

WCU Strategic Plan: Honoring Our Promise

Approved by the WCU Board of Trustees on June 3, 2021

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 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.

- 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.
- 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.
- 1.1.3: Incentivize and support programs and courses that include cross-curricular, interdisciplinary, and experiential learning.
- 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.
- 1.1.5: Expand educational programming around academic integrity and truth seeking to promote a culture of (student) academic honesty.
- 1.1.6: Coordinate, integrate, and highlight WCU's learning goals and co-curricular outcomes into curricular and co-curricular experiences.

Goal 1.2 Promote teaching excellence as the successful engagement of our students in learning, experimenting, creating, and achieving their full potential.

- 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.
- 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.
- 1.2.3: Recognize, promote, and celebrate outstanding programs, 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.

Goal 1.3 Promote and enhance cultural, environmental, economic, and regional development through educational programs, scholarship/creative activity, and service.

- 1.3.1: Provide learning opportunities for students to engage in the natural landscape and cultural heritage of the Southern Appalachian region.
- 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 WCU as a leader in the state, region, and nationally.
- 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.

- 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.
- 1.3.5: Encourage external collaboration of faculty, staff, and students with industry, start-ups, research institutes, non-profits, and government agencies.

Goal 1.4 Promote excellence in scholarship, research, creative inquiry, and cultural activity.

- 1.4.1: Value, promote, and provide opportunities for faculty-student scholarly collaborations with undergraduate and graduate populations.
- 1.4.2: Improve internal and external promotion of collaborative scholarship, research, creative, and cultural activity
- 1.4.3: Promote interdisciplinary learning, research, engagement, and idea exchange.
- 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.

Goal 1.5: Expand and support WCU's capacity to serve students and eliminate barriers to program and resource access.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 Promise funding for summer sessions, and other financial aid opportunities.

Goal 1.6: 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.

- 1.6.1: Refine and adapt the strategic enrollment plan to meet student enrollment targets while maintaining academic rigor in our educational programs.
- 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.
- 1.6.3: Continue to develop innovative data-driven methods of monitoring and enhancing student success at the individual level.
- 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.

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: 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.

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- 2.1.2: Create and track opportunities for student membership and leadership on institutional decision-making committees and organizations.
- 2.1.3: Implement diversity and inclusion initiatives to enhance students' understanding of other ethnicities and cultures.
- 2.1.4: Leverage intercollegiate athletics to instill pride among students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends of the University.

Goal 2.2: Instill institutional pride through more visible recognition and celebration of university achievements and traditions

- 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.
- 2.2.2: Build and sustain educational programs that recognize, respect, and celebrate Western North Carolina culture, including Cherokee history and traditions.

Goal 2.3: Create opportunities for skill development and career exploration through involvement in experiential activities.

- 2.3.1: Expand the utilization of the DegreePlus and other programs that promote transferrable skill development for students.
- 2.3.2: Promote student engagement in high-impact practices connected to professional development such as undergraduate research, service-learning, internships, and study abroad.
- 2.3.3: Develop co-curricular experiences that enhance classroom learning and professional 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 (e.g., DegreePlus Level 3 Experiences) related to inclusivity.

Goal 2.4 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.

- 2.4.1: Create and implement programs that embrace the elements of wellness to build and sustain a collaborative, comprehensive framework approach, with innovative strategies for engagement to help students be healthy and well. Programs will offer awareness of the scope of services provided by WCU to our faculty, staff, and students through knowledge of resources, facilitating discussions regarding wellness, and making referrals to the appropriate offices.
- 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.

Goal 2.5: Create opportunities that increase a student's ability to find their sense of belonging.

- 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. Programs and initiatives include but are not limited to student clubs, student organizations, campus events, Greek Life, and major/disciplinary events. Increased campus events (face-to-face and virtual) can increase the opportunities for all WCU students to improve their engagement with the institution.

- 2.5.2: Create a plan to gather data on sense of belonging from graduating students.

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: Foster an inclusive University community.

- 3.1.1: Administer a campus climate survey every three years and develop a University plan to address the results.
- 3.1.2: Develop and implement a robust university diversity and inclusion plan informed by SACSCOC standards and position statements.

Goal 3.2: Broaden our commitment to diversity and inclusion by recruiting, retaining, and developing a diverse community of faculty, staff, and students.

- 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.
- 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.

Goal 3.3: Support innovative and inclusive scholarship and teaching.

- 3.3.1: Ensure that diversity, equity, and inclusion are foundational aspects of educational offerings.
- 3.3.2: Provide ongoing, appropriate professional development on innovative and inclusive practices for faculty and staff.

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. As an institution dedicated to the overall development of North Carolina, Western Carolina University 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.*

* Buncombe, Cherokee, Cleveland, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, and Yancey

Goal 4.1: Be the higher education leader in workforce growth and development in Western North Carolina.

- 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. Grow these programs and develop new ones on main campus, the Asheville instructional site, and any other instructional sites, as appropriate.
- 4.1.2: Expand the regional service footprint of WCU beyond main campus through its instructional site in Asheville as well as other current and future sites in the region.
- 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.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 4.1.7: Develop a system of research and reporting for real-time awareness of regional workforce and other development needs.
- 4.1.8: In partnership with regional entities, leverage WCU's alumni network to bring graduates back to the region for relocation.

Goal 4.2: Serve as lead convenor on major issues facing Western North Carolina at both the regional and local levels.

- 4.2.1: Convene annual think-tanks on key regional issues such as, but not limited to, Community Health, Workforce Housing, Transportation, Broadband, Childcare, and Homelessness.
- 4.2.2: Convene business and non-profit subsectors on a regular basis to develop and cultivate “big ideas” for regional transformation.
- 4.2.3: Convene regional partners for collaborative leadership, research, and planning.
- 4.2.4: Encourage active and multi-lateral community and campus participation in relevant local strategic planning initiatives for communities, municipalities, and the region.
- 4.2.5: Publish and distribute widely, an annual report of WCU's regional and community development and engagement.

Goal 4.3: Become a key regional partner in business retention and expansion.

- 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.
- 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.

Goal 4.4: Be a state model for regional and community engagement.

- 4.4.1: Convene, lead, and invest in the development of Cullowhee as a community.
- 4.4.2: Develop interdisciplinary clinics(s), fixed or mobile, to serve the region and provide clinical placements for our students.
- 4.4.3: Develop a university-specific Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), guided by the University's Strategic Plan, and to include intensive participation from the various communities and counties encompassed in our region to create alignment with dynamic needs.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

- 4.4.7: Encourage and support individual regional and community engagement by students, faculty and staff.
- 4.4.8: Identify and annually place students, faculty, and staff on key regional and community leadership boards.

Goal 4.5: Leverage WCUs expertise in key areas to help other institutions, large employers, and government entities.

- 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.
- 4.5.2: Guide other regional partners to leadership in environmentalism and sustainability.
- 4.5.3: Leverage WCU's expertise in public/private partnerships for housing development to grow workforce housing in the region.

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

- 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.
- 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.

Goal 5.2: 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.

- 5.2.1: Support professional development for all employees as a managerial priority, by devoting the appropriate time and funding to the effort.
- 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.
- 5.2.3: Develop a campus-wide mechanism that provides training and documentation for the most frequently utilized WCU systems and processes
- 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 advancing the potential for career growth and long-term promotional opportunity.

Goal 5.3: Support scholarship and creative activities to foster our mission as a regional comprehensive university.

- 5.3.1: Strengthen the organizational structure to better integrate research and the Graduate School at our University.
- 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.

Goal 5.4: Create an environment in which the primary role of faculty as teacher scholar is recognized and valued.

- 5.4.1: Assess and support the needs of non-tenure track faculty.

- 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.

Goal 5.5: Create a campus environment that facilitates a healthy lifestyle for employees.

- 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.
- 5.5.2: Encourage physical health of employees by promoting physical fitness, healthy eating, activity, and movement.

Goal 5.6: Contribute to employee recruitment and retention by addressing environmental challenges for employees and their families.

- 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.
- 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.

Strategic Direction 6: Responsible Stewardship

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

Goal 6.1: Implement sustainable funding models to ensure fiscal stability.

- 6.1.1: Reduce operational dependence on one-time funding for core functions and services.
- 6.1.2: Engage the budgetary process to steward resource allocation, enhance sound investment, and address strategic critical need.

Goal 6.2: Maintain the Campus Master Plan.

- 6.2.1: Ensure sustainability and fiscal resources necessary to update and maintain the Campus Master Plan.
- 6.2.2: Use the Campus Master Plan to guide and inform decisions.

Goal 6.3: Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of campus business processes, including technology enablement.

- 6.3.1: Review campus business processes and identify those requiring revision.
- 6.3.2: Ensure delivery of excellent service experiences through ongoing assessment and periodic administrative reviews where possible.

Goal 6.4: Maintain currency and enable strategic information technology capabilities.

- 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.
- 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.

Goal 6.5: Preserve the safety, reliability, and security of the campus community.

- 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.
- 6.5.2: Ensure fiscal stability through systematic maintenance, assessment, repair, and enhancement of all campus infrastructure and technologies.
- 6.5.3: Engage in an enterprise risk management process to enhance communication and strengthen response capabilities.
- 6.5.4: Maintain and improve technologies and processes related to cybersecurity and privacy to prevent, detect, and respond to incidents.

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

- 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.
- 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.

Goal 7.2: Facilitate a shared understanding of the institution's strategic vision among the University's external communities.

- 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.
- 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.

Goal 7.3: Maximize and target a balanced and diverse mix of financial resources that will enable achievement of the University's strategic vision.

- 7.3.1. Explore innovative revenue generation strategies to minimize the cost of higher education to students, as far as practicable.
- 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.
- 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.
- 7.3.4: Increase the number, value, and competitiveness of sponsored research proposals while increasing research support and productivity.