

VISION PLAN AND CORE VALUE:

Sense of Place: One of the distinguishing features of WCU is our location in the Appalachian mountains of western North Carolina, and our location is key both to attracting and retaining students. WCU's location is also an intrinsic resource that can be accentuated not only to the advantage of the university's identity, but to the curricular offerings in all areas which can highlight a sense of place as well as create a sense of belonging to the natural, cultural, and economic life of the area. Building a sense of place into the educational experiences of all Western Carolina University students, coordinating existing coursework and programs areas to emphasize an environmental focus and to foster a commitment to stewardship and sustainability will become an intrinsic university value to be internalized and put into practice.

Diversity: Global awareness and a commitment to cultural diversity are essential aspects of education and life in general in the 21st century, and both are crucial to WCU's mission to provide integrated educational opportunities.

DRAFT: February 20, 2012

STRATEGIC DIRECTION: Fulfill the Educational Needs of the Region and State

Introductory narrative:

Western Carolina University is committed, first and foremost, to fulfilling its academic mission of providing each student with a rigorous and relevant curriculum and with learning experiences that will provide knowledge and skills that are durable, flexible, and transferable. WCU is committed to providing an education grounded in a strong set of foundational knowledge and skills combined with specific practical knowledge in content degree areas, the outcome of which is personal, intellectual, and economic enrichment for each student; WCU goes beyond strictly vocational job training. WCU aims to provide educational opportunities that will lead to graduating students who are prepared to succeed in their lives and ready to compete in a challenging, changing, and global economy and international environment, and who are committed to contributing to the intellectual, cultural, and economic development of the region and state. To achieve this outcome, administration, faculty, staff, and students will together make the university's academic mission paramount.

Recommendations for accomplishing this aim fall into four broad categories: (1) All-embracing strategies and values for approaching curricular issues; (2) Strategies related to general curricula and to focused curricula identified by the 2020 Commission as those that can best be offered by WCU; (3) Strategies for advocating life-long learning and engaging in regional outreach; (4) Strategies for managing enrollment and institutional growth which ensure and optimize the university's primary academic mission.

ALL-EMBRACING STRATEGIES AND VALUES FOR APPROACHING CURRICULA:

GOAL 1

Construct all academic curricula in all programs, majors, and minors at the undergraduate and graduate levels to achieve the following educational goals:

Integrate information from a variety of contexts

Solve complex problems

Communicate effectively and responsibly

Practice civic engagement

Clarify and act on purpose and values

Make critical judgments and decisions about quality of information received

Rationale

It is expected that integrated and intentional learning experiences are the foundation of the university's academic culture and curricula, and that all curricula will embody the values and learning outcomes listed above. The General Education program plays a critical role in a student's in-depth university education, and its intrinsic core values and learning outcomes will be purposefully maintained throughout a student's entire academic career.

GOAL 2

Integrate curricular goals by establishing an across-the-board approach to planning and carrying out the university's primary academic mission:

Initiative

Hire faculty who understand and will contribute to WCU's core educational values and holistic academic mission, as well as help enhance programs and/or courses in focused curricula areas identified by the 2020 Commission: education, health care, innovation, engineering, and technology, arts and culture, environment, recreation and hospitality/tourism.

Initiative

Develop and put into action effective, consistent, faculty-led advising of students about the value and function of core learning goals and outcomes of the university curriculum. This effort will be reinforced by support units.

Initiative

Evaluate faculty according to how their curricula, pedagogies, and scholarship successfully advance the university learning outcomes at all levels in their discipline.

Initiative

Review and adhere to a tenure and promotion process for faculty that accurately reflects the values and goals of the university's academic mission.

Initiative

Establish a set of best practices that will be used to create an effective and efficient system of quality indicators to measure and assess programmatic and university success for retention, graduation, and job placement and/or career development.

Initiative

Implement assessment procedures to ensure that the comprehensive goals stated above are being met.

GOAL 3

Prioritize all undergraduate and graduate programs.

Rationale

WCU possesses particular areas of academic strength and potential, and focusing on these will directly improve our ability to meet the educational needs of the people in the region and state.

Initiative

Assess programs, and focus resources according to how a program meets the university's principle values and academic learning outcomes and provide exemplary, high-quality discipline-specific instruction and learning experiences.

Initiative

Assess programs and focus resources according to how a program meets or will meet the focused curricular areas targeted for growth by the 2020 Commission.

Initiative

Assess efficacy of on-line courses and programs to ensure best-practice instructional delivery and alignment with the university's general learning goals.

STRATEGIC GOALS RELATED TO ALL CURRICULA AND TO FOCUSED CURRICULA:**GOAL 1**

Ensure high academic standards for all faculty and students in all curricular areas.

Rationale

Faculty and student scholarship needs to be supported in order to ensure relevance, currency, and active, high-quality engagement in any discipline. Cross-curricular learning experiences are one essential mode of learning in a 21st century world and for preparing students for a changing and demanding global market. There is also an increasing need for synthesized, experiential, and applied learning experiences for all students to prepare them to practice their skills and put their knowledge into different contexts. Effective communication and writing skills are demonstrably important to the success of all professionals in all disciplines. Students need to know and demonstrate competencies in being part of a 21st century environment, including a mastery of languages, an appreciation of the arts, and competencies in the use of technology. One of the hallmarks of a WCU education as well as the student life is the personal commitment of the faculty to its students in the classroom, whether residential or online. Class size directly affects a faculty member's ability to provide high-quality educational experiences, interactions, feedback, advising, and mentoring of students and their learning. The following initiatives below will apply to all programs in the university as the means to provide a high-quality education, which is the foundational and guiding mission of the university.

Initiative

Assess and revise where necessary class size limits to ensure that all class sizes are determined by how they best provide optimal learning for each student. Authorize departments to determine best practice for themselves and develop innovative solutions to best meet the needs of the students and curriculum within allotted resources.

Initiative

Prioritize resources for discipline-specific research, scholarly support, and professional development activities for faculty and for students.

Initiative

Identify and create cross-curricular and team-taught courses, foster collaboration of faculty, and eliminate bureaucratic and financial barriers to cross-curricular design and team-teaching.

Initiative

Increase experiential and applied learning experiences into all facets of the curriculum where considered best practice.

Initiative

Prioritize and assure funding is adequate for faculty to incorporate writing and research into all levels of the curricula.

Initiative

Redesign faculty teaching loads to better utilize those who carry responsibility for accreditation and clinical education, create community partnerships, engage in intense undergraduate/graduate research, and/or have highly engaged teaching models.

Initiative

Incorporate global and cultural awareness and experiences, where appropriate, into courses, programs, and extracurricular activities, and identify and remove departmental and university barriers to meeting graduation requirements for students involved in study-abroad.

GOAL 2

Target focused curricular areas of strength for development and growth: education, health care, innovation, engineering, and technology, arts and culture, environment, recreation and hospitality/tourism.

Rationale

Part of WCU's identity and history stands in its mission to train teachers at all levels, a mission which remains an important and successful facet of the university. The need for well-trained teachers has become increasingly urgent in a changing global and economic climate. There also remains a strong need in the region for health care providers, and additionally, WCU will benefit from defining broadly the notion of health care to meet the general needs of the people in western North Carolina, as well as the needs of its changing demographics, such as the increasingly large retirement-age population, underserved population of people with disabilities, and veterans. WCU aims to become a hub for education, health care, and the environment in the region; it may also serve as a hub for developments that will strengthen regional industries and organizations. WCU will adopt a broader view of technology and innovation so that we coordinate across academic programs, seek new sources of funding focused on developing new technologies, and collaborate with regional organizations to develop commercial applications of innovations. WCU graduates must be able to think critically and ethically about the appropriateness of technological solutions to problems within their disciplines as well as in society at large. Part of being a globally aware citizen of the 21st century is an appreciation of the arts, and WCU is uniquely positioned to be a regional center for arts, culture, and the humanities. Our art museum, performing arts center, and wide range of current cultural events and activities can be optimized and expanded. WCU's location is an asset to be strategically leveraged at all educational levels as it is a cornerstone of our identity and a key attractor to students and faculty regardless of academic discipline. It may also be turned to good use in the development of programs and educational opportunities specifically tuned to the regional environment. While WCU's location provides a great opportunity for scientific and cultural study of the region, it is also a prime destination for tourists and outdoor recreation enthusiasts. Western's academic programs can strengthen and highlight this strategic asset.

Education*Initiative*

Reallocate resources to prioritize teacher education programs and reinforce an academic culture throughout the university devoted to training well-qualified teachers.

Initiative

Expand teacher education programs in areas where there is determined to be a clear need, such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math), Modern Foreign Languages, TESOL (Teaching English as a Second Language), and Special Education.

Initiative

Increase retention of students in teacher education programs by providing a greater flexibility of means for financial support for students during their apprenticeship work and developing better early-alert systems for identifying students whose performance indicates potential for failure. Design better means for advising and mentoring of such students.

Initiative

Review Professional Education criteria and curricula to ensure high standards, best practices, and opportunities for increased proficiency and experience in their content areas.

Initiative

Train professional teachers competent to meet the North Carolina State Board of Education's mission to prepare public school students who will be globally prepared for work, postsecondary education, and life in the 21st century, by including and increasing foreign language instruction in all teacher education curricula.

Initiative

Design teacher education programs with an emphasis on training teachers to participate and help shape leadership roles as colleagues and administrators in the public school systems.

Initiative

Design and fund new programs that are low cost with high benefits that facilitate cooperative interaction between K-12 teachers and administrators, and the university.

Initiative

Bring in-service teachers to the WCU classrooms to work with teacher education students.

Health Care and Wellness*Initiative*

Build and strengthen existing curricula centered on health and well-being, and expand program offerings by assessing the strategic value and sustainability of focused health curricula.

Initiative

Review, and if necessary, restructure current clinical education practices in order to streamline recruitment, administrative, legal, and recordkeeping requirements at the program, school, college, university, and regional levels.

Initiative

Identify and procure both fiscal and human resources for focused health curricula to maintain and exceed accreditation requirements.

Initiative

Develop and expand ventures with allied and health care agencies by creating more flexible systems of administrative support and partnerships, and by establishing a better means of identifying, coordinating, and supporting clinical site opportunities for students.

Innovation, Engineering, Technology, and Commercialization*Initiative*

Assess technology systems for currency and appropriateness for more effective and transferable instruction and application, and provide resources for regular and timely upgrades and maintenance of educational technologies that represent the best practices of each discipline.

Initiative

Assure adequate funding to provide robust technology in online courses (e.g. computer systems, equipment, classrooms, etc.) that is appropriate, reliable, and accessible.

Arts and Culture*Initiative*

Expand summer credit and non-credit course and program offerings.

Initiative

Develop internships and teaching opportunities for arts and humanities faculty and students during the summers (e.g., summer theatre, film series, literary residencies, camps, music lessons, etc.).

Initiative

Create a unified approach to involving students and bringing people on campus to arts and cultural events and facilities by reviewing current funding methods and administration of arts and cultural events and facilities to coordinate efforts and increase efficiency, and assessing scheduling or infrastructure, and revise or expand where necessary, to assure optimal student and community involvement.

Initiative

Allocate resources to facilitate efforts to take the arts and arts programs off campus.

Initiative

Coordinate and better promote arts and cultural events for the general community.

Initiative

Where appropriate and advantageous, encourage a regional dimension in each area of the arts and humanities and incorporate regional themes in curricula of the arts and humanities.

Environment*Initiative*

Expand, and where necessary, restructure existing academic programs related to the environment to optimize opportunities for growth, assure efficient programmatic operation, reduce redundancy, and allow for better coordination of faculty and curricula.

Initiative

Develop new graduate programs with an environmental focus based on an assessment of the need and opportunities for expansion.

Initiative

Coordinate environmentally focused programs with programs in recreation and hospitality/tourism and with programs in innovation and technology.

Initiative

Collaborate with other educational institutions to provide year-round and more summer educational opportunities on campus and in the field.

Recreation and Hospitality/Tourism*Initiative*

Assess the need for new or revised programs such as minors or joint degrees to coordinate with programs related to recreation, hospitality, and tourism, such as entrepreneurship, and wellness.

Initiative

Work with community partners, businesses, and organizations, to develop internships and other real-world recreation and tourism experiences for Western students, regardless of major.

Initiative

Expand and restructure existing academic programs related to recreation and hospitality and tourism management to optimize opportunities for growth, assure efficient programmatic operations, reduce redundancy, and allow for better coordination of faculty and curricula.

Initiative

Focus resources to support regional tourism research to promote business development and environmental sustainability in the area.

GOAL 3

Eliminate barriers to life-long learning by strengthening ties to community and region, including K-12 and Community College partners.

Rationale

A timely and efficient transition process for students is a primary goal, and thus processes and systems need to be streamlined in order to hasten the process of giving students information about admission, transfer credits, and financial aid. The advent of educational options such as Early Colleges and College and Career Promise accentuates the need for enhanced communication and collaboration. Maintaining better communications of academic standards in programs and reviewing content, especially in areas where there is an Articulation Agreement, will facilitate seamless transfer. All cost analyses offers evidence of the economic benefits of higher education, and leveraging education is a critical means to improving the economy and economic development of the region and state. The message needs to be iterated at all educational levels that education is affordable for everyone and that there are many options for attaining higher education available to students throughout their educational journey. This is also one way to maximize recruitment from community colleges to WCU.

Initiative

Expand formal collaboration opportunities between K-12, community colleges, and WCU to ensure curricular alignment and seamless transfer by expanding existing formal Paired Program meetings, and establish a local advisory committee so that K-12, community colleges, and WCU faculty and administrators can regularly discuss curriculum goals and curriculum transferability with the aim of creating consistency, commonality, and transferability of course curricula. Expand present membership to include more representation from WCU health sciences, business, and technology/innovation programs.

Initiative

Review, and revise where needed, all Articulation Agreements between WCU and community colleges in WCU service area with the goal of maintaining high academic standards and facilitating curricular transfer and develop a standard review protocol and timeline so that Articulation Agreements remain up to date.

Initiative

Review transition stages to strengthen communication messages from K-12 to WCU and from community colleges to WCU by establishing a committee on academic transfer, comprised of WCU

and community college faculty and academic advisors and establishing a committee on admissions and financial aid, comprised of WCU and community college admissions and financial aid staff and advisors.

Initiative

Expand opportunities for WCU to visit with K-12 students and community college partners (both on- and off-campus) to share information as to the importance of higher education and the pathways, processes, and programs at WCU.

Initiative

Expand coordinated marketing and recruiting efforts between K-12, community colleges, and WCU about the value of education and affordable avenues for all individuals to achieve and benefit from it.

Initiative

Establish a committee of key players at K-12 schools, local and regional community colleges, and WCU to keep discussions active and information continually flowing between entities about the benefits of higher education and to enact the best strategies for marketing and recruiting.

GOAL 4

Expand outreach efforts to the community and region involving the university's learning opportunities

Rationale

WCU will serve as a key resource center which serves individuals, school systems, and teachers in the region in order to foster mutual, cooperative, and interactive partnerships between WCU programs, faculty, and students, the public schools, and the community. WCU can also capitalize on our attractive location and on the large influx of visitors (retirees, summer residents, students of all ages, and tourists), while making more efficient use of our facilities and resources. Serving populations not specifically identified with WCU will help bring recognition to our programs and foster community relationships, while increased summer opportunities for WCU students will aid in meeting graduation requirements in a timely fashion. The influx of visitors provides unique opportunities in addition to academic and cultural programs that can be developed to serve the year-round and increased summer population.

Initiative

Develop partnership opportunities with K-12 schools for studies and activities in innovation, technology, and creative applications.

Initiative

Develop community and K-12 partnerships to expand environmentally focused educational opportunities throughout the entire year.

Initiative

Build into the curriculum learning activities that enable students to connect with the local and regional community which focus on the environment, sustainability, and awareness of place.

Initiative

Generate educational opportunities for community, faculty, staff, and student wellness by releasing more space for student wellness/fitness classes inside and outside of student recreation center, establishing an integrated faculty, staff, student, and community wellness committee, and encourage faculty to review curricula for ways in which, where appropriate, wellness awareness or activities may be incorporated.

Initiative

Increase summer school offerings and educational opportunities for a wider variety of learners, whether WCU undergraduate or graduate students, guest students, senior citizens, K-12 enrichment programs, or the general community.

STRATEGIC GOALS RELATED TO ENROLLMENT GROWTH AND MANAGEMENT**GOAL 1**

Recruit, enroll, retain, and graduate the appropriate quantity, quality, and mix of students to serve the needs of the region and state, accomplish the university mission, and ensure the vitality and sustainability of the institution.

Rationale

University funding is inextricably tied to enrollment. Funding methodologies as well as enrollment capacity are complex and are impacted by many variables, including academic program classification, level, site, need, demand, and mode of delivery. Strategic, healthy enrollment is an integral component of fulfilling the mission and plans of the university.

Initiative

Conduct ongoing program assessment and prioritization, and allocate resources to positively affect program enrollment, particularly as programs relate to the focal areas identified by the 2020 Commission.

Initiative

Increase the levels of competitive merit-based scholarships, assistantships, student research funding, and need-based resources to attract and retain quality students.

Initiative

Expand efforts to recruit students in focal areas identified by the 2020 Commission: education; health care and wellness; innovation, engineering, technology, and commercialization; the environment; recreation and hospitality/tourism; and arts and culture.

Initiative

Expand the research of retention and graduation data as they pertain to enrollment criteria to increase the quality of entering students while continuing to serve the educational role of access as a regional comprehensive university.

Initiative

Increase the diversity (race, age, military, international, etc.) of the student body to serve the needs of the changing demographics of the region and state and to enhance the educational experience of students.