

Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support Services

2011-13 Biennium Priorities and Initiatives

November 2009

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The following categories and descriptions are not intended to cover all division priorities and initiatives, but are meant to reflect those directions on which – given the institution's and the state's current context and strategic directions for higher education – the division most needs to focus or increase its resources.

The division is actively seeking grant and private funds where possible for portions of these priorities, and continues to proactively gain efficiencies, realign and reallocate within its existing resource base, but meeting these critical needs will take thoughtful planning and a combination of solutions.

These priorities and initiatives were developed and informed by the institution's Strategic Plan and 15 Initiatives, the division's updated SCOT Analysis, the Higher Education Coordinating Board's draft 2011-13 Budget Guidelines, departmental and institutional data, and a number of conversations at various levels within the division.

I. **Providing Core Services at a Time of Increasing Demand**

Several departments providing core services have experienced significant increases in demand due to external impacts. These areas are critical for access, affordability, retention, time to degree/graduation, and safety, and therefore are the highest priorities for state support.

- The nation's economic situation has created further strain on an already understaffed **Financial Aid** office that is now trying to process significant increases in applications from financially challenged students, including those whose parents have lost employment and/or are facing foreclosure.
- Returning **Veterans** and their dependents – in increasing numbers – are taking advantage of new legislation authorizing educational benefits. Western lags behind other schools in its structure and capacity to serve the specialized needs of this population.
- **Mental health, student crisis issues, and related disability service demands** have been on the rise for some time. While these areas have been a high priority in recent years, the division has been unable to add resources at a rate sufficient to meet growing demand due to the budget situation.
- Make **investments in technology** where doing so will provide service to students with less resource drain on departments. These include tools for targeted outreach and recruitment, document imaging, more efficient system interfaces, and improved web resources.

Note that the core services of outreach and recruitment are more fully addressed under the "Enrollment Management" category.

II. Serving Emergent Needs of Unique Populations

As the demographic of the prospective student changes, and as Western responds to the state's goal of increasing degree production, the division's focus on growth in historically underserved populations and the support services tailored to retain and help them achieve academic success are critical. The division is moving toward a coaching model in some areas of service, which studies have shown to be particularly successful with at-risk students.

The division is submitting two TRIO grant applications – one targeting first generation, low income, and disabled students, and the other targeting students in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) fields, particularly focusing on the successful completion of math competencies, which is a critical gateway. Other grant applications will be written as opportunities match institutional needs.

- Identify and attract historically underserved populations and provide tailored support services for first generation, low income, English-as-a-second-language and other at-risk populations.
- Increase capacity to serve the growing number of students with diagnosed disabilities, particularly those with mental health issues and learning disabilities.
- Foster growth in international students and exchange opportunities
- As the institution grows its extended education and off-site programs to meet demand, ensure that services are provided that enhance academic success and degree completion.
- Increase the state's production of degrees by funding – on an ongoing basis – pilot programs developed for students returning to finish their degree (e.g. Destination Graduation program).
- Meet the increased need for specialized academic advising and support for unique/at-risk student populations.
- Realign Associated Student programming with outcomes defined for specific populations.
- Preserve functions that build students' health, well-being, and sense of community/belonging, which have been shown to have a positive impact on the retention and success of at-risk students. Incorporate elements of the coaching model, which has been successful in Athletics and other areas, into more student programs.

III. Investing in Strategic Enrollment Management and Marketing

The Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support Services shares a major portion of the responsibility for enrollment planning and management of undergraduate students. As Western competes for a shrinking, increasingly diverse and differently prepared prospective student applicant pool, it is imperative that Western invest in a strategic plan to support new student recruitment as well as a comprehensive enrollment planning and management plan which supports student success, improves retention and graduation rates, and decreases time to degree. In addition to leveraging results through institutional internal reallocation of resources such as tuition waivers and operating budgets, making investments in the recruitment of more out-of-state students would generate a net increase in tuition revenue. Private fundraising through the upcoming campaign will be essential.

In order for Western to maintain its niche as the premier public master's degree-granting university in the Pacific Northwest, campaign themes should focus on:

- generation of scholarship support of incoming students,
- enhanced programmatic efforts to recruit a diverse group of promising scholars and future leaders, and
- development of outreach efforts for building the pipeline to Western – essential to Western in maintaining its niche as the expansion of Distinguished Scholar programs links new student recruitment with a fast-track into academic major.

The division supports institutional initiatives to:

- articulate a cohesive marketing strategy, providing a base for both student recruitment and scholarship fundraising. The division is an active partner in this initiative, given its importance in attracting and shaping Western's student body.
- support programs that create and develop a pipeline of students who otherwise might not have college as a goal will prepare these students for college success. (e.g. Compass 2 Campus, Helping Admit New Diverse Students program). Recruitment from this pipeline will support institutional commitments to attract a diverse student body and serve state goals for increased degree attainment by a changing demographic (e.g. growth in Hispanic population.)

Staff within our division are often the first point of contact with area youth (through summer camps, etc.), prospective students, and parents, and are becoming more intentional through these experiences with regard to building the pipeline, recruiting top students, and developing donor relations.

IV. Developing Niches that Define “The Western Experience”... Utilize the Umbrella of “Leadership Development” to Create Pathways for Student Engagement and Development

Beginning fundraising campaign theme discussions have identified a number of areas donors might support. All have a fairly common thread of the characteristic Western student – and the passions in which the students engage. “The Western Experience” might be reinforced through the pathways that are created by the Leadership Advantage Program for aspiring leaders of all kinds to learn, practice and serve in various areas of interest. Some of the potential campaign theme descriptors that have been developed include innovative technologies, civic engagement and volunteerism, community-minded, transformative, diversity, ethics and accountability, entrepreneurial, problem-solvers, global citizens, stewards of place, sustainability, and active learning. These are all areas that fit well under an umbrella of “leadership development” as students prepare to be thoughtful, engaged and influential members of society.

- Develop an integrated and campus-wide “leadership niche” for Western by continuing to strengthen the structure and opportunities for students aspiring to learn about their passions, develop and practice skills, and begin service to their community.
- Expand opportunities for experiences that enable students to practice skills (e.g. volunteerism, student employment roles), reflect on learning outcomes, and begin the process of developing a leadership portfolio.
- Develop, in partnership with students, programs and changes at Western that “walk the talk” (e.g. sustainability, diversity)
- Clearly articulate student learning outcomes for programs and services, building on the work of the Division Assessment Resource Team.

V. Creating Necessary Infrastructures for Services and Programs

The backbone of success is often an infrastructure of capital, information, and human resources that facilitate programs, services and successful outcomes. The division must place a priority on the following:

- **Facilities:** Revisit funding and solutions for the Carver Complex, recognizing its dire condition at a time of uncertain state support, and continue working on strategies for expanding green/field space on campus. Continue exploring options and potential partnerships for improved event facility capacity (e.g. athletic games, commencement, public lectures and multipurpose space). Create a comprehensive plan for departments with space issues in Old Main, freeing up space where strategic movements out of the building make sense (e.g. tutoring in the Library).
- **Information:** Work to develop data sets within the division that inform decision-making and support outcomes-based learning models, as well as accountability.
- **Human:** At a time when resources are thin and staff are stretched, intentionally **support and recognize staff** who work hard as team players to support University directions. Realign, cross-train and provide opportunities for staff development.