Executive Summary

Working Toward “Engaged Excellence”

As a dynamic, growing public university highly responsive to the communities it serves, Western Washington University has undergone many changes in the decade since its last comprehensive evaluation by the NWCCU. These changes have been initiated and managed in all sectors of the University. Readers of this self-study are encouraged to see not a “snap shot,” but a moving picture, as Western reaffirms and shapes its commitment to high-quality education.

Undoubtedly, much more change lies ahead for Western. At the time of this self-study, President Karen Morse has announced her retirement in September 2008, and the search for a new President is in process. Three other senior administrative posts—Provost, and Deans of the College of Business and Economics (CBE) and College of Fine and Performing Arts (CFPA)—are being filled as two-year appointments. The Dean of Libraries recently retired, and we have completed the search process for a new Dean. In addition, negotiations are ongoing that will result in the first contract with Western’s new faculty collective bargaining unit, and the results of these negotiations are not yet known. Other pending changes include new supplemental budget requests that, if funded, could have an impact on programs and facilities. Statewide demographic trends and plans for adding a public four-year university in Everett signal potential challenges for enrollment planning and student retention. At the same time, mounting pressure from the state encourages Western to expand high-demand programs and clarify transfer articulation across institutions.

Sustained commitment and leadership at all levels enables Western to skillfully navigate these challenges and chart the future of the University. The NWCCU self-study, itself, has helped us identify mission-critical
issues that will influence Western's path toward fulfilling the mission of “Engaged Excellence.” This report is a testament to Western’s capacity for and willingness to change.

**A Sample of Significant Changes Since 1998**


- In 2002, the Board of Trustees approved the formation of two new colleges from the existing College of Arts and Sciences—the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS), and the College of Sciences and Technology (CST). *Standards Two, Four, and Six.*

- Western increased its focus on Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) Assessment and began implementation of an institutional assessment plan. All departments have written and submitted SLO assessment plans. *Standard Two.*

- Western reviewed, revised, and updated its General Education Requirements and implemented several first-year initiatives to enhance student success. *Standard Two.*

- Western reorganized, enhanced, and/or relocated several departments and services in the Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support Services to better serve student needs. Outreach and advising services were augmented in response to assessment. *Standard Three.*

- Western increased its focus on recruitment for diversity, in both faculty and student populations. *Standards Three and Four.*

- Western implemented a six-year salary plan with the intention of making faculty salaries more competitive with peer institutions. Although Western has allocated local resources toward fulfilling this plan, the University has been hindered in meeting its goals due to shortfalls in state funding. *Standard Four.*

- The United Faculty of Western Washington (UFWW) is the newly elected bargaining representative for faculty at Western; UFWW and the administration are in the process of negotiating a first contract. *Standards Four and Six.*

- Western Libraries and Information Technology Services have made several changes to enhance services in response to assessed community needs. These include a laptop checkout program and technological mediation of the majority of University classrooms. *Standard Five.*

- The composition of the Board of Trustees changed to include a student Trustee, who is nominated by the Associated Students (A.S.) and appointed by the governor. *Standard Six.*
Assessment Best Practices

COMMUNICATION

Designing and implementing assessments to sample student performance relative to outcomes:

Following the completion of its Communication Major Curriculum Map, the department is now engaged in developing direct and indirect methods for assessing actual outcomes. A Learning Outcomes by Assessment Method Matrix that shows how program-level outcomes may be assessed at various points in the major, will be completed during the latter part of the 2007/2008 academic year.

• The President created the President’s Planning and Resource Council (PPRC) as an avenue for broader university community input into decision-making processes. Standard Six.
• Western students initiated several new fees to better serve the campus, students, and local communities. (For example, a Renewable Energy Fee makes it possible for Western to purchase 100% renewable energy.) Standard Three and Standard Seven.
• Western students helped to accelerate Western’s focus on sustainability and global citizenship, and a new Office of Sustainability was created to coordinate efforts. Standards One, Eight, and Nine.
• Western developed a new Institutional Master Plan to guide facilities development at Western. Several new buildings and major renovations have improved Western’s ability to fulfill its mission. Standard Eight.
• Western began planning for a presence on Bellingham’s renovated waterfront. Standard One and Eight.
• Western reaffirmed its commitment to academic freedom and to ethical behavior, both locally and globally. Standard Nine.

Looking Back and Looking Ahead:
Western’s Strengths and Challenges

Even as Western undergoes many significant changes, certain qualities and values remain constant. The NWCCU self-study process helped Western to articulate the key themes, strengths, issues, and challenges that have shaped Western in the past and will provide direction for the future.

I. Building a Culture of Assessment

History and Strengths

In response to recommendations of the 1998 NWCCU evaluation team, Western articulated a formal institutional assessment plan. Four years ago, assessment of student learning was well developed and in process in several of Western’s Colleges, most notably in the College of Business & Economics (CBE) and Woodring College of Education. The Office of Assessment, Institutional Research, and Testing (OIART) was reorganized to assist all academic units in advancing a culture of student outcomes assessment. Concomitantly, all academic units and programs now have assessment plans in place, and databases have been developed and coordinated to gather a wide array of information and outcomes from and about Western students. A majority of faculty members now understand and use assessment outcome strategies at the individual course and program levels. See Standard 2.B.

In addition, the Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support Services has made great strides in assessing student outcomes, and soon will implement a division-wide, outcomes-based assessment program. See Standard Three.
Program assessment continues to advance across all sectors of the University. For example, significant upgrades in Western’s Emergency Management Plan and risk management program were the direct result of internal program assessment efforts. See Standard Eight. Careful analysis of the instructional technology needs of the campus led to enhanced mediation of the classroom environment and recognition as one of Yahoo’s “100 Most Wired Campuses” in the nation; Western Libraries have also been responsive to assessed needs of their patrons. See Standard Five and Standard Eight. Ongoing efforts to develop and coordinate instructional databases for planning and program assessment have resulted in several new software applications, data-management tools, and coordinated data collection and analysis efforts. See Standard Three and Standard Seven.

Challenges and Next Steps

As Western has made these strong advances in developing a culture of assessment at Western, the University recognizes a need to develop even stronger coordination of assessment efforts, ensuring that student learning outcomes are consistently published and understood by the populations they affect. Western must work to integrate course-level assessment strategies in all departments and programs, and the University will fully develop and implement systems for the collection, analysis, and reporting of student performance data. While some academic programs are well advanced with regard to these assessment efforts, the next phase of Western’s institutional assessment plan is to use individual student outcomes data in all programs to make positive changes. This will be accomplished through stronger collaboration of academic units with OIART.

This self-study also underscored the need for greater coordination of data across organizational sectors and increased institutional assessment. As a result, Western will hire a Director of Institutional Research and Planning in 2008.

II. Physical Space – A Source of Pride and a Challenge

History and Strengths

Western is situated in one of the most beautiful areas of the country. The campus community and external constituents cherish this natural resource, and the University designs and maintains the campus infrastructure to feature this essential aspect of Western’s character. Ongoing efforts to complement the natural beauty of the campus—such as the Outdoor Sculpture Collection and careful grounds maintenance and landscaping—continue the tradition of pride in Western’s physical campus. Recent efforts in environmental sustainability are very much in keeping with Western’s core values. See Standards One, Three, and Eight.

Following the development and adoption of Western’s Institutional Master Plan (a process recommended in the 1998 NWCCU evaluation), Western has added six major facilities and renovated three more to support the University’s academic programs and enhance student experiences. Western
also purchased a new building off-campus, and rented part of an adjacent building, to free up academic space in the campus core. See Standard Eight.

All aspects of campus safety are a high priority for Western, and the University has been proactive in emergency management planning. Western completed a comprehensive Emergency Management Plan to coordinate responses to a wide range of incidents that have the potential to affect Western’s community. Western’s campus safety ratings are quite high according to comparable statistics and benchmarks. See Standard Three and Standard Eight.

Challenges and Next Steps

Western has been challenged on how to preserve the natural aesthetics of the campus while simultaneously working to accommodate growth in enrollments and programs. The self-study report highlights the need in several departments or programs for improved facilities, office space, and equipment. Also, Western recognizes the need to stay current in the latest technologies which enable buildings to function at higher levels of efficiency and provide premier learning environments. The need for better integration of program growth and curriculum development with facilities planning is evident across several of the standards. See Standard Two—College Overviews, Standard Five, Standard Seven, and Standard Eight.

Optimum maintenance of existing facilities and equipment is an ongoing concern for Facilities Management and staff. Facilities Management has strong processes in place to assess maintenance needs and backlog, but Western needs higher levels of operational maintenance funding to allay facilities degradation. In addition, new regulations regarding the safety and accessibility of the physical campus have been accompanied by inadequate new resources to address these requirements. See Standard Eight.

Western anticipates building a strong presence on Bellingham’s renovated waterfront. This addition will provide new space for academic and support programs, and the expansion will provide opportunities for more student and faculty engagement with the wider community. See Standard One and Standard Eight.

III. Allocation and Management of Resources

History and Strengths

Over the years, Western has exhibited a high degree of financial stability and strong control of resources. The University keeps its focus on internal controls: in 2002, The Board of Trustees instituted an Audit Committee, and an Internal Controls Office was created to provide stronger oversight. Western adheres to principles of conservative financial planning and effective debt management.

With the revision of Western’s Mission and Strategic Action Plan, allocation of resources is designed to align with strategic objectives. The University has been successful in obtaining state funding for programs that
meet the evolving needs of Western students and Washington State. The University endowment increased by 153% over the last ten years, and grant activity increased from approx. $8.2 million to $13 million. Faculty have been quite successful in obtaining grant funding, and students have supported the financial health of the University by providing new streams of funding that help Western perform in socially responsible ways. See Standards One, Three, Four, and Seven.

**Challenges and Next Steps**

Western is facing funding challenges, as are the other public institutions across the state. Reduced state allocations and higher costs associated with “doing business” increase the need to find new funding sources. In the state of Washington, new funding has most often been targeted to high-demand programs or special initiatives. While these funds provide much needed revenue, they cannot be used broadly to meet other aspects of Western's strategic goals.

For example, increasing the average faculty salaries for all ranks remains a priority in order for Western to remain competitive with peer institutions. See Standards One and Four. Also, Western prioritizes a continued focus on improved financial support for at-risk and underserved students. See Standards Three and Seven. Western will continue to emphasize renovating and maintaining the buildings on campus, but new funding streams are needed to reduce the facilities maintenance backlog. See Standard Eight. Western Libraries need increased funding to serve their users most effectively in a rapidly changing academic landscape. See Standard Five. The many University Centers and programs that serve Western's mission—such as the Center for Service Learning and the Office of Sustainability—would benefit from more stable and long-term funding.

Funding from new sources such as endowment growth, external grants and contracts, and auxiliary or self-sustaining revenue are among the strategies Western employs to bolster fiscal resources. All these funding sources will play an increasingly important role, and will require new and creative staffing, program revisions, and oversight approaches as well as thorough institutional assessment of the efficacy of these new strategies.

**IV. Shared Governance and Collective Decision-Making**

**History and Strengths**

Although Western's administration is currently in a period of transition, historically there has been a relatively low turnover rate for administrators, indicating a stable core of governance. Western's current administrators have an average of more than seven years experience in their current positions.

Western has long prided itself on exemplifying democratic decision-making in all aspects of University life. Many opportunities exist for faculty, students, and staff to provide input on discussions of key issues related to Western's mission, and University committees are designed to represent as
many constituencies as possible. For the processes of updating Western’s Strategic Action Plan and creating the Institutional Master Plan, Western ensured that a wide variety of input would be heard and considered.

Challenges and Next Steps

There have been a number of significant decisions this past decade that have frayed the fabric of shared governance and collective decision-making. As the narratives for Standards Four, Six, and Nine indicate, there may still linger the “perception that the desires and actions of the separate units sometimes supersede the commons” (quote from 1998 evaluation report; See Standard 9.)

The formation of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS) and the College of Sciences and Technology (CST) helped to reinforce this perception for some faculty, despite efforts to create a process that invited and considered the assessments of both the positive and negative consequences of college restructuring. Some members of the campus community feel this reorganization played a significant role in the faculty vote to form a union, while others point to the inability to reach targeted salary increases as a major driving force to create this collective bargaining unit. See Standard Four.

Whatever the reasons, the reality is that collective decision-making and shared governance—tenets highly esteemed by all members of Western’s community—will require new ways of reaching consensus about institutional issues and common concerns with the advent of faculty bargaining. Though new avenues for input have been created—through venues such as the President’s Planning and Resource Council (PPRC)—work remains to be done to ensure that faculty, student, and staff voices are fully considered in decisions made by the administration.

As new leadership at the most senior levels of Western’s administration is sought, respect for collective decision-making and adherence to professional standards of shared governance takes on heightened importance. In particular, the important role students have played in helping chart Western’s policies, procedures, and future should continue to be recognized and integrated. The same holds true for the contributions of both professional and classified staff.

V. Actualizing a Learner-Centered Campus Defined by Western’s Core Values

History and Strengths

The core of Western’s mission of “Engaged Excellence” is high-quality undergraduate education, enhanced by attention to the values of diversity, community service, innovation, integrity, and engagement in the learning process. Throughout this self-study report, there are myriad references to the ways in which Western animates those values and engages students both inside and outside the classroom. Western’s faculty is the University’s greatest asset in this regard, highly responsive and available to students, while also actively engaged in relevant research, creative endeavors, and scholarship. The faculty also create new curriculum and programs that strengthen Western’s impact in
the community, both locally and globally. See Standards One and Four.

In the last decade, Western undertook a revision and update of the General Education Requirements (GER) for all students, utilizing input and assessment data from many sectors of the University. These requirements now have clearer articulation, rationale, focus, and outcomes-based objectives, and they provide a sound foundation for a Western student’s education.

Western has also initiated several curricular and co-curricular offerings in a strategic attempt to engage, retain, and prepare freshman students for success. First-year initiatives (most often forged through collaboration between Academic and Student Affairs), have resulted in the First-Year Interest Groups (FIGs) and the First-Year Experience (FYE) courses, both curricular offerings. Changes in outreach advising—through Academic Advising and Tutorial Services—and an enhanced Summerstart orientation program were the results of student survey data and focus groups that indicated Western could and should do more to assist new students with the transition to university life. See Standards One, Two, and Three.

Challenges and Next Steps

Efforts are underway to enhance transfer student transition to Western. For example, new online tools such as Degree Audits, the Transfer Course Equivalency Guide, and Curriculum, Advising, and Program Planning (CAPP) were introduced in 2006. Based on student surveys and focus groups, Western will continue to enhance advising, course access, and student support programs to assist the many transfer students who enroll. See Standard Three.

Several organizations and programs—such as Associated Students, the Honors Program, the Center for Service Learning, the Teaching-Learning Academy, the American Democracy Project, and several College or department-based initiatives—have highlighted Western’s ongoing, but previously uncoordinated, efforts in student leadership development. Future efforts building upon these successful initiatives will help Western create a framework that is expected to be a national model for excellence in leadership development.

VI. Building a Diverse University

History and Strengths

Western is proud of its commitment to diversity, and the ten-year hiring trajectory of faculty of color and women shows steady progress in increasing diversity among the faculty. In the fall of 1999, the percentage of full-time, underrepresented minority faculty was 8.7%. By the fall of 2006, this percentage had climbed to 14.1%. Asian Americans now comprise 7.9% of the full-time faculty, Hispanic Americans, 2.6%, Native Americans, 2.2% and Black Americans, 1.6%. The percentage of women in tenure-track faculty positions has risen from 30% in 1999 to 39.7% in 2006.

All Colleges now actively recruit for underrepresented faculty. For example,
Woodring College of Education has a formal Diversity Plan that incorporates goals and timelines. The Equal Opportunity Office (EOO) supports college efforts to develop a diverse pool of applicants to fill faculty positions, and departments work closely with the Executive Director to identify targeted outreach for underrepresented groups. See Standards One and Four.

Ethnic diversity in Western’s student population has also continued to grow. The Office of Admissions developed a strategic outreach plan, and Western continues to exceed State Ethnic Proportions for Native American and Asian American students. Western’s total ethnic minority student population is 15.8%, up from 13.7% in 1996. The Ethnic Student Center, Student Outreach Services, and the disAbility Resource Center all play important roles in supporting diversity in the student population. See Standard Three.

Challenges and Next Steps

While great strides have been made in increasing diversity at Western, much work remains to be done. For example, there is a notable lack of increase in the number of black faculty, and retention of minority faculty members has historically been a challenge for Western. Attracting, retaining and helping all faculty and students to feel comfortable at Western requires an integrated plan and an institutional effort.

Enhancing the diversity of Western’s student body is best facilitated with increased focus and staffing. Funding for low-income students’ financial support will also help Western reach its goals.

The President has charged the Executive Director for Equal Opportunity with preparing an annual Affirmative Action Plan (AAP) that sets forth goals to achieve a more diverse workforce. Units across campus have developed initiatives to assist with these goals. One initiative, “The Bridge to Workforce Diversity Program,” developed in 2007, provides proactive outreach efforts to facilitate employment of underrepresented groups, with Western’s first efforts focused on Whatcom County’s English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) community. In partnership with Whatcom Community College, Western’s goal is to interest advanced-level ESL students in applying for employment at Western. Initiatives such as these will enable Western to more fully enact its mission.

Engaged Excellence at Western

Since Western recently revised and updated its Mission and Strategic Action Plan (2006), the self-study process occurred at an excellent time for Western to examine how well the University had fulfilled its mission through 2006, while designing a plan to make progress toward actualizing the newly articulated ideals of “Engaged Excellence.” While the challenges discussed above present important opportunities for Western to improve its performance, the University has a strong foundation and has made steady progress, as indicated by our growing national reputation on a number of fronts.
• For the 11th consecutive year, Western was ranked second among public master’s-granting universities in the West, a region stretching from Texas to the Pacific, according to the 2008 *U.S. News & World Report* college rankings. Western also is the highest-ranking public master’s-granting university in the Pacific Northwest.

• Western ranks among the top 100 public colleges and universities in the nation that “combine outstanding value with a first-class education,” according to *Kiplinger’s Personal Finance* magazine. *Kiplinger’s* magazine ranks Western 48th on its list of the 100 Best Values in Public Colleges in the United States.

• Western ranks fifth on a list of the top academic and athletic NCAA Division II colleges/universities in the country in the fourth annual Collegiate Power Rankings announced by The National Collegiate Scouting Association.

• Western’s acclaimed Outdoor Sculpture Collection has been named one of the ten best on-campus public art collections in the country. For its spring/summer issue, the Public Art Review magazine asked members of the public art community to select the “Big Ten” of campus collections. Seattle architect Mark Spitzer declared Western’s a “world class sculpture collection.”

• In the EPA’s most recent update of Top 25 list of Green Power Partners, which highlights the largest U.S. green power purchasers, Western is ranked as the second largest purchaser of renewable power in higher education. Western purchases all of its electricity from renewable sources and was selected for a national 2005 Green Power Leadership Award. “We applaud Western Washington University for its environmental leadership,” said Kurt Johnson, director of EPA’s Green Power Partnership. “Western is providing an outstanding example for others to follow.”

• Western was selected as a coordinating institution for the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) Institutional Leadership Program. The CASTL Institutional Leadership Program is a three-year partnership between Carnegie and 187 selected colleges, universities, and higher education organizations with a strong commitment to the careful examination of teaching and learning. Participants were selected for their ability to influence work in areas such as assessment, accountability, social engagement, and undergraduate research.

• Western ranks fourth among the medium-sized colleges and universities with alumni serving as Peace Corps volunteers in 2006. Since the Peace Corps’ inception, 702 Western alumni have served. Peace Corps recruiter Nicole Meinzer said, “Western should be very proud of this ranking, which demonstrates the university’s strong tradition of service.”
This history of achievement reflects how hundreds of people (students, faculty, administrators, student support professionals, staff, community members, parents, legislators, and alumni) care deeply about Western. They have helped us clarify and fulfill our mission, while articulating the challenges Western faces and the progress the University still needs to make in key areas. While much of this self-study report outlines the ways in which Western meets the criteria for NWCCU accreditation, it also reveals genuine pride in Western’s shared values, our strong foundation in the liberal arts and sciences, and our direct focus on student engagement.

Prepared by:
The NWCCU Accreditation Executive Planning Group December 1, 2007

“I love living and going to school here because of the encouraging and challenging atmosphere. It is so exciting to be at a school that empowers its undergrads to explore their potential and create.”

—Western senior