

Preamble

The Strategic Planning Committee, whose members were appointed by the Chancellor from every sector of the campus, began meeting during 2005's spring semester. The committee was charged with reviewing the University Mission Statement and developing a Strategic Plan that addresses the challenges the university faces as it responds to the changes in regional and global conditions and prepares our students to succeed in the new millennium. The Strategic Plan contains a significantly revised Mission Statement, defines our Core Values, presents a succinct Vision for the future, and outlines eight Strategic Directions with accompanying Strategic Goals that will set the direction for the university and establish the priorities for funding for the next several years.

The committee began with internal and external scans to define our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Meeting throughout the spring semester and every week during the summer, the committee collected information from across campus and developed a draft for review by the university community. Following a revision which incorporates the community input, the committee will present the final document to campus including the Faculty Senate, the Staff Forum, the Student Government Association, the Resident Student Association, the Administrative Council, and the University Advisory Council for review. At that point the Strategic Plan will be presented to the Chancellor and the Board of Trustees.

The Strategic Planning and Resource Council will continue to meet after the plan is approved to ensure that the Strategic Directions are being implemented and to make adjustments as necessary to remain responsive to changes in the university or our partners. The Strategic Planning and Resource Council will conduct a formal review of the strategic plan and mission statement no less than every five years.

Characteristics and Purpose

The strategic plan establishes specific long-term directions for Western based upon its core values, vision and mission in relation to the institution's perceived strengths, weaknesses, external opportunities and threats. The plan is a management tool that assists decision-makers in evaluating initiatives and allocating resources to reach institutional goals. The strategic plan includes parameters that help decision-makers:

- Establish priorities among competing initiatives;
- Determine whether new initiatives should be pursued; and
- Evaluate programs and services.

Since a strategic plan is designed to have a life span of five or more years, the goals outlined in the plan must be robust and flexible. A strategic plan must be specific enough to provide direction, yet flexible enough to allow midcourse corrections in response to unforeseen conditions. The ultimate purpose of any strategic plan is to keep the institution working toward pre-established strategic goals/outcomes that decision-makers have identified as important to the institution's future.

Relationship to Budget and Planning

A sound strategic planning process will intentionally incorporate opportunities to review planning assumptions, projections, forecasts, cost/feasibility analyses, and financial and productivity ratios. The rationale for reflecting on such information is that it provides vehicles for examining alternative and often competing demands for resources including time, money, facilities, personnel, etc. A mutually dependent planning and budgeting process will motivate individuals (and units/departments) toward action because it clarifies the rationale(s) behind resource allocation, encourages transparent processes, and fosters accountability. The integration of

planning and budgeting will help to ensure that strategic activities will reflect institutional priorities and focus on results.

As part of the Strategic Plan, WCU is explicitly identifying how budgeting will be linked to planning as well as the role of the University's Strategic Planning Committee in facilitating this work. In general, WCU's approach to funding strategic planning priorities includes:

- Allocating new and redirecting current resources to achieve strategic planning goals.
- Improving services without increasing costs.
- Realignment of current resources to achieve goals.
- Validating connections between use of current resources and institutional goals.

Budgeting and Planning Cycle. Prior to the beginning of the budgeting process, the SPC conducts an internal and external scan to determine major institutional budget needs and priorities related to the strategic plan. The SPC presents its findings as suggested planning and budgeting parameters to the Executive Management Committee (EMC), composed of the Executive Council and the Director of Institutional Research and the Director of Assessment. After reviewing the SPC recommendations, the EMC recommends institutional priorities to the chancellor who sets the final institutional strategic priorities and budget parameters for the planning cycle. The CFO begins the budget process mandating that all budget requests relate to the chancellor's strategic priorities and budget parameters. The chancellor, provost and CFO hold budget hearings with each vice chancellor or division head to evaluate budget needs against the strategic priorities and budget parameters established by the chancellor. Once the chancellor makes allocations, a report is distributed to both the EMC and SPC.

Guiding Principles

Western Carolina University's Strategic Planning Committee has undertaken the charge of developing a mission, vision and set of strategic directions that are guided by the university's commitment to:

- Accountable and open processes that are participatory and inclusive of voices from all stakeholder populations.
- Excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service with a special emphasis on the development of interdisciplinary, applied and experiential learning programs.
- Diversity and the facilitation of a global understanding through our faculty, staff, student recruitment and retention strategies and our academic/co-curricular planning.
- An understanding that the future of the University and the region are intimately bound together in a reality that necessitates a proactive approach to partnering with the public and private sectors to address the intellectual, social, cultural and workforce needs of our communities.
- The importance of developing effective and accountable administrative structures that improve communication, integrate facilities and academic planning, align budgets with strategic priorities, and enhance the use of technology and information management.

Vision

Western Carolina University will be a national model for student learning and engagement that embraces its responsibilities as an economically-engaged university. Western seeks to nurture an ever-enlarging knowledge community and economy in western North Carolina through its academic programs, public service and scholarship.

University Description

Western Carolina University is a premier regional university with nationally and internationally recognized teacher-scholars dedicated to student learning. A constituent member of the University of North Carolina, the university offers courses in the arts, sciences, technologies, humanities, and professions through degree programs at the bachelor's, master's, education specialist and doctoral levels. Western offers the advantages of a large university while maintaining its small college atmosphere.

Mission Statement

Western Carolina University creates engaged learning opportunities that incorporate teaching, research and service through residential, distance education and international experiences. The university focuses its academic programs, educational outreach, research and creative activities, and cultural opportunities to improve individual lives and enhance economic and community development in the region, state and nation.

Core Values

The university prepares students to become lifelong learners and responsible citizens in a global community. By working independently, collaboratively, and in teams, graduates of the University should demonstrate:

- Integrity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and both written and oral communication skills;
- Proficient and responsible use of information and technology;
- Appreciation for the arts, sciences, humanities, and technologies;
- Intellectual competence and professional and technical skills; and
- Continued personal development and lifelong learning.

To encourage and protect the free and open interchange of ideas, the university strives to provide experiences that foster the development of respect among all its members toward the larger communities of which it is a part. Accordingly, the University encourages its students, faculty, and staff to display the following traits of citizenship:

- behavior characterized by honesty, integrity, and responsibility;
- service to others;
- awareness of and sensitivity to the concerns of diverse people and cultures; and
- commitment to stewardship of the natural and cultural environment.

Strategic Directions and Strategic Goals

Western's strategic plan is based upon three subordinating constructs. Each construct plays a specific role in the strategic plan and the strategic planning process: They are:

- Strategic directions – general statements of planned action consistent with the core values, vision and mission.
- Strategic goals – moderately specific statements of action derived from the strategic directions that establish expected outcomes.
- Strategic initiatives – specific action plans that are designed to reach the outcome(s) established by the strategic goals and have specific costs associated with them. Strategic initiatives are not published in the strategic plan document, but are used for more specific planning and budgeting purposes.

Strategic directions are the heart of the strategic plan. They provide organizational structure and institutional focus and define the major long-term emphases or themes of the institution. Strategic directions are typically set

only every five to six years but are reviewed annually. While new strategic directions may arise during this time, they are generally not expected to change significantly over the life cycle of the plan.

Strategic goals give specificity to strategic directions and establish expectations of success. They, too, are key features of the written strategic plan. Strategic goals set the parameters for the institution in terms of how the approved strategic directions will be realized.

Strategic initiatives, by definition, are those initiatives that 1) have institutional impact and 2) are directly linked to specific institutional strategic goals. All strategic initiatives include an action plan that outlines the unit(s) responsible for implementation, a timeline, resources needed, and performance targets.

Western's strategic directions and goals are as follows:

1. Advance institutional quality with a special emphasis on academic excellence.
 - Enhance the intellectual climate of the campus through student and faculty research and creative activities.
 - Assure that all students acquire a broad and rigorous educational foundation.
 - Expand faculty and staff development.
 - Improve national reputation through raising and meeting higher expectations for students and faculty.
 - Reward faculty and staff for achievement consistent with strategic directions.
 - Reward high academic program performance consistent with strategic directions.
 - Obtain external funding to support and enhance academic quality.
 - Maintain a technology-rich environment to support student learning, research and creative activities.
2. Advance academic engagement inside and outside the University as a central educational strategy.
 - Expand service activities with external constituencies.
 - Expand opportunities for student and faculty scholarship through research and creative activities.
 - Develop expanded opportunities for student service learning activities across all curricula.
3. Meet the expectations, challenges, and opportunities of a focused growth institution¹.
 - Increase opportunities for adult learners through distance learning and the use of creative learning structures.
 - Grow enrollment through programs that address the needs of the region and state.
 - Engage communities of interest in managing growth responsibly.
 - Provide leadership in planned growth of the university and region by ensuring that infrastructure can meet demands and sustain Western's growth.
4. Respond to regional needs and opportunities.
 - Strengthen the University's relationship with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians to identify and respond to areas of mutual interest.
 - Maximize locational advantage in the development of programs and partnerships.
 - Develop and support academic programs that respond to changing economic opportunities, technologies, and demographic trends.
 - Develop programs that involve the students, faculty and the community in promoting regional development.

¹ *In its ten-year enrollment plan, adopted in 1998, the UNC Board of Governors identified campuses with excess physical capacity and smaller enrollments. These campuses agreed to pursue aggressive enrollment growth with special funding and support provided by the General Assembly and the UNC Office of the President. (January 2005 UNC Board of Governors Report, <http://www.northcarolina.edu/content/php/bog/reports/2005/january.htm>)*

- Support programming, service, and research and creative activities to respond to regional needs.
 - Expand educational outreach through development of regional partnerships.
 - Develop the Millennial Initiative to integrate academic programming with economic development.
5. Enrich the student experience.
 - Enhance extracurricular programming with an emphasis on service, leadership, citizenship, and a stronger connection with the curricular experience.
 - Enhance recreational facilities in quality, quantity, and scope.
 - Continue to improve residential and related facilities (dining, meeting spaces, etc.)
 - Facilitate and encourage a healthy, wellness-minded lifestyle.
 - Improve the student dining experience.
 - Schedule facilities and programming to accommodate student needs.
 - Assure that the redesign of the campus incorporates a physical environment that promotes community and an appreciation of the outdoors.
 - Provide a virtual experience for off-campus learners to savor Western's rich culture.
 6. Prepare students to succeed in an increasingly diverse, interrelated global society.
 - Expand the ethnic, cultural and intellectual diversity of students, faculty, and staff.
 - Broaden the international opportunities and programs available to Western students.
 - Encourage Western students, faculty, and staff to gain language proficiency.
 - Increase the number of international students through recruitment and programming.
 - Respond to the needs of an increasing Hispanic/Latino population in the state.
 - Assure that services meet the needs of a diverse student body.
 7. Enhance the effectiveness of management processes.
 - Improve management information systems and procedures that support data-based decision making, planning, and assessment.
 - Implement seamless and reliable internal and external communication systems.
 - Improve integration of planning and budgeting processes.
 - Streamline day-to-day processes for greater efficiency.
 8. Create expanded funding opportunities that support university priorities.
 - Develop relationships that encourage financial support from a variety of sources.
 - Encourage continued governmental support for Western initiatives.
 - Develop strategic processes that encourage collaboration with internal and external partners.
 - Expand reward systems for faculty and staff consistent with achievement of strategic directions.
 - Create an institutional climate promoting increased sponsored programs.