International Initiative – Q&A

1. What exactly is a “pathway program?”

A pathway program typically combines credit-bearing coursework with English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. Pathway programs are an extension of what university-based intensive English programs, like Western’s own IEP, do through bridge courses or sheltered instruction, in which students receive English support while taking academic courses. Pathway students are admitted to the university on a conditional basis because their English fluency is insufficient. They spend up to three academic quarters, the “pathway year,” in a special program to gain the required English proficiency for full admission, participate in sessions and mentoring designed to help them understand the expectations in U.S. higher education, adapt to the life and culture of the United States, and complete some first-year course work depending on their qualifications. Upon completing the pathway program successfully, students are fully admitted to the university and transition into the general student population.

2. Why was it necessary to enter into a public/private partnership to recruit international students?

Partnering with a pathway provider gives Western’s marketing and recruiting efforts global reach. One of the primary benefits of contracting with Study Group is access to their global network of corporate offices and affiliates. It is simply beyond the ability of Western to develop such a network or global presence from its own resources, and the university lacks the sophisticated knowledge of individual national educational systems, marketing, and recruiting channels. Study Group has a reputation for success in recruiting students from all over the world.

In addition to managing the marketing, recruitment and admissions process, Study Group is also a capacity-building organization. A key part of their process includes inbound and outbound recruitment activities. Familiarization trips, or so-called FAM trips, where key agents in target markets come to Western for campus visits and global tours where Western faculty and student services staff are taken into key markets, will be arranged and paid for by Study Group. This both builds the broader recognition of Western’s reputation, while also providing Western with direct access to agencies and markets across the world to aid in long-term relationship building.

3. The announcement of a contract with Study Group came as a surprise. What was the process that led to this partnership?

In 2010, the Working Group on Internationalization produced a White Paper recommending that Western increase the number of international students at Western. Faculty groups such as the One World Committee and others have furtherted that recommendation, and most recently the Institute for Global Engagement’s 2015 Action Plan calls for increased international student enrollment. Time and time again the university community has articulated this goal, but
resources and infrastructure have made progress nearly impossible, leaving us at a < 1% international enrollment today.

With that mandate, the university began to explore how to begin to realize the goal of increased international student enrollment. The exploration began in the spring of 2016 and continued through that summer, culminating in a day-long meeting on campus with a pathway provider. While that conversation was helpful on campus in terms of information about pathway programs, we ultimately did not partner with that provider after six months of essentially no communication from the provider. From there, and understanding the dramatic shifts in international student behavior after the US presidential election, we began to talk with Study Group, ultimately engaging in the contract process. The idiosyncrasies of this type of contract (confidentiality, exclusivity terms negotiated individually by each university, proprietary considerations, etc.), made the process very complex.

We acknowledge that from the beginnings of the conversation in 2016 and over multiple presidencies, the process was allowed to too strongly dictate communication and the lack of it, but we also see the implementation of university strategic goals as one of our responsibilities within a shared governance environment. Regretting the process and the errors of omission that helped create the unfortunate environment of surprise for campus colleagues when the contract was ready, the President and vice presidents reaffirm their commitment to the shared governance we so value at Western.

Now during Fall Quarter, with a partner identified, we begin the process of structuring the pathway and of implementing the partnership to serve international students and campus. There is much to do in a short period of time, but a variety of groups are hard at work on the initiative. Additionally, with the goal of exploring best practices, a delegation trip to another university that partners with Study Group is being planned for Winter Quarter 2018, a delegation that will include faculty and staff. In summary, the process has been long, but it has been one that was very inclusive on the front-end (the goal of having more international student enrollment), and currently broadly discussed on the back-end (the creation of the Western Global Pathway), but frustratingly characterized by confidentiality and lack of communication during the process of exploration of alternative partners and negotiation of the final contract.

4. How many international students will there be on campus?

We hope to have 75 international undergraduate students and 25 international graduate students here to begin AY 2018-19. A very small percentage of those students might be matriculated to Western, but the vast majority will be in the pathway. The following year, AY 2019-20, we would anticipate some 65-70 matriculated international undergraduate students and approximately 20 matriculated graduate students, with some 100 total students (graduate and undergraduate), in the pathway.

5. Will international students take the seats of resident Washington students?

No. We believe that we have a moral imperative to expand access to higher education, particularly for individuals from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds, including first generation and ethnically-diverse students. In fact, we specifically focused on broader access in our recruitment efforts for fall 2017. The result is the University’s largest incoming class ever,
with 30.1 percent of new freshmen and 45.6 percent of transfer students being the first in their families to attend college. Overall fall enrollment for students of color is 25.6 percent, an increase over 25.3 percent in fall 2016, another all-time record for Western.

We do not expect this influx of international students to alter our current 87:13% ratio of resident to non-resident students, nor will it alter our overriding commitment to recruiting and successfully graduating a diverse student body that reflects local and global diversity. It is critically important that we prepare students for life in a global society and success in a global economy. We believe this partnership will help us ensure an equitable and transformative education for all students, and we expect that this institutional effort to have our students reflect the increasing population diversity in Washington and the nation will continue going forward.

6. Where will the international students live?

International students will have the same living options as all Western students. It is our intention to ensure that international students are integrated with resident and non-resident U.S. students not just in their classrooms, but in living and co-curricular spaces as well.

7. We already have access and space issues in some popular academic programs. How can we accommodate these international students?

The university has to address its space and access issues, international student enrollment notwithstanding. We expect this partnership will contribute resources that will enable us to hire an additional 30-35 tenure-track faculty and to improve/increase space on campus, which will complement the support that we receive from the legislature. In terms of space for what is described as the “Western Global Pathway Center,” that is the current space used by the Intensive English Program (IEP) in College Hall. IEP classrooms and offices are already in College Hall, and any IEP classes taught in general use classrooms are taught after/around credit-bearing campus classes. There has been for some number of years now an effort to identify for the Honors Program more appropriate space than the three offices their staff currently occupy, and WWU Space Administration is working to finalize that as well so that the current contiguous IEP space can function better. Again, though, this move has been in the works for a number of years.

8. What countries will the international students come from?

International students will come from all over the world. Study Group has unmatched global reach and capacity, including the ability to focus on specific region recruitment. In other words, it is possible to set regional priority. This capability is important to ensure diversity because it is as much about recruiting the right student, as it is to ensure that there isn’t an oversaturation from one ethnicity. While pent-up demand might have it that initially most students will come from only a handful of countries, Study Group and WWU will routinely reflect on diversity and continually aim for a diverse pathway. In 2015 Study Group recruited students from over 170 countries to attend partner universities.
9. Do we know what majors the international students will be interested in?

Traditionally, international students tend to be interested in business and in the STEM areas. Our partnership with Study Group, however, is built upon a shared commitment to recruiting international students with academic interests that span our majors and programs. This was an important part of our conversation and something for which Study Group has documented success at other partner institutions.

10. What are the budget implications of the partnership with Study Group?

Study Group will assume all upfront costs and risk to the partnership and all financial liability for scaling Western’s Global Pathway program. The financial arrangement consists of a revenue share on tuition and fees only and begins when the student arrives on campus and reaches the census date. It bears repeating that there is no upfront cost or risk to the university. In return for Study Group recruiting and operating the Pathway program, it receives a percentage revenue share of the tuition. Our current model calls for international students to be our out-of-state tuition rate, applicable fees, and room & board. It is anticipated that this revenue will complement state funding and allow us to address access issues in terms of hiring new tenure-track faculty and with respect to increasing and improving space. New resources associated with it also will support student services for all students, not just international students.

11. Does Study Group have courses and curriculum?

No. International students entering the pathway will take WWU Intensive English Program courses, and eligible international students might take existing WWU for-credit courses in preparation for matriculation to WWU.

Provost Carbajal is planning a lead a delegation of Western faculty and staff to visit James Madison University (another institution that partners with Study Group), for Winter Quarter 2018. The goal of this trip will be to explore what that university has done with respect to its own pathway program and any lessons they have learned about impacts on courses, this in an effort to create the best Western pathway possible.

12. What are the “working groups” on campus associated with this initiative?

There are seven working groups. These groups have flexible membership and no set number of participants. The groups are intended to help coordinate implementation of the partnership:

- Academics
- Admissions
- Finance
- Marketing
- Technology
- Operations
- Student Services
13. What about admissions requirements for international students? Are they different from or lower than our stated requirements?

From Undergraduate Admissions’ perspective, under the new partnership with Study Group, admissions standards for students who will directly enter into the university’s academic programs (i.e. Direct Admission students) are in line with standards we have used in the past.

More specifically, the two main standards that were reviewed for international students were cumulative grade point average (GPA) and English language proficiency. For the former, we traditionally provided guidelines for admission for students with a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher. However, our holistic application review process would welcome applications from students with GPAs below that stated guideline. For Fall 2018, we adjusted the guideline to 2.5 or higher, with Western’s Admissions Office conducting the holistic review of students with GPA between 2.3 and 2.49 (students with a GPA below 2.29 will be denied). In the latter, we rely on scores from English language proficiency exams (most commonly, TOEFL and IELTS) before granting admissions to applicants whose primary language of instruction is not English. There was a slight adjustment for our TOEFL score—from 80 to 79—and we kept our IELTS minimum the same (6.5).

Both adjustments—in GPA and TOEFL—will bring us more in line with the current environment. Here is wording copied from UW’s page on international freshmen admissions: An applicant’s overall academic performance is a major factor in the admissions decision. We do not consider applicants with grades below a C average (2.0 on a 4.0 scale). Although a C average is the minimum requirement for admission consideration, a much stronger academic record is required to be competitive.

Western’s previous minimum TOEFL score of 80 was the highest among the state’s public four-year institutions, and even with that slight adjustment, ours is the highest standard within that cohort, along with WSU’s and TESC’s:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>TOEFL</th>
<th>IELTS</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Washington University</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington State University</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Evergreen State College</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Washington</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Washington University</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Washington University</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>6.0</td>
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Students whose applications fall below these minimums may make great candidates for the Global Pathways program, where they can enhance their academic abilities and English proficiency before embarking on a full-fledged, degree-seeking program.

Our processes for reviewing and assessing international students’ GPAs is consistent with the best practices across the enrollment management spectrum. When we receive a transcript from a secondary/high school, we rely on an online database (www.classbase.com) that features detailed information on national educational systems and corresponding grading scales for nearly every country in the world. This information allows us to properly place each applicant’s academic achievements within the context of their setting, and to translate grades into our own 4.0-based
system. Grades for each class are counted individually, and our staff uses a special calculator to generate a cumulative GPA for the applicant. Some school systems (e.g. Japan), already provide documentation that includes US-style transcripts, with accompanying GPA information on the 4.0 scale.

If the country in question is one in which fraud is somewhat prevalent, we request that the transcript provided go through a fee-based provider, such as World Education Service (www.wes.org), in order to verify the transcript’s authenticity. The utilization of services like WES is required for international students applying as transfer applicants, where we can count on WES’s expertise in reviewing and assessing students’ academic preparation from across a multitude of post-secondary educational systems.

It is our understanding that transcript and credentials evaluation done through Study Group will rely on team members who are trained and certified by WES, hence our high level of confidence in their assessment and identification of students, ultimately identifying those who meet Western’s minimum GPA requirements.

In summary, we are confident the standards set in place will favorably position Western to achieve desired goals of increasing our international student enrollment, and to do so without sacrificing the level of preparation of the students who will be welcomed into our community. Bottom line, Western is solely responsible for all admissions decisions.