and DEIB fellow facilitated eight workshops during the 2022-23 academic year. The CFC incorporates inclusive pedagogy and universal design for learning practices into all course design consults and workshops to include the Online Course Design and Teaching Institute and the Faculty Forward Symposium for new faculty. The CFC Director served as one of the primary organizers of the WCU DEIB Community of Practice (CoP) which held four CoP meetings during the 2022-23 academic year.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4:
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

Accomplishment Highlights

- **Regional demand for nurses and engineers** – To grow the number of nurses in the region, the cohort size of the accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing, located in Asheville, has been increased. New graduate degree programs are being developed in engineering and nursing with a focus on rural healthcare.
- **Biltmore Park site expansion** – WCU Programs in Asheville secured additional space at its instructional site location at Biltmore Park. This will grow the footprint in Asheville by 35 percent to facilitate growth in healthcare degree programs as well as for the addition and expansion of other programs in Asheville.
- **Finish Line program success** – The Finish Line Program is designed to assist students in finishing their first bachelor's degree. It is catered toward qualified former students and new transfers. This past year twenty-two students have graduated through the program and has pushed the total number of graduates to 157 since Finish Line began in 2015.
- **NC Innovation partnership** – WCU announced a new partnership with NC Innovation, joining our colleagues at UNC-Charlotte, NC A&T State, and East Carolina as hubs for the initiative. This new collaboration will further strengthen the entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystem across Western NC, producing new technologies and commercialization of products and businesses.
- **Small business support** – The Small Business and Technology Development Center (SBTDC) at WCU serves a 14-county area in Western North Carolina. The SBTDC partners with College of Business professors and MBA students to provide planning services to local businesses. In 2022, the SBTDC aided 675 local businesses, offering nearly 6,000 hours of consulting services. As a result of this support, 334 jobs were created or retained. Businesses that received assistance from the SBTDC were able to secure over $33 million in bank loans.
- **Multi-income housing projects** – WCU is working with two local non-profit housing organizations, along with Jackson County Economic Development, to conceptualize and advance plans for a large-scale multi-income housing project to serve the region. The WCU Endowment Fund Board provided a letter of intent to partner with Mountain Projects and Givens Communities on the development of a multi-income housing community in Webster.

Strategic Direction 4: Regional Development and Engagement

Through regional and community partnerships, we will be a force for the progress and growth of Western North Carolina. A state-wide institution dedicated to the overall development of North Carolina, WCU serves all of the state with particular focus on the communities, towns, and cities of the 17 western-most counties of North Carolina as well as the Qualla Boundary of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

Goal 4.1 – Workforce Growth and Development

Be the higher education leader in workforce growth and development in Western North Carolina.

Strategic Initiatives	Key Stakeholders	Summary of results to date
4.1.1: Increase the number of graduates in regionally identified growth sectors, such as Health & Human Services, Engineering, IT, Hospitality & Tourism, Business, and other fields as annually identified in collaboration with regional partners.	Provost's Office Academic Colleges Office of Economic & Regional Development WCU Programs in Asheville Center for Career & Professional Development Educational Outreach	To grow the number of nurses in the region, the cohort size of the accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing, located in Asheville, was increased by more than 10 percent to 55 students. Two new graduate degree programs are now in process to be added to main campus and WCU Programs in Asheville. One is in Engineering which would be in Asheville and the other is in Nursing with a focus on rural healthcare. The Nursing degree would be at main campus and Asheville. These degrees are at different stages in the approval process and are scheduled for implementation in 2024.
4.1.2: Expand the regional service footprint of WCU beyond main campus though its instructional site in Asheville as well as other current and future sites in the region.	Graduate Programs Educational Outreach Office of Economic & Regional Development	WCU Programs in Asheville secured additional space at its instructional site location at Biltmore Park in Spring 2023. This will grow the footprint in Asheville by 35 percent to facilitate growth in healthcare degree programs as well as for the addition and expansion of other programs in Asheville. The renovation is planned to be complete in August 2024.
4.1.3: Expand the number of undergraduate and graduate degrees offered as distance programs, whether entirely online or a combination of face-to-face and hybrid on main campus, the Asheville instructional site, and any other instructional sites.	Educational Outreach Graduate School & Research Associate Provost Provost's Office Undergraduate Admissions Coulter Faculty Commons WCU Programs in Asheville Distance Learning Advisory Council	Two new hybrid graduate degree programs are now in process to be added to main campus and WCU Programs in Asheville. One is in Engineering and will be in Asheville. The other is in Nursing with a focus on rural healthcare and will be located on both main campus and in Asheville. These programs are at different stages of the approval process and are scheduled for implementation in 2024. The Master of Accountancy Program requested approval to move to on-line delivery method and, upon final approvals, will begin and complete that transition in 2023-24.
4.1.4: Develop a program of recruitment and support for part-way home and Finish Line students, who need to return to higher education to complete a degree or other credential and link these programs with the myFutureNC program.	Office of Student Success Office of Student Advising Undergraduate Admissions Educational Outreach WCU Programs in Asheville	The Finish Line Program is designed to assist students in finishing their first bachelor's degree. It is catered toward both former students and new transfers that may qualify. This past year 22 students have graduated through the Finish Line Program (10 students in December and 12 students in May). It is another great graduation class and has pushed the total number of graduates to 157 since Finish Line began in Fall 2015. This was another excellent year for Finish Line, and we hope to continue to build on the success moving forward through improved communication/marketing with WCU Admissions.

4.1.5: Establish WCU as the leading UNC system school of choice for students transferring from the North Carolina Community College system as well as other 4-year universities and colleges.	Community Colleges Undergraduate Admissions Office of Student Advising Financial Aid Office Educational Outreach	WCU remained the top transfer institution among regional community colleges, surpassing sister UNC schools in attracting students from the eight westernmost NC community colleges in fall 2022 and spring 2023. WCU: 348; UNCA: 108; ASU: 102; UNCC: 55; UNCW: 33; UNCG: 24. WCU experienced its 2nd largest fall transfer cohort in 2022 (1050) and its 2nd largest spring transfer cohort in 2023 (485) thanks to increases in transfer students from other UNC institutions and out-of-state colleges. WCU established three more Guaranteed Admission Partnerships this year (UNCC, CVCC, and WPCC), and the Brinson Honors College established its 10th MOU (CPCC). Numerous offices collaborated on programs. Educational Outreach secured a UNC System grant to host four outreach programs in fall 2022 and increased outreach to community college presidents, employers, and professional communities. Campus partners hosted Catamount Advising for Transfer Success (CATS). Finish Line catered to former students and new transfer students to support completion of baccalaureate degrees. Twenty-two Finish Line students graduated this academic year, bringing the total to 157 since the program's inception in fall 2015.
4.1.6: Develop a next-level continuing education and professional development program that utilizes traditional and alternative credentials, as well as stackable credentialing that integrates tightly with undergraduate and graduate degree programs.	Provost Coulter Faculty Commons Office of Economic & Regional Development WCU Programs in Asheville Graduate School & Research	In response to the evolving needs of workforce and the demand for continuous learning, Educational Outreach leads on-going efforts in developing next-level continuing education and professional development programs that utilize credentials and other valuable learning pathways in partnerships with university colleges, associations, and industries. The goal is to provide learners with comprehensive, versatile, and industry-relevant learning opportunities that enhance their skill sets and career opportunities. EO also gathers information about skill gaps and areas of demand in the job market. Understanding the specific needs of employers and industries allows for the development of partnerships, credentials and tailored programming that is relevant, practical and meets the demands of the job market. Areas of Focus: Outreach and Assessment, Engaging Stakeholders, Building Partnerships and Customized Curriculum, Assessing Learner Needs, Flexible and Inclusive Learning Formats, and Evaluation of Program Impact.
4.1.7: Develop a system of research and reporting for real-time awareness of regional workforce and other development needs.	Office of Economic & Regional Development Center for the Study of Free Enterprise	Monthly economic key indicators and relevant workforce data is provided by NC Commerce and distributed widely via our Council of Government partners throughout the region. In 2024-2025 the Office of Economic Development, in collaboration with WCU Marketing and Communications, will integrate relevant reporting of said data through our web platform.
4.1.8: In partnership with regional entities, leverage WCUs alumni network to bring graduates back to the region for relocation.	Office of Economic & Regional Development Office of Alumni Engagement Center of Career and Professional Development	WCU continues to utilize our alumni network to promote opportunities in high-growth, high-demand career fields in Western North Carolina. Respective colleges and programs are continually using social media platforms such as linked in to connect with former students and to share opportunities that are germane to critical industry sectors, thereby providing a potential pipeline of skilled workers into the region.

Goal 4.2 – Issues Facing Western North Carolina Serve as lead convenor on major issues facing Western North Carolina at both the regional and local levels.		
Strategic Initiatives	**Key Stakeholders**	**Summary of results to date**
4.2.1: Convene annual think-tanks on key regional issues such as, but not limited to, Community Health, Childcare, Workforce Housing, Transportation, Broadband, and Homelessness.	Office of Economic & Regional Development	Over the past 12 months WCU has convened or participated in numerous regional discussions on relevant economic subject matters, to include but not limited to: the WNC Outdoor Economy Conference, the WNC Rebounding Stronger Federal Reserve summit, the We Speak WNC small business summit, the Innovations in Healthcare-Economic Development summit, and the Device Access for Broadband roundtable. In addition, WCU has both participated and presented in Statewide forums that would include the Emerging Issues Forum at the Institute for Emerging Issues, the NC Rural Summit, and the North Carolina Economic Development Association.
4.2.2: Convene business and non-profit subsectors on a regular basis to develop and cultivate "big ideas" for regional transformation.	Office of Economic & Regional Development	WCU has proactively worked with several non-profits and local government agencies to develop creative strategies for improving the availability of multi-income housing, the proposed development of a "bridge clinic" to support displaced workers from the Pactive Evergreen shutdown, as well as actively participating in key discussions regarding the future of the Pactive Evergreen site in Canton. Western also continues to engage with economic, private, and non-profit leaders to define the need for specific industry sector support that aligns with critical workforce and research and development needs across Western NC.
4.2.3: Convene regional partners for collaborative leadership, research, and planning	Office of Economic & Regional Development	In 2024 WCU announced its partnership with NC Innovation (NCI) to promote research and development along with innovation and product commercialization here in Western North Carolina. NCI's regional hub director with work closely with WCU to assess and foster the research and innovation ecosystem, in collaboration with other higher education institutions that serve our region, and indeed the State. This effort will provide for a stronger connection to funding for research and commercialization that has typically been funneled to the Research Triangle Park, thereby expanding the state's intellectual property and tech transfer capacities and fostering new industry/job creation.
4.2.4: Encourage active and multi-lateral community and campus participation in relevant local strategic planning initiatives for communities, municipalities, and the region.	Office of Economic & Regional Development	In the past 12 months, WCU has worked closely with local and regional officials to develop or revise specific initiatives, and comprehensive planning documents that serve as a roadmap for economic success. Those activities run the gambit between active participation in the Cullowhee Revitalization citizen action committee, to holding a seat on the Economic Advisory Council for the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina. Representatives from WCU hold seats on Chamber of Commerce Boards in Jackson, Haywood, and Buncombe counties, further solidifying our connection in support of our community partners. WCU remains closely engaged with our Regional Council of Government partners (Southwestern & Land of Sky) and their workforce development boards.

4.2.5: Publish and distribute widely, an annual report of WCUs regional and community development and engagement.	Office of Economic & Regional Development	The WCU Office of Economic Development and Regional Partnerships publishes its annual summary of activities/accomplishments in conjunction with the Chancellor's Division annual report.

Goal 4.3 - Business Retention and Expansion
Become a key regional partner in business retention and expansion

Strategic Initiatives	Key Stakeholders	Summary of results to date
4.3.1: Develop two business development centers, one in Jackson County to serve southwest NC and one in Buncombe County to serve metro Asheville, that physically bring together WCU's and other entities' business development units.	Office of Economic & Regional Development Small Business and Technology Development Center College of Business WCU Programs in Asheville	Work continues developing feasibility studies for both a regional innovation hub to be in Sylva, and a larger center to be focused on entrepreneurship and innovation in association with other disciplines in advanced manufacturing, health/life/sciences, and data sciences in the Asheville metro area. The NC Growth initiative from UNC Chapel Hill is currently developing a framework for the Jackson County location, and funding requests have been made to several foundations and agencies to provide planning for the Asheville-based spoke and hub concept. WCU's new partnership with NC Innovation will also provide support and leverage resources that will bolster the need for such facilities.
4.3.2: Lead regional efforts to foster small-business and entrepreneurial endeavors via entrepreneurship curricula, Corporation for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Small Business & Technology Development Center, the RAPID Center, and the region's Community College Small Business Centers, Community Development Financial Institutions, and non-profit resources.	Office of Economic & Regional Development Small Business and Technology Development Center College of Business	WCU Continued its rich tradition of being a catalyst to bolster small businesses throughout Western NC. The Office of Economic Development & Regional Partnerships continued in its role as co-chair of the CREATE Bridges initiative, focused on retail, entertainment, accommodations, and tourism sectors in the western counties, culminating with the *We Speak* small business conference last year. WCU also announced our partnership with *NC Innovation*, joining our colleagues at UNC-Charlotte, NC A&T State, and East Carolina as hubs for the initiative. This new collaboration will further strengthen the entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystem across Western NC, producing new technologies and commercialization of products and businesses. The Small Business and Technology Development Center (SBTDC) at WCU serves a 14-county area in Western North Carolina. The SBTDC actively works with the College of Business professors providing valuable experiences to MBA students and excellent services to local businesses in strategic planning. In 2022, the SBTDC center aided 675 local businesses, offering consulting services for a total of nearly 6,000 hours. As a result of this support, 334 jobs were created or retained. Moreover, businesses that received assistance from the SBTDC were able to secure over $33 million in bank loans. Additionally, the combined sales of the center's clients experienced a collective increase of $3 million just in the WNC area. Notably, the SBTDC also played a crucial role in the establishment of 82 new businesses/start-ups.

Goal 4.4 Regional and Community Engagement Be a state model for regional and community engagement.		
Strategic Initiatives	**Key Stakeholders**	**Summary of results to date**
4.4.1: Convene, lead, and invest in the development of Cullowhee as a community.	Office of the Chief of Staff Office of Economic & Regional Development Division of Administration & Finance	M. Byers and R. Price serve as board members on Cullowhee Revitalization Inc (CuRev). M. Byers serves as WCU's designated member on the Cullowhee Planning Council. Began development of grant application for federal funding to repair the Cullowhee dam and provide for the potential to facilitate a future river park below the dam. WCU annually hosts Mountain Heritage Day, as a significant investment in the community. WCU health clinics are investments in our community (pro bono PT and social work clinic, the hearing and speech clinic, the McKee Clinic, etc.) The Seeds and Soil: Campus Community Partnership Forum brought together faculty, staff, students, and community partners from across WNC to share best practices for developing mutually beneficial partnerships among various stakeholders. During this forum, representatives from higher education institutions and community organizations discussed the issues they have collaboratively addressed, the processes and structures they adopted for their partnerships, and their projects' key transferable lessons. WCU continues to maintain hiking/biking trail on campus for community use.
4.4.2: Develop interdisciplinary clinics(s), fixed or mobile, to serve the region and provide clinical placements for our students.	Coulter Faculty Commons College of Business College of Education College of Health & Human Services	An examination of the viability of an interdisciplinary clinic in Asheville began in Spring 2023. The examination is part of a space fit analysis tied to the expansion of the instructional site at Biltmore Park which is scheduled to be completed in August 2024. The McKee Assessment and Psychological Services Clinic on the main campus is a not-for-profit training clinic for students in WCU's Psychology graduate programs, serving children and adults in the community. A total of 16 graduate students and 6 clinical faculty provided services to a total of 89 individuals, including 17 WCU students. The Catamount School, WCU's laboratory school located inside Smoky Mountain High School, served 52 students from Jackson County in grades 6-8. This past year, there were 182 clinical placements at the school which included students from undergraduate programs in Middle Grades, Health and PE, Inclusive Ed, Elementary Ed, Music Ed, Math Ed, Nursing, Health, and graduate programs in School Psychology and Counseling. The Mountain Area Pro Bono Health Services (MAP Health) in Cullowhee and Biltmore Park continued to offer physical therapy, social work, nutrition, and speech therapy services to the under-served and under-insured populations of WNC. The pro bono clinic is self-supported through student fund raising.
4.4.3: Develop a university-specific Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), guided by the University's Strategic Plan, and to include intensive	Office of Economic & Regional Development College of Business	This year has been marked with several of our County and Regional economic development organizations amid revisions of their respective CEDS documents. It is prudent for WCU to have a full understanding of those planning documents, and any additional regional economic impact analysis (2022 State of our Workforce survey: Land of Sky area) before proceeding with the development of a campus-specific plan. We

participation from the various communities and counties encompassed in our region to create alignment with dynamic needs.		would expect to engage with consultants to evaluate both WCU's economic impact to the region, as well as feasibility for a campus specific CEDS plan in the 2024-2025 academic year.
4.4.4: Develop a tool by which external partners can identify and connect with institutional departments, program and units for regional and community partnerships.	Office of the Chief of Staff Office of Economic & Regional Development	In 2023-2024, the Office of Economic Development & Regional Partnerships, in conjunction with University Marketing and Communications, completed a revision and update of our dedicated website to provide productive contact points more directly for external partners. That office along with Research Administration will work to further develop synergies for both reporting and connecting with external partners to advance research and support opportunities. WCU is also highly active in the State and region's Chambers of Commerce, economic development organizations, and Councils of Government, which allows for streamlined information sharing and resource identification.
4.4.5: Leverage the fine and performing arts to advance WCU's commitment to regional and community engagement on the main campus, instructional sites, and across the Western North Carolina region.	Bardo Fine & Performing Arts Center Belcher College of Fine & Performing Arts Mountain Heritage Center WCU Programs in Asheville	From performances and festivals to exhibitions and public art, WCU serves as a regional hub for the arts by offering a range of experiences, primary offered through the Belcher College of Fine and Performing Arts and the Mountain Heritage Center. WCU hosted a total of 219 arts and culture programs and engaged a total of 42,846 adults and youth (k-12). All activities were open to the public and included in-person events at Bardo Arts Center in the Performance Hall and WCU Fine Art Museum exhibitions and receptions, performances at Coulter Recital Hall, Niggli Studio Theatre, University Auditorium, and Mountain Heritage Center. Media exposure included editorials, articles, and paid advertising across WNC outlets such as the Sylva Herald, Smoky Mountain News, Cherokee One Feather, Mountain Xpress, Blue Ridge Public Radio, The Laurel of Asheville, The Laurel of Highlands-Cashiers, Macon County News, Franklin Press, Biltmore Beacon, Asheville Citizen-Times, and WNC Magazine.
4.4.6: Be a regional and community hub for thought leadership at main campus, the Asheville instructional site, and any other instructional sites/facilities.	Educational Outreach Academic Colleges	As the Covid-19 pandemic continues to recede, the University is now better able to consider how it can leverage its academic expertise and its locations to expand its role as a thought leader in the region in a variety of fields.
4.4.7: Encourage and support individual regional and community engagement by students, faculty and staff	Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning Human Resources Faculty Senate Staff Senate	For fiscal year 2023, 277(+19) employees utilized 4,262 hours of community service leave (CSL) (+39.6%). Staff Senate facilitated 1,073 hours of CSL (+600). During 2022-23, WCU students completed 9,770 community service hours - 4,150 by students enrolled in the Lily Award for Community Engagement Initiative. Other examples include: -28 faculty taught 36 Service-Learning designated courses, successfully completed by a total of 604 students. -CCESL increased social media post engagement by 407% (Facebook) and 156% (Instagram) between January -June 2023.

		-2,609 newly admitted students completed the "Introduction to Community Engagement at WCU" pre-orientation module. -220 Summer Bridge Program students completed the Find your Spark. Make a Difference. Live Western" community engagement leadership workshop. -Launched the new CCESL IMPACT Awards, recognizing twenty-two community-engaged partnerships between students/staff/faculty and community partners. -Sixteen WCU seniors received the WCU Lily Award for Community engagement. -WCU awarded fifteen Medford scholarships to students demonstrating a commitment to community engagement and service learning. -CCESL held the 2023 Experiential Commons Scholar Summit at Biltmore Park.
4.4.8: Identify and annually place students, faculty, and staff on key regional and community leadership boards.	Office of the Chief of Staff Office of the Provost Dean of Students College Deans Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning	The offices of the Chancellor and the Provost continually scan the landscape for strategic opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to serve on or be involved with state, regional, or community industry, non-profit, governmental, or leadership boards. Below is a curated list of strategic boards on which WCU has representation. Asheville Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors NC Campus Compact Harris Regional Hospital Board of Directors NC Innovation Jackson County Business and Industry Board EDPNC Economic Advisory Council Cullowhee Revitalization Endeavor (CuRvE) Board Southwestern Workforce Development Board of Directors - Executive Committee Mountain West Partnership Board of Directors Governor's Advisory Council on Hispanic/Latino Affairs Mountain Area Health Education Consortium (MAHEC) Board of Directors Blue Ridge Public Radio Board of Directors Tuckaseigee Water and Sewer Authority Board of Directors Cullowhee Planning Council Jackson County Comprehensive Plan Advisory Council NCDOT Statewide Multimodal Freight Plan Council Center for Domestic Peace Board of Directors Vecinos Board of Directors Haywood County Chamber of Commerce Big Brothers/Big Sisters of WNC

Goal 4.5 – Leverage Expertise Leverage WCUs expertise in key areas to help other institutions, large employers, and government entities.		
Strategic Initiatives	**Key Stakeholders**	**Summary of results to date**
4.5.1: Bring in other regional partners to develop their own diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts as the University improves upon its own	Office of Equal Opportunity & Diversity Programs Intercultural Affairs Educational Outreach Human Resources Administration & Finance	Efforts on this initiative have been postponed by the vacancy in the Chief Diversity Officer position.
4.5.2: Guide other regional partners to leadership in environmentalism and sustainability.	Office of Economic & Regional Development Office of Sustainability & Energy Management	Senior Energy Manager (SEM) led UNC System response to increased natural gas costs as part of State Contract 405N. Led panel discussion on issue at Appalachian Energy Summit, alerting UNC System to increased fuel costs. Several UNC schools, including WCU, have switched providers to reduce costs. -SEM served as Co-Track Manager for Governmental & Institutional Track NC State Energy Conference. -SEM served on state Energy Ad Hoc Committee (2021-present) to develop 2024 North Carolina Energy Conservation Code. -SEM presented at NCSU Energy Management Diploma Program (2013-present). -SEM served on Technical Advisory Committee, US DOE Commercial Audit Assessment Project to fully value window and building envelope improvements. Led by Lawrence Berkley National Lab and Pacific Northwest National Lab (2023-26). -Sustainability Officer served on Jackson County Solid Waste Board, representative for WCU (2020 - present). -Sustainability Officer served on Jackson County TDA Sustainability and Stewardship Committee, representative for WCU (2022-present). -Sustainability Officer served on Empowering Mountain Food Systems Advisory Board (2019 - 23). Project grant end date 5/23.
4.5.3: Leverage WCU's expertise in public/private partnerships for housing development to grow workforce housing in the region.	Office of Economic & Regional Development Administration & Finance	WCU has been engaged with 2 local non-profit housing organizations, along with Jackson County Economic Development, to conceptualize and advance plans for a large-scale multi-income housing project to serve the region. A full project announcement can be expected in the Fall of 2023. In addition, WCU continues to lead and participate in, relevant discussions and planning efforts across our region to further address the challenge of housing availability. The WCU Endowment Fund Board provided a letter of intent to partner with Mountain Projects and Givens Communities on the development of a multi-income housing community in Webster. WCU master leased 4 apartment units for sub-lease to new faculty and staff on a short-term basis, until they can find a more permanent living arrangement.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 5: **EMPLOYEE EXCELLENCE**

Accomplishment Highlights

- **Staff salary improvements** – A 1% Labor Market Adjustment Reserve (LMAR) equal to $750,000 was used to provide salary adjustments to approximately 400 faculty and staff to address labor market, equity, and retention concerns. All faculty and EHRA Non-Faculty salaries increased to a minimum of the 35th percentile of designated national market data and SHRA salaries adjusted to a minimum of 85% of the designated state-wide market rate. Additionally, in fiscal year 2023 the UNC System converted SHRA accounting, audit, business professional, and law enforcement positions to EHRA Non-Faculty. This conversion is designed to provide campuses with greater salary range flexibility and significantly increases the amount of paid time off (vacation leave) available to newly hired staff.
- **New knowledge database** – The My Resources knowledge base was launched in September 2022. This campus-wide resource includes articles, videos, and links to content for the most frequently used WCU systems and business processes.
- **Investment in professional development** – For fiscal year 2023, WCU nearly doubled the Staff Senate Professional Development fund, providing $23,586 in recurring funding for external professional development opportunities, with forty-two staff receiving funding. Additionally, the university allocated $896,789 for external professional development/ training programming and provided HR-sponsored programming to 1,808 individuals.
- **Grant funding for graduate students** – During fiscal year 2023, there were 19 grant proposals awarded that included graduate student support.
- **Expanded mental health support** – In Fall 2022 WCU introduced the Ginger On-demand mental health program for faculty and staff.
- **Flexible work arrangements** – For fiscal year 2023, 132 formal Flexible Work Arrangement agreements were approved and implemented.

Strategic Direction 5: Employee Excellence

We will continue to attract, retain, and promote outstanding faculty and staff while providing valuable scholarship, leadership, and professional development opportunities

Goal 5.1 – Salaries and Compensation

Ensure salary and compensation benefits package remains an institutional priority to attract, reward, and retain the highest quality employees.

Strategic Initiatives	Key Stakeholders	Summary of results to date
5.1.1: Advocate with governing bodies for financial resources and structural framework necessary to offer competitive, attractive, and cost-effective total compensation (salary and benefits) packages.	Human Resources Administration & Finance Office of External Relations Chancellor's Office	A top institutional legislative priority that was approved at the December 2022 WCU Board of Trustees meeting was salaries for current faculty and staff. To extend this message, University leadership continues to advocate for faculty and staff compensation to key external constituents to the greatest extent possible. The statewide fiscal year 2023 budget provided for a 3.5% across the board increase for faculty and staff salaries as well as a 1% Labor Market Adjustment Reserve (LMAR) equal to $750,000. As part of the LMAR implementation, WCU was able to provide salary adjustments to approximately 400 faculty and staff to address labor market, equity, and retention concerns. Additionally, in fiscal year 2023 the UNC System converted SHRA accounting, audit, business professional, and law enforcement positions to EHRA Non-Faculty. The conversion to EHRA moves oversite of these position groups from the North Carolina Office of State Human Resources to the UNC Board of Governors. The move from SHRA to EHRA is designed to provide campuses with greater salary range flexibility and significantly increases the amount of paid time off (vacation leave) available to newly hired staff.
5.1.2: Develop, implement, or strengthen institutional efforts to address salary shortfalls, making this a top institutional priority, in addition to, or in the absence of, salary maintenance as a state funding priority.	Human Resources Administration & Finance Office of External Relations Chancellor's Office	During fiscal year 2023 university salary committees continue to be active with broad representation. Formal recommendations from each committee have been submitted to leadership and recommendations were utilized to guide key salary adjustment processes. During fiscal year 2023 WCU effectively utilized state appropriated and university-based funds to address priority faculty and staff salary issues to include the following: 3.5% Legislative Increase (July 2022); 1% Labor Market Adjustment Reserve ($750,000) to address labor market issues (October 2022); $180,000 to convert University Law Enforcement positions from SHRA to EHRA Non-Faculty (April 2023); Trend analysis to assess progress towards target salary goals is conducted annually in December. Information from this analysis is provided to University Leadership to include the BOT, Executive Council, University Salary Committees, and Faculty & Staff Senates. Additional highlights include: all faculty and EHRA Non-Faculty salaries increased to a minimum of the 35th percentile of designated national market data; effectively address compression issues of faculty across ranks; SHRA salaries adjusted to a minimum of 85% of the designated state-wide market rate.

Goal 5.2 – Professional Development and Long-term Promotion Opportunities Ensure all employees have access to valuable professional development and training opportunities, to support increased capacity and productivity as well as long-term career promotion opportunities.		
Strategic Initiatives	**Key Stakeholders**	**Summary of results to date**
5.2.1: Support professional development for all employees as a managerial priority, by devoting the appropriate time and funding to the effort.	Human Resources Budget Office Division/Department Heads	The University has provided $23,586, which is an increase over last year by $11,586 in recurring funding to the Staff Senate Professional Development fund which is designed to provide funding for external professional development opportunities for staff. For fiscal year 2023, this fund was fully exhausted by April with forty-two staff receiving funding (out of 48 requests). Additionally, in fiscal year 2023, the university allocated $896,789 for external professional development/ training programming (excludes travel). The University also continued to place an emphasis on ensuring adequate resources and availability for internally sponsored programming. In fiscal year 2022, for example, 1,808 individuals participated in formal WCU HR-sponsored professional development offerings.
5.2.2: Develop a process to report and document the level and engagement of faculty and staff in professional development, both internally and externally.	Human Resources Coulter Faculty Commons Information Technology Division/Department Heads	Human Resources has continued its partnership with CFC and IT to expand the capabilities of the Catalog application with Canvas that was launched in Fall 2021. Key areas of functionality that include a registration tool for on-line and in-person training events; tracking of grades, completions, and certifications; and an employee self-service and access to transcripts continue to highlight the use of the Catalog application. Reporting capabilities that allow for mixing variables (supervisor, department, job category, etc.); and interface with Banner for the updating of employee profiles in Canvas/Catalog; ability to group training offerings into categories, groups, and tracks remains an ongoing project. Assigning curriculum, based on an employee group, employee role or hire date continues to be done manually at this time. Solutions to maximize canvas/catalog functionality is ongoing.
5.2.3: Develop a campus-wide mechanism that provides training and documentation for the most frequently utilized WCU systems and processes.	Human Resources Coulter Faculty Commons Information Technology Staff Senate	*My Resources* was launched in September 2022. This campus-wide knowledge base includes articles, videos, and or links to content for the most frequently used WCU systems and processes. Ongoing efforts continue to expand content in the knowledge base led by Human Resources staff. Marketing materials have been developed with instructions and prompts to assist in this effort. Content currently includes human resources processes, purchasing, graduate school, registrar, advising, student administration, advancement, and donor relations. The knowledge base can be accessed via https://myresources.wcu.edu
5.2.4: Develop mapping of position-based skills, competencies, and access needed for staff positions, as a mechanism for quality assurance in the workforce, continuity in departmental operations, and	Human Resources Department Heads Information Technology Staff Senate	Initial project assessment performed in fiscal year 2022. The overall scope of this project will be difficult to implement within existing resources. A review of current staffing hiring patterns has shown that current promotional opportunities for staff are not only available but critical to overall institutional operations (in fiscal year 2023, 35% of all staff hires were via internal promotion). As the UNC System has initiated a project to update the current SHRA Career-Banding Classification system, there may be opportunities to incorporate some aspect of this initiative into a future implementation.

advancing the potential for career growth and long-term promotional opportunity.		

Goal 5.3 – Professional Development for Research

Support scholarship and creative activities to foster our mission as a regional comprehensive university.

Strategic Initiatives	Key Stakeholders	Summary of results to date
5.3.1: Strengthen the organizational structure to better integrate research and the Graduate School at our University	Graduate School & Research	The Graduate School and Research made organizational and structural changes to better integrate our units with The University. The Graduate School eliminated an administrative support position to increase salaries for a Recruiting and Communications Director, a Student Support Specialist, and a Technical Analyst. It is hoped that the more competitive salaries will help Graduate School retain its staff who are integral in working with the larger university community. Specifically, the redesigned Student Specialist will focus more intentionally on supporting graduate students enrolled at WCU to increase sense of belonging and retention. The Office of Research Administration experienced over 100% turnover in academic year 2022-2023. To bolster staff hiring and retention as well as keep connected to faculty, a new faculty liaison position was created. To deal with export controls and compliance issues, a new Director of Compliance position was created in early Fall 2022. Additionally, the Provost began campus-wide meetings to discuss potentially separating Graduate School and Research offices. A new Director of Research Administration was hired in June 2023 and a new Dean of Graduate School started July 1, 2023.
5.3.2: Build individual faculty, staff, and graduate student capacity through support of development activities aimed at increasing research and grant proposal writing, publications, creative work, and other scholarly endeavors.	Office of Research Administration Office of the Provost Academic Colleges	During fiscal year 2023, there were 19 grant proposals awarded that included graduate student support (assistantships/wages/travel/etc.). Eight graduate students were specifically supported on assistantships from non-state of North Carolina funding. These assistantships totaled $37,500 and were supported from external grants and contracts from submitted proposals through the WCU Office of Research Administration. Continued success to build momentum from development activities to support research and grant activities have been minimal since there is no part-time or full-time staff support for development activities for the Graduate School and Research. Plans for fiscal year 2024 include hiring a Research Programs Coordinator who will assist in building development capacity for activities associated with research. The Research and Scholarship Conference (RASC) that integrates both the Graduate Research Symposium and the Undergraduate Expo incorporated the Faculty and Scholarship Conference into the RASC in Spring 2023. This created a more public facing event that will help to attract stakeholders that wish to support and stimulate faculty, staff, and student research and scholarly endeavors.

	Goal 5.4 – Faculty as Teacher / Scholar Create an environment in which the primary role of faculty as teacher scholar is recognized and valued.		
	Strategic Initiatives	**Key Stakeholders**	**Summary of results to date**
	5.4.1: Assess and support the needs of non-tenure track faculty.	Provost's Office Faculty Senate	2022-2023 was the second year of promotion opportunities for non-tenure track faculty. In this cycle, thirty-four fixed-term faculty were reviewed according to criteria in the DCRDs and 33 received promotions. A total of ninety-one fixed term faculty have received promotions through this program since it was established.
	5.4.2: Encourage department heads and deans to utilize flexibility within the parameters of fiscal realities in developing and implementing integrated faculty workload expectations, which allow for teaching, scholarship, and service expectations tailored to local need, skill, and specialization.	Academic Colleges Provost's Office	Department heads and deans have traditionally held some level of flexibility in developing and integrating workload expectations. Significant advances in the availability of data dashboards in Catalytics continues to help managers make strategic decisions around instructional resource needs. A major update to the UNC Policy on Faculty Workload was approved in May 2023 that will lead to significant changes to reporting faculty workload and will ideally further advance this strategic initiative in meaningful ways over the next 2-3 years.
	Goal 5.5 – Healthy Lifestyle Create a campus environment that facilitates a healthy lifestyle for employees.		
	Strategic Initiatives	**Key Stakeholders**	**Summary of results to date**
	5.5.1: Promote employee mental health through programming and services, addressing issues such as destigmatizing mental health, and improving work-life balance, stress management, and employee resilience.	Office of Health & Wellness Human Resources Academic Colleges Department Heads	2022 UNC Employee Engagement Survey results showed that 72% of employees were satisfied or very satisfied with their well-being. To further support and promote mental health and well-being, in Fall 2022 WCU introduced the Ginger On-demand mental health program for faculty and staff. Additionally, the university continued to offer the Calm app with 508 faculty and staff signing up for services in fiscal year 23. The Employee Wellness Ambassadors promoted through TEAMS state Lunch and Learns, Coulter Faculty Commons Joy of Learning, Empty Bowl, wellness articles, Eye Mask Making & Mindfulness Session, Employee Appreciation Day Be the Best You Bingo. Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) skills-based course trained 204 Faculty/staff and students to identify and respond to someone experiencing a mental health challenge. Eight elements of wellness videos created https://www.wcu.edu/learn/academic-enrichment/campus-theme/campus-theme-resources.aspx -Offered a community service employee trail workday, and weaving nicely into the campus theme, offered several Koru Mindfulness courses, which specifically promotes improvement in participant's perceived stress, sleep problems, mindfulness, and self-compassion.
	5.5.2: Encourage physical health of employees by promoting physical fitness, healthy eating, activity, and movement.	Office of Health & Wellness Human Resources Academic Colleges Department Heads	The Employee Wellness Team offered employees access to two free lunch hour Campus Recreation Group Exercise classes per week regardless of membership. Campus Recreation started private American Red Cross swim lessons for employees and offered a trail workday utilizing community service hours. The WCU trails are open to employees

			and the community, as well as Reid Pool and a low-cost membership option to the Campus Recreation Center and program and service offerings for overall wellness. In addition to the Employee Appreciation Day (EAD) Be the Best You Bingo, Eat Green and exercise tips were given to employees. Medical Director, Dr. Jessica Ange, completed her teacher training in the Koru Mindfulness program which specifically promotes improvement in participant's perceived stress, sleep problems, mindfulness (including measurements in attention and acceptance), and self-compassion. Weaving nicely into the campus theme, Dr. Ange offered several Koru courses for employees. WCU Wellness Ambassadors receive wellness programs and information on TEAMS to promote to colleagues. WHEEforlife.wcu.edu promotes both campus and community wellness opportunities.
	Goal 5.6 – Environmental Challenges (Recruit and Retain) Contribute to employee recruitment and retention by addressing environmental challenges for employees and their families		
	Strategic Initiatives	**Key Stakeholders**	**Summary of results to date**
	5.6.1: Implement a flex-work policy, aligned with the policy provided by the System Office, as a tool which can be strategically employed to improve productivity, employee satisfaction, and maintain our position as a competitive employer.	Human Resources	In partnership with the UNC System Office, WCU implemented formal Flexible Work Arrangement guidelines in Summer 2021. These guidelines are designed to facilitate flexible work arrangements where practicable while ensuring all operational needs of the University are met. These guidelines are reviewed on a regular basis and an annual report on usage is provided to Executive Council. For fiscal year 2023, 132 formal Flexible Work Arrangement agreements were approved and implemented. WCU HR continues to provide ongoing training/information sessions on WCU's Flexible Work Arrangement guidelines.
	5.6.2: Provide support for dual career households through programs such as regional employment networks, and access to a variety of resources such as institutional job posting boards and career fairs.	Human Resources	The University remains an active member of HERC (Higher Education Resource Consortium) of the Carolinas. Through this partnership, the WCU community has access to a "dual career" search engine designed to identify career opportunities within a defined geographical location. The FamilySource© work/life solution through our employee assistance program provider (EAP) ComPsych was one of the highest utilized EAP resources by WCU Faculty and Staff during the past fiscal year. This program offers employees customized solutions that help address a wide range of issues such as child or elder care services, and housing solutions. To further address housing the university is actively sharing the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce listing of home/apartment rentals in the area for non-student adults/families to connect employees to available housing. Additionally, two community Facebook groups allow group members to post both housing wanted and housing available listings on their group boards. For fiscal year 2023, WCU has participated in eight (8) regional career fair events and has posted positions on over 100 job boards.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 6: **RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP**

Accomplishment Highlights

- **ACH transfer implemented** – Purchasing and Accounts Payable has fully implemented virtual payables which allows a vendor to receive payment via an ACH transfer. Many vendors have signed up for this payment method, thus reducing check printing costs.
- **Classroom upgrades** – Funding is allocated annually for the replacement and upgrade of technology in Learning Spaces. In fiscal year 2023, two classrooms had student desks replaced, and one 48 seat classroom was fully renovated.
- **Updated emergency operations plan** – During fiscal year 2022-23, the Department of Emergency Services worked with campus stakeholders to complete a comprehensive update on the WCU All-Hazard Emergency Operations Plan.
- **Cybersecurity enhancements** – A data privacy program was started through the Executive Council's adoption of the ISO 27701 Privacy Framework, modification of Policy 97 to include privacy governance, and appointing the university's first Chief Privacy Officer.

Strategic Direction 6: Responsible Stewardship

We will focus our priorities on facilities, technology, core resources, and business policies and practices

Goal 6.1 – Funding Models

Implement sustainable funding models to ensure fiscal stability.

Strategic Initiatives	Key Stakeholders	Summary of results to date
6.1.1: Reduce operational dependence on one-time funding for core functions and services	Administration & Finance	The University continues to refine its annual budget development process to allow campus stakeholder requests for recurring operational expenditures. Budget development exercises are held with the Chancellor's Leadership Council to determine the best allocation of additional funding sources for recurring needs. Each division holds a budget hearing annually to explain its request for recurring funding, and then there is a university-wide budget hearing to highlight the recurring allocations that will receive priority in the new budget year. The implementation of the all-funds budget requirement by the System Office on campus has provided an additional avenue for departments to examine their resources and to reallocate resources for recurring needs within their respective departmental budgets. Nonrecurring funding has been focused on capital equipment spending (e.g., computers, heavy equipment for maintenance, vehicles) for departments to lessen the need for the use of operational funds for these purchases. The new funding model promulgated by the System Office will allow for a timelier annual determination of available funding for recurring needs.
6.1.2: Engage the budgetary process to steward resource allocation, enhance sound investment, and address strategic critical need.	Administration & Finance Division Heads	Our budgetary process has become well-known for being transparent, efficient, and highly visible. Units across campus engage in the process each year to submit prioritized one-time and recurring requests for additional funding from their respective divisions. During the current year, to address strategic critical need and enhance sound investment, resources were allocated to capital improvement needs (landscaping, chiller replacement, lighting upgrades, etc.), campaign and marketing commitments, and investment in our people by continuing to address wage compression, employee retention, and labor market adjustments for positions across campus.

Goal 6.2 – Master Plan

Maintain the Campus Master Plan.

Strategic Initiatives	Key Stakeholders	Summary of results to date
6.2.1: Ensure sustainability and fiscal resources necessary to update and maintain the Campus Master Plan.	Facilities Management Chancellor's Office Provost's Office Division leadership Administration & Finance	Update of 2014 Campus Master Plan was approved and adopted by the Board of Trustees during its meeting of March 2022. Following Strategic Initiative 6.2.2, this will now guide and inform decisions until a new or updated Campus Master Plan is adopted. Fiscal resources will need to be identified to perform a new or updated plan within the next five to seven years.

6.2.2: Use the Campus Master Plan to guide and inform decisions	Facilities Management Chancellor's Office Provost's Office Division leadership Administration & Finance	The new 2022 Campus Master Plan Update continues to provide guidance in the physical development of the campus. Completed projects include the Apodaca Science Building, North Baseball Parking Deck, Energy Production Facility (Steam Plant), and the new Lower Campus Residence Halls (the Rocks). Additional projects, such as the renovation of Moore Building, a partial renovation of Breese Gymnasium, and Athletic Facilities Improvements are in design. Also currently seeking legislative funding for advance planning of a new Engineering building. Additional projects identified within the 2022 Campus Master Plan are included in the university's 6-year capital plan.
Goal 6.3 – Business Processes Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of campus business processes, including technology enablement.		
Strategic Initiatives	**Key Stakeholders**	**Summary of results to date**
6.3.1: Review campus business processes and identify those requiring revision.	Internal Audit Division leadership Office of Institutional Assessment Office of the Registrar	Fiscal Affairs is reviewing the business process to determine which processes may need to be improved. Significant progress was made during fiscal year 2023, in which Fiscal Affairs made numerous process changes to gain efficiency. First, Purchasing and Accounts Payable has fully implemented virtual payables which allows a vendor to receive payment via an ACH transfer. Many vendors have signed up for this payment method, thus reducing check printing costs. Check requests and vouchers are now routed through Catamart, which allows tracking in the purchasing system, rather than being manually routed. The Controller's office has developed some electronic workflows which allow departments to submit journal entries electronically through Adobe sign. Fund creation is also being managed through Adobe sign, thus allowing tracking of the documents. More travelers are using the travel card, which reduces the need for employee travel advances or early reimbursement for registrations and airfare. The Bursar's office is assisting with the transition from Truist Bank, which left its Sylva location, to First Citizens Bank (FCB). More electronic banking features will be used at FCB.
6.3.2: Ensure delivery of excellent service experiences through ongoing assessment and periodic administrative reviews where possible.	Division leadership Office of Institutional Assessment	WCU's support units engage in the continuous improvement process each year for the purpose of collecting and analyzing data to measure their unit's performance on several different metrics. Among support units, the most assessed outcomes over the past year centered on operational effectiveness, process efficiency, program participation, student satisfaction, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. Additionally, support units updated their assessment plans this year to ensure that their operational goals remain relevant for their current circumstances and missions. Support services units in the Division of Academic Affairs are also part of WCU's internal review process. During these reviews, a unit conducts a self-evaluation of their department, including its history, alignment with WCU's institutional mission, service demand, and cost effectiveness. The unit then hosts an external review team to evaluate operational functions and departmental services. One unit was reviewed this year - Highlands Biological Station. The review was very successful and resulted in the creation of a Strategic Action Plan outlining tangible steps for future achievements.

Goal 6.4 – Information Technology Maintain currency and enable strategic information technology capabilities.		
Strategic Initiatives	**Key Stakeholders**	**Summary of results to date**
6.4.1: Establish and systematize a sustainable funding model for information technology that accommodates operational support, replacement and upgrades, University growth, cybersecurity, and strategic initiatives	Division of Information Technologies Administration & Finance	Learning Spaces: Funding is allocated for the replacement and upgrade of technology in Learning Spaces. A process has been implemented to track upgrades in 110/210 spaces. Required mandates and contractual cost increases: No progress was made this year toward funding internal mandates or inflationary increases in supplies and services. We continue to utilize multiyear contract options and evaluate existing tools to help manage some of the incremental cost increases. Pawprint: Print volume has not returned to pre-covid volumes. We will reduce the number of printers on campus and revise the tiered pricing structure to reflect the current print volumes when the 5-year-old fleet is refreshed in spring of 2024. Security Operations Center: An initiative to investigate options for a 24/7/365 security operations center to monitor and respond to security threats was launched.
6.4.2 Ensure accommodation of mandatory and anticipated information technology needs, including both human resources and technologies through annual capacity planning, strategic management, and process assessments. Incorporate a review of current technologies, evaluating any redundant, obsolete, or underused products into this planning process.	Division of Information Technologies Coulter Faculty Commons	Implemented an on-going strategic review for open positions. Completed annual capacity plans for the data center and networking areas. Completed an external program review for networking. Performed process reviews for project management and "buy versus build" (software acquisition). Performed benchmark visits to Georgia Tech and UNC Charlotte on Educational Technology. Completed a significant IT-re org (nearly 1/3 of the division) to streamline operations. Re-evaluated PawPrint printer fleet and re-chartered the Total Quality Management function to focus on key metrics for problem management and project management processes.
Goal 6.5 - Safety, Reliability, and Security Preserve the safety, reliability, and security of the campus community.		
Strategic Initiatives	**Key Stakeholders**	**Summary of results to date**
6.5.1: Develop and maintain University all-hazards prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery efforts through comprehensive emergency and disaster planning, training, and exercise programs.	Office of Emergency Services Safety & Risk Management Office University Police	During fiscal year 2022-23, the Department of Emergency Services worked with campus stakeholders to complete a comprehensive update on the WCU All-Hazard Emergency Operations Plan. Additionally, Emergency Services participated in a joint tabletop exercise with Executive Crisis Management Team (ECMT), Crisis Communications Team (CCT), and the Emergency Operations Team (EOT). Emergency Services also participated in a WCU EMS-led full-scale exercise. The Department of Emergency Services also worked with Emergency Operations Team members to identify training and exercise needs for WCU over the next three years. This input is included in a Multi-Year Planning and Training and Exercise Plan (MYTEP) that will be finalized in the summer of 2023. Emergency Services and the Office of Safety and Risk Management continued the

		mandated meeting and maintenance of the WCU Health and Safety Committee. Additionally, the Department of Emergency Services coordinated a comprehensive review of WCU policies related to student, staff, and faculty health and safety to ensure these policies are examined every three years per the North Carolina Administrative Code and updated as necessary.
6.5.2: Ensure fiscal stability through systematic maintenance, assessment, repair, and enhancement of all campus infrastructure and technologies.	Administration & Finance Facilities Management Division of Information Technologies Office of emergency Services	Strategic management of the university's physical plant infrastructure and technologies is continually addressed through a proactive preventative maintenance program, continued corrective and reactive maintenance activity, and strategic management of its deferred maintenance backlog (or total needs index). Facility condition assessments and inspections provide information that assist in annual budget development, carryforward allocation, and six-year biennial capital planning of repair and renovation (R&R) priorities. Since baseline year of 2017-18, the university has reduced its total needs index, a measure of deferred maintenance and need, by 15.5%.
6.5.3: Engage in an enterprise risk management process to enhance communication and strengthen response capabilities.	Office of Legal Counsel Internal Audit	The 2023-2024 risk assessment began in February 2023 with risk identification and assessment. Although the enterprise risk management process addresses all facets of the University, some of this year's top risks are specifically related to preserving the safety, reliability, and security of the campus community. Those identified risks include: (i) failure to detect and protect against cyber-attacks; (ii) sexual harassment/misconduct or sexual assault of faculty/staff/students/visitors to campus; (iii) active shooter or domestic terrorism perpetrated on campus; (iv) student and employee mental health challenges; and (v) aging facilities and deferred maintenance of buildings/properties. The Chief Compliance Officer then worked with the Executive Council to identify the responsible EC member and risk owner, who will work with a team of risk partners to develop a risk management plan to mitigate each of the top risks during the next fiscal year. Risk management plans consider strategic plan goals and are designed to help inform decision making and benchmarking for each strategic goal.
6.5.4: Maintain and improve technologies and processes related to cybersecurity and privacy to prevent, detect, and respond to incidents.	Division of Information Technologies Office of Legal Counsel	Started using a 24x7 network intrusion detection monitoring service to provide proactive incident detection and alerting. Moved operational security role to the Data Center to streamline security incident detection and response processes. In the Microsoft 365 realm we have started working towards Managed Secure Teams and increased use of data loss prevention and cloud security tools. Privacy program started through the EC's adoption of the ISO 27701 Privacy Framework, modification of Policy 97 to include privacy governance, and appointing the university's first Chief Privacy Officer.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 7: **VISION ADVANCEMENT**

Accomplishment Highlights

- **Ongoing capital campaign** – The Fill the Western Sky: A Campaign for WCU, in its 4th year of a 7-year campaign, is presently at 55% of the $75M goal to increase support for academic and other philanthropic priorities.
- **NC Innovation partnership** – WCU entered a memorandum of understanding with NC Innovation, a non-profit organization designed to connect the state's research universities, industry partners and the private sector, to serve as a regional hub for economic development activities that will manifest as faculty research is monetized for the benefit of the university.
- **Increased grant awards** – In fiscal year 2023 faculty and staff received 77 awards, a 15% increase over fiscal year 2022, amounting to $7,502,896, a 4% increase in dollars awarded over the prior year.
- **Grant support for students** – In fiscal year 2023, over $2.75 million from 47 grants was used to support student education, wages, and travel.
- **Live Western brand campaign** – The initial phases of the Live Western brand campaign were completed and placed into market in November of 2022. Current focus is on developing college-specific advertising campaigns and other initiatives to support degree programs and student support units across the university.

Strategic Direction 7: Vision Advancement

We will create and promote a shared understanding of WCU's future around our areas of distinction, student support, and faculty and staff initiatives.

Goal 7.1 – Promote Quality and Excellence

Promote an institutional vision of quality and excellence in academic and administrative programs and activities.

Strategic Initiatives	Key Stakeholders	Summary of results to date
7.1.1: Regularly review and enhance messages for new faculty, staff, and students to ensure early introduction to and understanding of the University's strategic vision, history, and culture.	Communications & Marketing Undergraduate Admissions Graduate School & Research Human Resources Educational Outreach Dean of Students Orientation Programs WCU Programs in Asheville	Over the past year we have solidified and launched our new brand campaign and message strategy geared to showcase a cohesive approach to messaging at the University level. Additionally, we have worked with each college to identify key value propositions and develop a message strategy that's specific to that college and their audience. We have completed and implemented this work in a variety of mediums that are being used internally and externally.
7.1.2: Ensure consistency among vision messages from all internal sources to include reinforcement of WCU's role as a regional institution through its involvement in the NC Promise tuition plan and emphasis of UNC-approved institutional areas of distinction.	Office of the Chief of Staff Communications & Marketing Undergraduate Admissions Financial Aid Office Educational Outreach Office of Economic & Regional Development Office of the Provost	The revised mission statement has now been fully integrated into the website and printed materials. In 2022, the University created a position dedicated to Chancellor-level communications to ensure consistency of messaging across Chancellor's communications platforms including print and social media and speaking engagements. The position reports to the Chief of Staff and works closely with the Deputy Chief of Staff and the Assistant to the Chancellor. Additionally, University Communications and Marketing ensures that consistency of messaging is present across all University divisions and institutional marketing and communications, ensuring there is a focus on WCU's value proposition, in marketing and advertisements across the region and state, with prominence in all major NC population centers. The Chancellor continues to represent WCU as a thought leader on higher education affordability and the role of regional comprehensive universities in various venues. She has now joined the boards for the Asheville Chamber of Commerce, NC Innovation, and Harris Hospital. She routinely speaks with elected officials, board members, and governing agencies across the region and state.

Goal 7.2 – Vision and External Communities Facilitate a shared understanding of the institution's strategic vision among the University's external communities.		
Strategic Initiatives	**Key Stakeholders**	**Summary of results to date**
7.2.1: Create and grow a meaningful hybrid blend of virtual and face-to-face engagement opportunities that equip both alumni and leadership boards to better advocate, serve, and contribute to Western Carolina University.	Division of Advancement Communications & Marketing Alumni Board of Directors WCU Foundation Board of Directors Catamount Club Board Center for Career & Professional Development Academic Deans Division of Athletics	Virtual engagement highlights for fiscal year 2023 include the Cullowhee Connection, a monthly e-newsletter distributed to all external constituents of record, Western Wednesdays, a semi-regular podcast featuring alumni stories, and alumni social media channels, which publish content several times per week that is designed to invite user engagement. Among the numerous in-person engagement events were the All Boards Orientation held in August for all volunteer boards including the Catamount Club Board, Alumni Board and WCU Foundation Board, new student sendoff events in Greensboro, Raleigh, Charlotte, Atlanta, and Asheville for incoming students, parents, and alumni leaders, regional alumni events in Davidson, Charlotte, Asheville, Greensboro, Raleigh, Florida, Washington, D.C., Alumni Central tailgate events at all home football games and at the WCU at Georgia Tech game, and the Chancellor's Legacy Pinning Ceremony for alumni and their students.
7.2.2: Regularly complete a competitive analysis and external perception research to develop a reputation strategy, and a current market analysis to tailor the university's messaging accordingly.	Communications & Marketing Institutional Planning & Effectiveness Office of the Chief of Staff	The perception study completed in Fall of 2021 that allowed us to develop and formulate the foundation of the Live Western brand campaign during 2022-2023. The initial phases of the brand campaign were completed and placed into market in November of 2022. During 2023, our focus is on developing college specific advertising campaigns and other initiatives to support specific programs and retention-based units across the university. These efforts will include a formal messaging strategy as well as complementary advertising plans.
Goal 7.3 – Mix of Financial Resources Maximize and target a balanced and diverse mix of financial resources that will enable achievement of the University's strategic vision.		
Strategic Initiatives	**Key Stakeholders**	**Summary of results to date**
7.3.1. Explore innovative revenue generation strategies to minimize the cost of higher education to students, as far as practicable.	Financial Planning & Analysis Division Heads Auxiliary Administration Educational Outreach Advancement Tuition and Fees Committee	The Fill the Western Sky: A Campaign for WCU, in its 4th year of a 7-year campaign, is presently at 55% of the $75M goal for philanthropic gifts and grants to increase support for academic excellence and the student experience, athletic facilities, unrestricted annual support, and other philanthropic priorities. Entered a lease with Verizon to add cell antennae on Harrill Hall, which will produce additional revenue and improve cell coverage on campus and in Cullowhee. WCU entered a MOU with NC Innovation to serve as a regional hub for economic development activities that will manifest as faculty research is monetized for the benefit of the university. Faculty Support from Grants in fiscal year 2023: - Faculty received salaries (not including fringe) in the amount of $1,545,686 from 62 different grants. Student Support from Grants in fiscal year 2023: - Education Awards to Students- $2,403,919 from 15 different grants

		- Student Wages (not including fringe) - $330,861 from 31 different grants - Student Travel - $23,171 from 2 different grants - Student Health Insurance - $3,416 from 1 grant - Reimbursement to students for Mental Health services - $9,838
7.3.2: Implement a comprehensive plan to increase significantly the advocacy efforts among elected officials on behalf of university and system priorities, adjusting as necessary due to shifts in the external or political landscapes.	External Relations Office of Economic & Regional Development Communications and Marketing WCU Foundation Board of Directors Campaign Steering Committee	Following a renewed Legislative agenda endorsed in March 2023, WCU enhanced advocacy efforts, both on campus and in Raleigh. Chancellor Brown led a vigorous legislative visit schedule to highlight institutional & BOG priorities of faculty & staff salary and benefit needs and growth of the Engineering program. Trustees and Provost Council members joined Chancellor Brown for a successful Legislative briefing event in Raleigh early in the 2023 legislative session. WCU Cullowhee and Biltmore Park increased the number of convenings that brought a larger scope of NC Council of State members, Congressional representatives, State Legislators, government, and philanthropic leaders to WCU. The 2023 legislative session brought several new legislative proposals with a focus on higher education, related to institutional operations, curriculum, athletics, and employment matters. WCU strategically provided information on impact of these proposals, with some significant successes, while other proposals remain active as challenges are debated. WCU developed relationships with newly elected federal and state legislative representation and extended outreach to officials outside of western NC.
7.3.3: Seek private support through philanthropic gifts and grants to increase support for academic excellence and the student experience, diversity, equity, and inclusion, regional engagement, athletic facilities, unrestricted annual support, and other philanthropic priorities to increase the baseline of philanthropic support	Division of Advancement Graduate School & Research Educational Outreach Division of Athletics Office of Equal Opportunity & Diversity Programs Academic Deans Center for Community Engagement & Service Learning Communications and Marketing	Fiscal year 2023 was a successful year with fundraising metrics, during the leadership phase of the comprehensive campaign. Overall, for fiscal year 2023, there was a $3M increase year over year (31.2% increase), growth in cash ($1.6M increase), increase in private grants ($1M increase from both advancement & sponsored research grant activity), and substantial movement in the number of gifts (a 29.5% increase) and donors (a 36% increase) to WCU. fiscal year 23 results with fiscal year 22 comparisons are as follows: Fiscal Year 2023 WCU Overall Fundraising - July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2023: Gifts/Cash: $7,469,093.37 (fiscal year 22: $5,857,832.69) Pledges: $3,558,363.53 (fiscal year 22: $3,213,477.85) Private Grants: $1,541,469.70 (fiscal year 22: $533,679.35) fiscal year 23 Total: $12,568,926.60 (fiscal year 22: $9,577,563.25) Total Gifts: 10,564 (fiscal year 22: 8,153) Total Hard Credit Donors: 4,108 (fiscal year 22: 3,024) The Fill the Western Sky Campaign total for fiscal years 2020-2023 stands at $41.625M, or 55.5% towards the $75M goal. According to the 2023 Giving USA report, overall giving in the U.S. declined by 3.4%, and giving by individuals fell by 6.4% across the U.S. The fiscal year 2023 WCU numbers are counter to the national trend.

	7.3.4: Increase the number, value, and competitiveness of sponsored research proposals while increasing research support and productivity.	Office of Research Administration Provost's Office Faculty Committee on Research Academic Deans	In fiscal year 2023 faculty and staff submitted 91 grant proposals for a total of $20,092,915 which represents a 13.33% decrease in number of submissions from the prior year. In fiscal year 2023 faculty and staff received 77 awards amounting to $7,502,896, which represents a 4% increase in dollar award values from the prior year award amount ($7,203,428). The Office of Research Administration funded five Provost Scholarship Development Internal Grants in fiscal year 2023 for a total of $84,657, a 57% decrease compared to the previous year. The goal of these projects is to initiate research leading to future submission of externally funded proposals. Plans for fiscal year 2024 include bringing coordination of undergraduate research programs under the purview of the office, as well as, expanding the staff by including a new Research Programs Coordinator who will develop and facilitate a broad portfolio of internal and external programs aimed at improving pursuits of scholarship, research, and creative activity.