The Challenge

Whatcom County is a vibrant area with many initiatives to support community and economic development, innovation and entrepreneurship. While each initiative has merit, the competing initiatives result in no overarching vision for community and economic development in Whatcom County. A great deal of the fragmentation in the initiatives is due to confusion about the difference between growing or enhancing existing businesses and NGO’s, and attracting currently operating businesses and NGO’s to the area and supporting the development of new startups.

In the midst of this fragmentation most of the Community reports they don’t think of Western as a resource, and if they do, they don’t know where or who to contact. The reciprocal of this is true in that there are many students and faculty at Western who don’t know where to go in the community for support to bring ideas and innovation to the next step. There is a classic “Town-Gown” divide that limits the ability of either side in leveraging individual and shared strengths.

The Purpose

The Front Door to Discovery is designed to stimulate community and economic development and greater social awareness in our region and state while enhancing the internal spirit of entrepreneurship and innovation at Western through the connection of people and resources in our community. It will create a two-way pathway to greater awareness and connectivity to the resources available to the greater community at Western Washington University, and conversely, to connect students and faculty to the assets available to them in the region and beyond.

Actions

- Create an institutional mechanism to connect faculty, staff and students to each other and to members and institutions in the outside community in order to leverage resources at the University and in the Community.
- Creation of a position within the University Relations Division to:
  - Overcome the psychological distance between Western and the Community
  - Create a direct personal connection between engaged students and faculty to resources and opportunities within the University and in the private and public sectors.
  - Serve as a central clearing house that maps the campus and the community to foster connections
  - Develop and foster collaborative partnerships with community partners
- Integrate Western resource assets with the Front Door to Discovery
- Create a space for people who are energized about creating a great climate for innovators, entrepreneurs and members of the cultural and arts communities in Whatcom County and beyond.

Goals

- Improve and stimulate community, cultural, economic and social growth in the Northwest Washington region
- Encourage the spirit of entrepreneurship, innovation and collaboration within the wider community and Western
From the Community

- Business/Industry
- Startups
- Cultural/Arts Groups
- Students/Alumni
- Nonprofit/NGO
- Government/Agency
- Inventors
- Professors

- Student Projects
- Class Projects
- Internships
- Dept. & Program Resources
- Research Collaboration

To The Community

- Bellingham Angels
- TAG
- NWIRC
- Big Idea Lab
- Company Development
- Non-Government Organizations

Raise awareness of innovation and research, tech transfer, and commercialization of technology at Western.