INTRODUCTION:
The faculty and staff of Western Carolina University embody a wide range of interests, abilities, perspectives, and contributions, yet we are also united as employees in our dedication both to our institution and region. Through such shared service as the Invest in Faculty and Staff (IFS) subcommittee, we aim to maximize a more holistic and inclusive campus culture, where artificial and rhetorical boundaries between employees are eliminated. This document represents our common goals and hopes as employees in support of WCU’s new strategic plan.

The subcommittee began by identifying common concerns of all WCU employees. Through review of the 2020 Strategic Directions, the external report, and faculty and staff conversations from Fall 2011, we chose to address four shared goals and two goals apiece for faculty and staff. Our shared goals include: salary and compensation priorities; professional development; leadership succession and stability; and quality of life issues. Our strongest priorities as members of the institution and community are reflected in these unanimously shared goals. WCU’s faculty and staff not only work together; we are also neighbors and partners in organizations and activities across the region. Given the variety of classifications and funding models for various employee positions, we realize a single solution is not possible for both faculty and staff concerns. Many of our goals are shared, but the paths to achieve those goals may diverge. Still, a single thread unites all of our hopes and concerns within this document, namely employee recruitment and retention. WCU cannot be a successful institution without satisfied, qualified, and well-supported employees. Too often, economic instability is cited as an excuse for inaction. This document proposes creative approaches to rewarding, retaining and recruiting qualified employees. We hope to aid the 2020 Commission in making WCU the most competitive and sought-after employer in the region.

The faculty members of the IFS subcommittee underscored the aspirations of our increasingly active scholarly community in their two goals. In order to thrive and attract the best new faculty to our institution and to retain our current, exceptional faculty, two key concerns were articulated: support for scholarship; and better management of workload, particularly increasing workload that comes without remuneration or recognition. The staff members of the IFS subcommittee believe we must grow a unified culture of collegiality, community, and trust that unites all employees. Staff goals include issues of communication and equal opportunities for engagement for all employees across campus. The employees of Western Carolina University present these goals in our common hope of making our institution the very best. All goals and initiatives reflect a commitment to the recruitment and retention of excellent WCU employees.

GOAL 1: Commit and show that faculty and staff salary and total compensation packages are an institutional priority.

Rationale: WCU must prioritize action on salary and compensation adjustments for its employees. Western Carolina University historically has not shown a commitment to proactively addressing employee salary and compensation adjustments compared to other UNC institutions, which has resulted in salary compression and inversion as well as gap to market issues across the university. While employees realize that raises and other compensation adjustments are only
possible according to federal and state laws and institutional policies, WCU must be prepared to act in a proactive manner and implement salary and compensation adjustments as soon as such resources become available, as it often costs more to recruit, hire, and train new employees than it does to retain our current employees.

**Initiative 1.1:** Create a task force and commit to a regular and recurring process for employee salary review, addressing both internal salary inequities and external points of comparison. Use this data to create appropriate benchmarks that may lead to new approaches to providing compensation and benefit packages.

**Initiative 1.2:** Proactively retain employees with competitive salary adjustments and/or compensation packages. When high performing faculty and staff do pursue outside opportunities, retain them aggressively through a flexible and more timely counteroffer policy.

**Initiative 1.3:** Effectively manage work plans / workload to reflect accurately the work that employees do and provide compensation appropriate to the increase in workload and the job skills that have been obtained.

**Initiative 1.4:** Create a new reward and recognition system (including small monetary salary adjustments or other tangible rewards) awarded to deserving, high-achieving colleagues via a process of peer nomination that does not require application by the nominees. Awards will be made by a joint committee of faculty and staff peers.

**GOAL 2:** Create more opportunities for Faculty and Staff Professional Development

**Rationale:** Faculty and staff must have the resources, encouragement, and opportunities for professional development in order to maintain and expand currency in their field. WCU must offer flexibility and financial support allowing employees continual professional growth, so that new skills and knowledge are brought back to the campus community and region.

**Initiative 2.1:** Develop a broad reaching program that will allow employees the ability to earn “professional development credits” and be recognized for their achievement. Encourage supervisors to allow employees release time (faculty) or flexible work schedules (staff) for personal or professional development.

**Initiative 2.2:** Seek external funding resources to create an endowed fund that can be used for faculty and staff development, and modify extant internal funding sources to encourage faculty and staff professional development.

**Initiative 2.3:** Utilize more broadly the current infrastructure and resources on campus or develop new infrastructure and support for WCU to host professional and academic conferences and workshops, to highlight WCU’s areas of academic excellence, and to heighten the profile of both our institution and our region.
GOAL 3: Improve competitive incentives, family-friendly policies, and work-life issues.

Rationale: Western Carolina University’s rural setting is one of its greatest strengths and attractions for many employees. However, the cumulative effects of our rural location, such as absence of a town center, frequently prevent the recruitment and retention of employees. Both for quality of life issues and employee retention, we must strive to make Western Carolina University a truly family-friendly institution.

Initiative 3.1: Enhance employment opportunities for spousal and partner hiring practices both within the university and in partnership with local businesses and institutions in the region.

Initiative 3.2: Work to improve quality of life issues for WCU employees and families by investigating opportunities for affordable childcare, healthcare, and housing options; offering faculty and staff-driven campus community activities; and improving access to goods and services within our local communities.

GOAL 4: Strengthen campus leadership through programs that will cultivate new leaders and build the skills of existing leadership.

Rationale: Campus leadership is the heart of the institution. Fostering new generations of leaders from within employee ranks must be a long-term priority. Many current faculty and staff have assumed leadership responsibilities without the formal training necessary to learn appropriate state and university regulations that would make them exceptional campus leaders. This goal offers suggested paths both to enhance the skills of extant leadership and to create long-term stability and continuity within our institution through cultivating strong successors. Achievement of this goal should create a greater degree of transparency in leadership appointments.

Initiative 4.1: Develop and implement an effective evaluation process that allows all employees to evaluate both peers and supervisors, and ensure prompt return of feedback at all levels.

Initiative 4.2: Ensure succession of leadership by establishing a leadership institute as a permanent funded initiative, and by creating a Faculty and Staff Leadership Orientation program. Offer workshops for faculty and staff who are interested in leadership positions across campus, providing lessons in our institutional structure and relevant information for future unit leaders. Formalize a mentorship program for employees at all career and promotion levels.

Initiative 4.3: Declare leadership and succession planning an institutional goal, by facilitating internal promotions to leadership positions when appropriate and by limiting or minimizing the duration of interim appointments.

GOAL 5: Increase scholarly support for all faculty.

Rationale: Faculty must serve their institution, discipline, and profession. WCU cannot retain its best faculty without investing in and supporting scholarly productivity. Scholarship at WCU takes many forms, as exemplified by the Boyer model of scholarship. These different types of
scholarship require different means of support. WCU must commit support to scholarship in at least the following ways.

**Initiative 5.1:** Improve infrastructure and support services for scholarly activities, including but not limited to: physical infrastructure; statistical, technological, and software support; publication and manuscript production; grant writing and applications; management of internal scholarly support funding.

**Initiative 5.2:** Encourage department heads and deans to build greater flexibility in teaching and/or service obligations for faculty with active scholarly agendas or major projects nearing completion.

**Initiative 5.3:** Commit to an increase in internal support through: an increased number of faculty scholarly reassignment awards; research travel support and sustained avenues for summer research support; a conducive scheme for redistribution of overhead costs; and appropriate start-up funding for new faculty. Reflect WCU’s commitment to globalism by creating new funding sources for international travel, both for scholarship and to reinforce connections with international universities with which we currently partner.

**Initiative 5.4:** Facilitate external scholarly support by promoting the pursuit of grant and fellowship opportunities, and reviewing university intellectual property and patent policies, especially with respect to proceeds distribution.

**GOAL 6:** Identify all elements of faculty workload and address hindrances to the primary faculty role as teacher-scholars.

**Rationale:** Faculty members take immense satisfaction in their roles as teacher-scholars and active participants in their community. Many non-course related enrichment activities are required for students, and are part of the TPR and AFE process in some departments, but often are not quantified as part of workload. The full role of faculty is undervalued as workload continually grows and many elements go undocumented during the annual collegial review process. Accurate assessment of current workloads will help academic units develop realistic faculty workload expectations within tenure and promotion expectations, and will increase financial efficiency, recruitment potential, and scholarly productivity of faculty.

**Initiative 6.1:** Charge department heads and deans with development of department- and college-level descriptions and assessment mechanisms for faculty workload for all general faculty. From this and similar data from peer institutions, create a workload template and reassess growing areas of faculty obligation.

**Initiative 6.2:** Provide department heads and deans flexibility in assigning course release to faculty who advise large numbers. Alternatively encourage the hiring of college/discipline-specific advisors to advise and engage in other activities, including student career development, graduate school applications, and alumni engagement.

**Initiative 6.3:** Revisit committee structures across the university to eliminate unnecessary service redundancies and ineffective committees.
GOAL 7: Improve communication strategies to bring about an inclusive university community

Rationale: The success of Western Carolina University depends on all employees working together to further its mission. We must develop clear communication strategies that breakdown barriers and encourage transparency in our communication with all members of the university community. While faculty and staff have distinct roles at WCU, we must not let those differences become a barrier to equal and free exchange of ideas and information.

Initiative 7.1: Review all existing forms, documents, and naming conventions, replacing references to faculty and staff with “employee.”

Initiative 7.2: Develop a strategy where communication that targets specific populations (faculty or staff) will be sent only to that population and communications that are targeted to both populations will be addressed to “employees.”

Initiative 7.3: Email is considered the official means of university communication. We must provide adequate access for all employees, ensuring that they have the ability to receive email from the university and have access to the tools necessary to communicate with other members of the university community.

GOAL 8: Create additional opportunities for staff engagement.

Rationale: The strategic planning process has provided opportunities for employees to have voice and be engaged directly with university leadership. Staff desire continual, shared ownership of Western Carolina University. We must develop an environment that is conducive to and encourages participation of all WCU employees.

Initiative 8.1: Establish opportunities that will give staff access to university administration and to provide recommendations and feedback such as open forums and brown bag lunches.

Initiative 8.2: Encourage the Faculty and Staff Senates to continue to work together on university-wide issues and to develop joint programs where faculty and staff collaborate to further the university mission under the common moniker of ‘employee.’

Initiative 8.3: Review the award structures currently in place and develop new staff awards that will make the number of awards allocated to faculty and staff more equitable.

CONCLUSION:
Western Carolina University plays an increasingly important role within our region, providing high quality education to students of North Carolina. The core of our strength lies in our employees. While the employees of WCU have many goals, hopes, and concerns for our institution and region, we cannot accomplish these goals without mutual support and recognition of all employee contributions. Retention of our current employee base is essential as WCU moves into a new phase of strategic planning and implementation. Recruitment of high quality
colleagues will enhance these efforts with new perspectives and abilities. The recruitment of
more diverse employee and student populations will allow us even greater insights into the
changing world to which WCU provides service and stewardship.

The members of the Invest in Faculty and Staff Subcommittee unanimously believe that our first
shared goal – salary and compensation – remains the biggest challenge to WCU in its
recruitment and retention of a qualified faculty and staff. WCU administration must commit to
addressing proactively the gap to market salary issues, and salary inversion and compression,
and must act as our strongest advocate. Without a qualified and satisfied employee base, WCU
cannot thrive as an institution.

As this subcommittee worked through its goals, we increasingly became aware of the legislative
restrictions that make some of our goals challenging to accomplish. We also recognize that, in
the realization of these goals, sacrifice will be required at some level within the university. To
overcome these limitations, WCU administration must utilize the extant framework for lobbying
both General Administration and the NC Legislature toward the long-term improvement of WCU
as a regional force for economic growth and academic accomplishment. Investments in faculty
and staff will allow WCU’s greatest asset – its strong employee base – to work alongside
administration in realizing the aforementioned goals.