The primary charge to the WWU Senate Extended Education Committee in 2017-18 was to begin a university-wide conversation about Extended Education at Western. The committee carried out this charge across the school year by meeting with a wide variety of faculty, students, staff, and administration in Bellingham, Everett, and Poulsbo. These conversations covered a range of topics and made it clear that this discussion is overdue. The announced retirement of the current Vice Provost of Extended Education and the beginning of a search for a new leader also make this an opportune time to reflect on and reconsider Extended Education at Western.

Extended Education has grown significantly over the last five years and one of the consequences of this growth has been a blurring of mission and boundaries. It has become difficult to discern where Extended Education begins or ends. Extended Ed includes both state supported and self-sustaining courses. Extended Ed operates Western's off-campus programs, but it also has programs on the main campus in Bellingham. Some online courses are run through Extended Ed and some are not. As we begin the search for a new Director of Extended Education, Western should take stock of the overall operation to come up with a clear understanding of where it begins and ends.

MISSION AND GOALS

Our conversations also revealed a deeply divided understanding of the nature and purpose of Extended Education. Most of the people who work in Extended Education sincerely feel that the purpose of Extended Education is to bring educational opportunities to people who otherwise would not have access to Western. At the same time, most of the people in academic units (especially department chairs) have the impression that Extended Education is primarily about revenue. From their respective perspectives, each of these very divergent understandings makes complete sense. Extended Education colleagues spend most of their time doing the work it takes to make sure that Extended Education students get the education they need. Deans, on the other hand, have been forced to focus on the revenue that Extended Education generates in order make ends meet in their budgets. Department chairs and their colleagues have felt pressure to make curricular choices (especially for summer session) based on revenue projections and have been tempted toward online courses and other self-sustaining courses for the money they would add to anemic department operating budgets.

This split understanding has led to some tension between Extended Education colleagues and faculty and staff in departments and colleges. The committee feels that the beginning of the search for a new Director of Extended Education should be used as an opportunity to clarify the mission and goals of Extended Education. We also would like to create more regular opportunities for Extended Education
colleagues to meet face to face with faculty and staff from departments and colleges to resolve conflicts and better understand each other.

As a result of our many discussions, the Senate Extended Education Committee offers the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

SELF-SUSTAINING EDUCATION

1. As a public institution, Western is committed to a publicly funded high quality education. The committee recommends that Western review all self-sustaining programs to determine their ongoing sustainability as high quality programs.

2. The committee recommends that Western advocate for the transformation of as many self-sustaining programs as possible to state supported programs.

3. The committee also recommends that Western not begin any new degree programs as self-sustaining, except on a fixed-term temporary basis with the intention of transferring successful new programs to state support.

4. The committee recommends that Western actively develop new non-credit bearing EE courses and non-degree programs for non-matriculated Western students.

The overwhelming majority of self-sustaining courses are run through Extended Education. Our committee feels that it is extremely important for the Western community to examine and define the role of self-sustaining education at Western. Self-sustaining education is essentially private education at a public university. There is no public subsidy and all course costs must be covered with the tuition that students pay. If those costs include an imperative for profit-like revenue returned to the institution, this puts an even greater strain on the quality of the course. High quality private institutions have high tuition rates that allow them to cover the costs of high quality courses with only tuition funds. As a public institution, Western strives to keep tuition affordable for students from all classes. It is the state appropriation that allows us to both charge affordable tuition and offer the same quality of education as a private institution.

Summer Session is one of the biggest self-sustaining programs at Western and provides an excellent example of the structural difficulty with self-sustaining education in a public institution. Summer courses are offered as fully legitimate courses that confer the same credit on students as Academic Year courses. And yet a tenure track faculty member teaching a summer course is paid 80% of what they
are paid to teach an overload course in the Academic Year. This difference in salary is due solely to the fact that Summer Session is self-sustaining. We have no doubt that Western’s outstanding faculty are offering our students outstanding courses in the summer, but the structural message we are sending is that a summer course is 80% as valuable as an academic year course. This same problem extends to all of our self-sustaining programs. High quality education must be appropriately funded and this is very difficult for a public institution using only self-sustaining funds.

At the same time, the committee continues to feel that Western ought to do more with self-sustaining courses outside of our degree-granting curricula aimed at audiences with the resources to pay tuition that makes up for the lack of a public subsidy. Of the six public universities in Washington, Western offers the fewest number of enrichment, certificate, and badge programs.

THE USE OF EXTENDED EDUCATION PROFITS

1. The committee recommends that Western’s administration provide ample base funding for the primary academic mission of the university. Revenues generated by EE programs and classes should not be critical to the funding of academic year courses or college and departmental operating expenses.

2. The committee recommends that Western’s administration ensure that all regular-tuition paying students have access to a complete state-supported curriculum that ensures timely graduation.

Extended Education returns just over 3 million dollars to Academic Affairs. Current practice is for the Provost to divide this money between the Provost’s office and the colleges. Colleges report that this money is crucial to make ends meet and use this money for a variety of things, most of which are central to their educational mission, including the funding of courses taught by non-tenure track faculty.

The committee feels very strongly and has felt strongly for two years that the current practice of distributing Extended Education revenue needs to be changed. Three million dollars is a lot of money, but it is a small percentage of Western’s annual operating budget of $160 million. Forcing colleges to rely on varying income from self-sustaining Extended Education profits has created significant planning problems and significant tensions between colleges and departments. It has also created unhealthy incentives for departments and colleges to move students from state supported programs to self-sustaining programs, which creates the ethically dubious possibility of charging students twice for the education they are supposed to receive in exchange for banded tuition. There was a 22% increase in EE courses offered during the regular academic year between AY2013-14 and AY2015-16; in AY2015-2016, a total of 21 departments offered a total of 113 course sections through EE. We are concerned that an increase in course offerings during the
regular academic year is occurring, at least in part, to meet student demand when departments have no other resources to do so, and/or to generate extra revenue for other critical needs. We believe that self-sustaining, higher cost EE courses should not substitute for more affordable, state supported courses in order for Western’s students to graduate in a timely fashion.

EXTENDED EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN PLACES OTHER THAN BELLINGHAM

1. The committee recommends that, in sites other than Bellingham, a tenured academic administrator, with appropriate resources, be in place with significant input into and control of curriculum, personnel, and budget. This faculty administrator must also have the ability to make program decisions based on the on-the-ground circumstances. This administrator should be fully apprised of all budget information and understand and participate in the negotiation of agreements with other institutions.

2. The committee recommends that Western insure that students at sites other than Bellingham have access to all of the services that Bellingham students have, appropriate to the location.

3. The committee recommends that Western’s administration provide resources needed for departments to ensure the high quality of EE programs. The continuing expansion of EE programs creates many new hiring and evaluation obligations for departments, often at sites some distance from the Bellingham campus. The committee is concerned that increases in departmental resources are not always commensurate to these increased obligations, which are crucial to maintain the quality and reputation of Western’s EE programs.

The committee visited Western’s sites in both Everett and Poulsbo and heard from faculty, staff and students in both places. The committee also spoke with most of the current and former academic program directors at these sites.

While it is clear that a lot of excellent teaching and learning is taking place in these programs, it is also clear that a lot of confusion and dismay results from competing interests, neglect, unclear lines of authority, and lack of resources. Students and faculty in Everett feel abandoned by both academic departments and Extended Education in Bellingham. Academic Program Directors at these sites report regularly being kept in the dark about budgets and program decisions. Students and faculty often feel that services beyond the classroom such as crisis and mental health services are inadequate and difficult to access. In Everett, students are also acutely aware that WSU students at the same site, in the same building, have far more access to basic services (things like internet connection) than Western
students. Staff feel that many marketing decisions are made without input from people on-site and that Extended Education is often not willing to adapt their marketing plans and materials to the communities being served. Academic departments on the Bellingham campus charged with overseeing extended programs often don’t have the resources to do that oversight properly.

Some of the people we spoke with also raised questions about Western's relationships and agreements with partner institutions in non-Bellingham sites. They raised questions about competition between programs. As Western continues to build programs outside of Bellingham, it is important that we review agreements and make sure that they all are in the best interest of Western and our students.

MARKETING

1. The committee recommends that all Extended Education Marketing programs and materials be developed with extensive input from the local faculty and staff and be overseen by the Office of University Relations and Marketing to ensure consistency and continuity.

Our discussions made it clear that the marketing of Extended Education Programs, which should be a collaborative and cooperative endeavor, has evolved into a separate and competitive arrangement, which creates confusion and frustration for both students and staff. Programs are often described differently on two different websites (one from Extended Ed and one from the academic college/department) and navigating those websites can be confusing and difficult. The committee feels that the marketing of Extended Education Programs should include robust and collaborative input from both Extended Ed and academic departments. The ultimate marketing program should then be overseen by Western's Office of University Relations and Marketing to ensure consistency, continuity, and ease of access and use.