

WWU Budget Options for 2011-2013 FAQ

Question: I understand you have decided to cut certain programs. Why?

Answer: No decisions have yet been made about cutting programs. In accordance with our shared governance processes, we engage the campus in open and transparent budgeting. This is just the beginning of the campus-wide discussion about the need to make further cuts. Certainly, there are no "good" candidates for elimination or merger. Western is a very lean and successful institution. Consequently, the work of recommending programs for elimination and merger has been difficult and painful and we've approached it with an eye both to evidence and to the suggestions and recommendations that have emerged through the colleges themselves.

Question: Why would you consider cutting some programs over others?

Answer: We are following a process called "rebasings", examining how best to allocate resources to preserve Western's excellence on a sustainable base for the future (for further detail, see President Shepard's memo, ["The Next Hundred Years"](#)). The motivation for this strategy is based upon the fact that, even under the best case budget scenario from Olympia, and after tuition increases are added back in, Western's operating budget has dropped 13.7% in the last two years. Add to that, two basic principles: 1) We must continue to deliver the excellence that people have come to expect from Western, and 2) The severe state funding cuts of the past several years have established a "new normal" to which we must adjust without using any more temporary or expedient solutions. Given these constraints, it follows that not all we are currently doing will continue to be possible in the new base.

Question: So, how do we decide what is going to be in the new base?

Answer: All decisions to date, and in the future, are driven by our public, one-page [strategic commitments](#). Our institutional vision is to apply Western's areas of considerable strength to meet the needs of the state of Washington. Both assessments, then, are critical to our decision making: is a particular program a strength of ours? Is it critical to our state?

Question: Just how big will the rebasing be?

Answer: Proposals were generated by asking every part of the university to consider what they would do were their state operating budget reduced by a major amount. Just how much rebasing ends up being necessary will depend upon what the final cut for the next biennium will be.

Question: How about my major, I don't see it mentioned in the recent rebasing proposals. Will it still be around?

Answer: Yes, and we will be assessing which programs will receive additional support. That is one reason to be clear about what subjects are up for consideration. And, which are not. Most (95%) of what Western is doing will continue. We are not considering proposals to eliminate programs other than as identified in ["Rebasing for Western's Future: Proposals for Discussion."](#) The rebasing that does occur will assure the continuing strength of what we offer in the future.

Question: How about my major? I see it is mentioned – what happens to me if the program is eliminated?

Answer: It is important to note that the current budget proposals include concentrations or minors within degrees and departments, not entire academic departments. Where the decision is made to eliminate an academic program, commitments to current students will be fulfilled as the program is phased out over several years.

Question: I am a newly admitted student. What happens to me if my major is eliminated?

Answer: We are still admitting students into the programs we currently offer, knowing that means a commitment to teach those students until they complete their program.

Question: I hear about ongoing discussions of graduate programs and academic program offerings in Fairhaven, Huxley, and in the STEM (science, engineering technology, computer science, mathematics) areas. What's going on?

Answer: Here, precisely because of their importance to the state and their association with Western's distinctive excellence, the campus has been engaged in figuring out how best to meet continuing needs in these areas. The importance of these areas and the complexities in the new funding environment are such that this engagement cannot be quickly concluded and will continue into the next academic year. The directions for the campus engagement can be found here: [What is Next?](#) Please go to the last page of the document.

Question: So how come these budget options are not yet final?

Answer: These are options that are under consideration as the university develops its 2011-13 operating budget. The Legislature is now in special session to finalize the 2011-13 state operating budget – including the exact level of budget cuts expected for Western and other public higher education institutions. Only when we have a final budget target from Olympia can we meaningfully translate the implementation of particular possibilities like these into an actual budget.

Question: How come these budget cuts continue even though tuition has risen dramatically in recent years?

Answer: Unfortunately, the Legislature has sharply cut funding to public universities while also dramatically increasing tuition rates, shifting the cost of attending college increasingly onto students and their families. However, the increases in tuition only partly offset the deep state funding cuts. When the final 2011-13 Washington State operating budget is passed, Western will have had more than 50% of its state funding cut in less than three years.

Question: How can employees learn about whether their area has been cut?

Answer: Most likely they have already been informed by their planning leaders. However, proposed budget options have been posted [here](#).

Question: Have university employees whose positions may be affected been notified?

Answer: All university employees whose positions are in jeopardy of being eliminated or could be affected have been notified.

Question: What are the next steps in the process?

Answer: Budget discussions have been ongoing for months on campus, with deans and vice presidents working closely with faculty and staff to make funding decisions based on the protection of Western's core academic quality as the top priority. On Monday, May 2, President Shepard along with the provost, deans, vice presidents and chair of the University Planning and Resources Council (UPRC) developed proposed budget options for further campus review and decisions. Once the Legislature has completed its work on the state budget, the president, vice presidents, deans and UPRC chair will meet to finalize the 2011-13 University operating budget. The president's recommendations to the Board of Trustees will be posted at the University Planning & Budgeting website. The trustees then are planning to act on the university's 2011-13 operating budget at their June meeting.

Question: Western is working on a lot of buildings, like Miller Hall. Why can't that money be used instead to offset these cuts?

Answer: Western has both an operating budget – which keeps the university going on a day-to-day basis, paying salaries, utilities, supplies, etc. – and a capital budget, which is used for building projects such as renovation or new construction of campus buildings. The money for these comes from two different funding sources and can only be used for those specific purposes: operating money comes from state operating appropriations and tuition; the capital budget is primarily financed by long term state-issued bonds, a financing mechanism similar to a home mortgage.

Question: I have questions you did not answer. How do I get answers?

Answer: Please contribute your question to the [WWU 2011-13 Budget Options](#) thread on Viking Village. As additional questions are asked there, this FAQ will grow.

Question: How can I be involved?

Answer: For more information on the process moving forward please see [What is Next?](#)

Question: Have any decisions been made about cutting computer science or any other programs?

Answer: Again, no decisions have been made about cutting programs at the university. In accordance with our shared governance processes, we engage the campus in open and transparent budgeting. This is just the beginning of the campus-wide discussion about the need to make further cuts. In every university college, bottom up, additional scrutiny has been given to the quality, size, centrality and cost of academic programs. The Department of Computer Science, as with many academic departments at Western, will be engaged in an evaluation process.

Question: What are the budget challenges with STEM Programs?

Answer: More and more of our students are moving to science-based majors. We are determining what areas of strength we need to concentrate on as we adjust to declining state funding. We need to bring together two considerations to see the intersection: where are we strongest and what are Washington's top needs?

Question: Why is computer science on the rebasing discussion list?

Answer: Through this rebasing effort we are striving to meet the state's expectations for quality and curriculum, and that includes computer science. We are striving to determine what areas of strength we need to concentrate on. As the faculty in computer science engage in their evaluations of the current computer science program, we want them to ask some serious questions:

- What kind of program do we want to offer?
- What versions of computer sciences do we want to offer?
- What are the degrees we want to offer?
- What are the concentrations we want to offer?

What we are doing in computer science and numerous other areas is what the business world does on a regular basis – we are asking computer science to do an evaluation of their program. We are asking them to think about the future of their disciplines and the needs of the State of Washington.

Question: What is stated in the budget report about Computer Science?

Answer:

- **Strength in STEM Fields:** In the areas of science, technology and mathematics Western has major strengths, and strengths and excellence in these areas are critical to one of our top strategic objectives: apply Western's strengths to build a stronger state of Washington. Further, student demand in these areas has been growing, another positive for Washington. However, growth has not been even across areas. And, as in all colleges at Western, program quality varies. In particular and involving our external advisory boards, we must critically examine our current approaches to meet changing needs for graduates in the area of Computer Science with the intention of supporting the most central and highest quality programs in the STEM fields we continue to offer.
- **College of Sciences and Technology:** Conduct comprehensive study of Computer Science offerings relative to future needs of the state.

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