SCOT Analysis

Unit Graduate School       Year 2014-15

Strengths:

- **Support of Western’s mission**
  The graduate program expands student access to engaging education, promotes life-long learning, enhances scholarly activity across the campus, and develops graduates qualified to address the diverse critical needs of the state and nation. Graduate students perform quality research and service that connects with and contributes to local, regional, and international communities.

- **Enhancement of undergraduate education**
  Graduate students serve as mentors and role models to undergraduates, and also provide instructional and research support for faculty. They expand curricular undergraduate opportunities by providing direct and supplemental instruction in the classroom, labs, and office hours. Graduate TAs help keep class sizes optimal for the undergraduate experience.

- **Highly regarded programs that provide unique opportunities and evolve along national trends**
  Western’s graduate programs provide high-quality degrees that adapt to student needs and national trends based on assessment data. Students receive individualized advising and support for professional development.

- **Recruitment and support of high-quality faculty**
  Our active graduate programs serve as an incentive when recruiting faculty.

- **Assessment of student learning**
  All graduate programs include capstone experiences or projects (e.g. theses, comprehensive exams, practicums, etc.) that assess students’ performance and attainment of program learning goals.

- **Assessment of programs**
  Many of the graduate programs receive accreditation from professional organizations in their fields, and all programs undergo five-year reviews by the Graduate Council. In 2014, all programs provided the Graduate School with a comprehensive appraisal that will be used in strategic planning.

- **Adaptive, centralized leadership**
  The Graduate Council—made up of faculty and graduate students from across the University and chaired by faculty—votes on all policies and procedures related to graduate education. It serves as an advisory council to the Graduate School, which implements these policies and procedures, and is proactive in adapting to student and faculty needs and national trends.

Challenges:

- **Under-resourced programs**
  Many programs need more resources in order to recruit and retain both high-quality students and faculty. These resources include: more Teaching Assistantships with nationally competitive compensation, updated research equipment and facilities, funds for national recruitment of a diverse student body, funds for professional development and travel, and tuition support for Research Assistants.

- **Escalating cost of Graduate Student health insurance**
  The cost for the Graduate School to provide student health insurance has increased substantially over the last several years, and not all students are eligible for this insurance.

- **Lack of representation within Western’s student governance and Associated Students outreach**
  Graduate students have not yet had a consistent presence or voice within the Associated Students’ governing or outreach structures.

- **High level of debt for students**
  Programs with higher time-to-degree lead to greater student debt; programs with lower retention rates may produce students with high debt loads and no completed degree.
• **Need for a continuous enrollment policy (CEP)**
  A CEP is needed to better track enrollment of students who have completed coursework but have not graduated. A CEP will provide students ongoing access to resources to aid them in their writing and research and support their engagement with the campus community.

• **Variable faculty participation in graduate programs**
  Faculty in some departments report having little support for participation in graduate programs.

• **High percentage of stacked classes in some programs**
  Some programs stack undergraduate and graduate classes to more efficiently use limited resources. Additional resources would enable more dedicated graduate courses in these programs.

• **Lack of consistent assessment practices across graduate programs**
  Not all programs have strong assessment practices; these programs need to articulate and assess student learning outcomes down to program and course level. The Graduate School needs to create consistent expectations and oversight of assessment.

• **Low visibility of graduate students in the Western community**
  Graduate students have few opportunities to interact with students outside their own programs, and they are not included in University events such as convocation, awards ceremonies, Scholar’s Week banquet, etc.

**Opportunities:**

• **Invest in the Doctorate in Audiology and explore other degrees beyond the Master’s Degree**

• **Explore opportunities to build graduate programs that enhance and support undergraduate programs; consider investing in programs demonstrating growth nationally**

• **Increase investment in off-campus programs**

• **Invest in targeted enrollment growth**
  Some programs have self-identified interest and capacity for growth

• **Expand identity within Western’s brand**
  Take steps to create an institutional culture that recognizes and values graduate student contributions to Western’s identity and brand

• **Increase faculty participation in graduate programs**
  Provide incentives to participate in graduate programs

• **Provide a leadership position for a Graduate Student in the Associated Students**

• **Expand undergraduate scholarly and creative opportunities by investing in Graduate scholarly and creative opportunities.**

• **Explore opportunities for graduate student alumni to become supporters of WWU**
  Many graduate student alumni obtain work and success in their fields; they often reciprocate by becoming active alumni supporters and donors to the Western Foundation

**Threats:**

• **Reduced state investment in Higher Education**

• **Increased options for Graduate students outside traditional programs**
  WWU faces competition from non-traditional program offerings, nationally and internationally, such as online degree programs, and programs not affiliated with four-year universities.

• **Flat growth in non-STEM degree programs nationally**
  If a program at WWU does not see growth in student application numbers, this often correlates with a nationwide trend in the popularity of these secondary degrees in the marketplace.