

INVESTING IN OUR STUDENTS, OUR REGION, AND OUR STATE:

Western Carolina University's Ambition
and Vision for Shared Success

“Focusing on quality education and preparation for responsible citizenship in a changing world” – that is the mission of Western Carolina University.

Western Carolina University’s unwavering commitment to students dates back to its founding in 1889, and the university is now serving more students than ever. WCU achieved its third consecutive year of record enrollment in 2014-15, topping out at nearly 10,400 students. Recognizing the vital role higher education plays in the Western North Carolina economy, WCU will work toward increasing the size of its graduating classes by 25 percent by 2020.

Recruiting and educating an increasing number of students is at the core of the university’s “2020 Vision” strategic plan and an explicit objective to “fulfill the educational needs of the state and region in order to contribute to its economic development.” Additionally, Western Carolina will seek to “increase the diversity of the student body and ensure resources necessary to support a diverse student body in order to serve the needs of the changing demographics of the region and the state and to enhance the educational experience of all students.”

Western Carolina University’s top philanthropic priority will be to raise a minimum of \$50 million in private support for endowed student scholarships through its next campaign.

Talent and a desire to learn should not be wasted.

Western Carolina University will ask its alumni, friends, and corporate and foundation partners to fund endowed scholarships to help make a WCU education accessible in perpetuity to all academically eligible students who want to become part of the WCU community. Last year, only 9 percent of WCU students received merit-based scholarships. A total of 126 endowed scholarships have been established at the university since the March 2012 installation of Chancellor David Belcher (with more in the works), but WCU remains at a significant disadvantage with its primary competitors in terms of the scholarship support available to its current and future students. The 126 scholarships attained to date represent roughly one-third of the current total of 391 scholarships, with an aggregated value of just over \$31 million.

Despite tuition increases, Western Carolina is consistently recognized as one of the nation's most affordable universities in the South by U.S. News & World Report. And yet, there remain many worthy students from modest economic backgrounds who either cannot afford to enroll, or who have to borrow large sums of money to pursue and complete a WCU education, and who graduate with sizable debt. In the 2014-15 academic year, WCU students and their families assumed \$63.3 million in loans for a single year, representing a significant increase from just six years ago when the amount borrowed was approximately \$37 million. Between 2011-12 and 2014-15, the average undergraduate loan debt among graduating students increased from \$15,911 to \$20,575.

The primary focus of WCU's next campaign will be to significantly increase privately funded scholarships that are aligned with enrollment, retention, and graduation objectives for students most in need – those representing the very best and brightest of their generation. The campaign will center on securing scholarship dollars in support of students with significant need and/or particularly noteworthy academic achievements irrespective of their pursuit of specific majors. Scholarship donors will continue to have the opportunity to designate their charitable commitments to any academic program in any of the university's seven academic units: the College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Business, the College of Education and Allied Professions, the College of Fine and Performing Arts, the College of Health and Human Sciences, the Kimmel School of Construction Management and Technology, and the Honors College. Additionally and importantly, the university also will pursue scholarship support specifically for WCU's student-athletes.

Many deserving North Carolina students are faced with the untenable decision of either incurring high levels of debt or forgoing a college education altogether.

During the 2014-15 academic year, a total of 3,896 students, or roughly 44 percent of the total undergraduate student population, had an expected family contribution toward the annual costs of their educations (based on standard federal income guidelines) of \$5,157 or less, the upper limit to qualify for federal Pell grants. Their combined total financial need was \$45.4 million, with roughly \$25.3 million of that figure, or slightly more than half, being met through grant funding. This left roughly \$20.1 million, or an average of \$5,164 per student, in unmet need to cover direct costs associated with tuition, fees, housing, and meal plans.

These statistics are sobering, but they do not represent the full picture of need inasmuch as roughly 81 percent of enrolled students qualified for and received financial assistance. Many of these students come from families with annual incomes outside the federal guidelines for poverty. These students struggle, as they essentially fall “in the middle” and outside of the established criteria to qualify for financial support from federal Pell grants and have significant unmet need of \$5.1 million, or an average of \$3,915 per student.

In the fall of 2014, a total of 6,638 applicants were admitted as freshmen to WCU, with a total of 1,745 enrolling for a yield of roughly 26 percent. Statistics demonstrate and affirm that scholarship support has been and continues to be a key factor in decisions on whether to enroll and where.

For these reasons, Western Carolina University will seek a minimum of \$20 million for scholarships restricted to those most in need.

Since 2009, Western Carolina University has seen steady increases in the academic profile of its first-year students. At the same time, the yield rate of admitted students who choose to enroll has declined because of increased competition for top students.

With more high-achieving students pursuing admission to WCU, it has become increasingly difficult to offer competitive scholarships to these deserving students who also are the recipients of more generous award packages from other institutions both within and outside North Carolina.

Many other UNC campuses offer full or nearly full scholarships for their highest ability students. In addition, private funds also are available at other institutions for stipends supporting experiential learning and undergraduate research opportunities.

Between fall 2009 and spring 2015, a total of 1,377 students have enrolled at WCU with a 3.5 unweighted grade-point average (GPA) or higher; only 42 percent of these students received scholarships based on their academic standings and accomplishments. Opening with just 77 students in 1997, the Honors College at WCU was the first residential honors college established in the University of North Carolina system. In 2014-15, only 38 percent of WCU's 1,400 Honors College students received a merit scholarship, with these awards averaging \$2,325. Existing scholarship funding has been stretched as far as possible in order to attract top students interested in enrolling at WCU, both within and outside the Honors College. WCU's

success, however, in continuing to attract such talent is being threatened by significant competition from other institutions that have deeper scholarship resources than ours. WCU's ability to recruit high-quality students is at risk.

For these reasons, Western Carolina University will seek a minimum of \$20 million for scholarships restricted to those demonstrating the highest academic performance, with higher awards aligned with progressively higher levels of scholarly accomplishment.

Western Carolina University's athletics vision centers on delivering a whole student experience that connects the winning spirit it expects on the field and the court with a dedication to excellence in the classroom.

Grade-point averages for WCU's approximately 375 student-athletes have averaged 3.07, with roughly one out of five of these students making the dean's list (based on a GPA of 3.5 and higher) over the past four academic years. The graduation rate for student-athletes also is higher than that of the overall student body. The NCAA's Academic Progress Rate (APR) accounts for eligibility, retention, and graduation, providing measures of academic performance. In 2013-14, men's golf, women's golf, and volleyball scored perfect APR scores of 1,000. Another eight of WCU's 16 sports improved their multi-year rates, and all 16 WCU programs were above the NCAA minimum in 2013-14 and exceeded the average for the Southern Conference.

During the past academic year, WCU athletics awarded more than \$3 million in scholarships, affecting 71 percent of the entire student-athlete population. Since 2010-11, funds contributed to athletics scholarships have increased from \$433,000 to \$1,137,000.

Through these annual fund contributions and the yield from the existing endowed scholarships for athletics at WCU, more than \$1.3 million was raised and generated last year, leaving a deficit of just under \$2 million to meet current scholarship requirements. An annual total of \$4.6 million is needed every year to fully fund all sports at the maximum level allowable by the NCAA. Of Western Carolina's 16 men's and women's sports, nine rank in the middle tier for athletics scholarships and seven rank in the bottom tier in the Southern Conference. Overall, WCU ranks sixth in funding for overall athletics scholarships among the 10 members of the Southern Conference.

For these reasons, Western Carolina University will seek a minimum of \$10 million for scholarships for its student-athletes.



WCU is a University of North Carolina campus and an Equal Opportunity Institution.