Summary

WWU's potential development of facilities at the Bellingham waterfront continues to move forward with ongoing planning by the campus community and the Port and City of Bellingham. As the Port and City have worked toward a Master plan for the development throughout the past year, WWU has been continuing internal planning for academic programs that will build on and enhance the distinctive character of WWU. Western is also considering the related need for facilities so that development of the waterfront property will be ready to proceed when necessary agreements by the City and Port are reached and sufficient foundational work, including the development of strategies to secure funding, are complete.

As the University began to plan the expansion of the south campus in 2000, a character study was conducted that provided a consistency of vision about the entire campus and guided the new construction. In 2009, WWU has been engaged in a similar interactive character study that is providing thoughts and ideas of what a University’s physical presence on the waterfront may look like. The discussions included the point of view that facilities on the waterfront may share elements of the existing physical character of the university. However, key stakeholders acknowledge that the character of the waterfront campus may be strengthened by new elements that are unique to the vision of the new facilities as a destination point and an expression of distinct elements of WWU’s academic excellence and relationship with the community.

The current waterfront character study was designed to be an inclusive process engaging students, faculty, staff, administrators, City and Port officials and community stakeholders in interactive workshops. The study began with and then built upon the guiding principles that have emerged over the last several years from the community’s original Waterfront Futures Group and the WWU Waterfront Committee; as well as the principles from the WWU Character Study conducted in 2000 and input from two Huxley College Environmental Studies classes that took on the waterfront campus as the class project in winter and spring quarters in 2009. Workshops were conducted in early April 2009 with the assistance of consultants collaborating under the auspices of Stratus Inc. Follow-up sessions and a public forum were held in mid May.

Purpose of the Study

This WWU Waterfront Character Study, through a facilitated process of discovery, discussion, and documentation is intended to:

- Identify the key physical characteristics necessary to make the Waterfront project a distinctive and a connected part of Western Washington University
Create Development Criteria for the Waterfront District Master Plan and Zoning Plan as it relates to the University and its adjacent neighborhoods.

Provide criteria for the selection of future architects, designers, and developers who can demonstrate experience and sensitivity with similar developments.

Create a Basis of Design for future projects in conjunction with a Statement of Program Requirements and Statement of Technical Requirements, not included in this document.

Process for developing character study

The general process and timeline for the WWU Waterfront Character Study is outlined below. Occurring over the Spring Quarter of 2009, this inclusive process engaged students, faculty, staff, administrators, City and Port officials and community stakeholders.
Participants

**WWU Waterfront Character Study Project Management Team**

The Project Management Team, including Steve Swan, Vice President, University Relations, Rick Benner, Executive Director, Facilities Planning and Development, and Elizabeth (Buff) Schoenfeld, Executive Assistant to the President, provided overall management for the WWU Waterfront Character Study and ongoing counsel to the Consulting and Facilitation Team; reviewed and evaluated progressive deliverables; served as liaisons to internal and external communities; scheduled the Character Study work sessions; and addressed the administrative review of this report.

**WWU Waterfront Character Study Consulting and Facilitation Team**

The WWU Waterfront Character Study Consulting and Facilitation Team was composed of architects, landscape architects, planners, and consultants and included the University’s waterfront development consultant (STRATUS); a Bellingham-based architect and charette session facilitator (David Christensen); a noted landscape architect and participant in the 2000 Campus Character Study (Bill Johnson); and the Port and City of Bellingham’s consultant for waterfront master planning (Collins Woerman).

- Doug Graham, Strategic Consultant, STRATUS, a division of Heery International, Inc., Los Angeles, CA
- David Christensen, Christensen Design Management, Bellingham, WA
- Bill Johnson, Landscape Architect, Bainbridge Island, WA
- Randy Benedict, Principal, NBBJ Architects, Seattle, WA
- Arlan Collins, Founding Principal, Collins Woerman Architects, Seattle, WA
- David Spiker, Associate Principal, Collins Woerman Architects, Seattle, WA
- Steve Schlenker, Collins Woerman Architects, Seattle, WA

**Committees, Representatives, and Participants**

The WWU Waterfront Character Study work sessions facilitated input from university’s internal and external stakeholders, including:

- Waterfront Committee
- Provost’s Council
- University Administrative Council
- Huxley College Students in Environmental Studies 415 (winter, spring 09)
- Associated Students Board
- Port of Bellingham
Key Questions

Answers to the following three key questions were identified as being key objectives of the Study.

1. How should the Western Washington University Waterfront Academic Center embody physical characteristics that are consistent with and complimentary to the existing campus?

2. What characteristics could also make the Waterfront Academic Center unique and distinctive while maintaining the Western Washington University character and identity?

3. What should be the character and guiding principles for the development of the zone surrounding the core academic center in the Viking Development Area?

Guiding Principles

It was important for the WWU Waterfront Character Study to explore new ground but also be based upon guiding principles that have emerged over the last several years. Internally, the WWU Character Study conducted in 2000, the Campus Waterfront Committee, and WWU students of sustainable design all contributed initial guiding principles to the WWU Waterfront Character Study. These initial guiding principles were then compared with those developed by the Bellingham Waterfront Futures Group, to verify that Western’s vision was compatible with that of the external community.
The WWU Waterfront Character Study’s first work session validated these key physical guiding principles and asked the question of each participating group: “Which are the most important?” Their responses in order of priority were as follows:

1. Identity
2. Continuity/Connectivity
3. Convergence
4. Water Connection
5. Intimacy of Scale
6. Orientation
7. Referencing History

In addition to these discrete character traits, it was determined that Art, Sustainability, Wellness, and Learning are themes that should weave their way through each of the character traits and infuse the whole. The next challenge was to describe what these words mean in terms of physical characteristics, how they relate to a larger story, identified component parts and how they could combine together, and representative architectural expressions.
Expression of WWU Themes and Identity on the Existing Campus

A Story of Water: Continuity of Flow and Portals

The workshops began with a review of the story of the existing Western Washington University campus, which is nestled between the Sehome Arboretum and neighborhood to the East and Northeast; South Hill neighborhood to the West; and Happy Valley neighborhood to the South and Southeast. The campus generally flows from a high point in the north to low point in the south. From its relationships within the greater Bellingham community to its on-campus features like Red Square and Haskell Plaza - water themes – eddies, pools, and currents are prominent in Western’s relationship with its environment.
The existing campus abounds in portals and memorable pathways.
Expression of the WWU Themes and Identity at the Waterfront

A Story of Convergence

Western Washington University at the Waterfront should recognize these existing campus characteristics and continue their cascade down the hill to the Waterfront. The Waterfront District and Western's proposed place within it should be a place of convergence – of water, art, community, vitality, education, economic development, culture, healthy living, and sustainability. The Waterfront Academic Center is envisioned as Western's sustainable learning experience.
Scale

The water theme can be expressed in many ways, including ways that break down scale and provide places of reflection and contemplation.

Building scale should vary from low at the Waterfront to higher further inland.
Connectivity

Western at the Waterfront should have a close, natural, and transparent connection to its natural environment.
Western at the Waterfront should connect to its natural environment and encourage pedestrian flow through it.

Connections and soft edges should create places of interest with portals emphasizing connections and clarity of organization.
**Edges**

The edges and streets should be permeable and take advantage of the opportunities to create unique places on campus as well as a relationship with the surrounding neighborhood.
Commercial and academic uses should be compatible at the edges and blended to provide opportunities for future expansion.
Clusters of sheltered seating areas should be developed within and adjacent to Western at the Waterfront.

The seating areas should accommodate a variety of group sizes.

Shelters should incorporate lessons and practices of sustainability.
Envisioned as part of a larger mixed-use and 24 hour community, Western at the Waterfront should provide the feeling and reality of safety and security.
Street life should be integrated with alternative transportation systems and encourage healthy lifestyles.
Integrated Characteristics and Guiding Principles

The following sketches illustrate how the individual characteristics and guiding principles could be integrated into a coherent whole.

Western at the Waterfront should be both a point of convergence and a series of pathways that link adjacent uses and activities.
Transparency through the campus would encourage safety, wayfinding, and connectivity.

Portals, which are reminiscent of the existing campus, would focus pathways and improve connectivity to adjacent buildings and neighborhoods.
Iconic reference points could include natural features such as Mount Baker or Bellingham Bay; built features such as the existing campus or Mt. Baker Theatre; or pieces of art or artifacts from the former industrial plant.

Materials used should be authentic to the Northwest and may include references to the Waterfront’s industrial past.
Large and small gathering places should be developed to encourage community and create a sense of place.

Sheltered walkways, entrances, and gathering places would provide protection from harsh winds and weather.
Opportunities for outdoor teaching and learning should be provided to reinforce that the Waterfront itself is a sustainable learning experience.

Edges of the campus should be designed with an eye toward creating a coherent neighborhood.
**Design Character**

Character study participants were asked to rate their preferences for dozens of potential design character images. The following photographs represent the images that were most preferred and the notes about them cite the specific characteristics that were valued in several categories, including: collegiate appearance; open spaces and pathways; waterfront spaces; preservation, and sustainability.

- **Collegiate Appearance**
  - Good integration of old and new architecture
  - Brick is effectively used as a unifying element
  - Building entrances relate
  - Open plazas and planters appear well thought out
  - Planters provide effective seating areas
  - Incorporation of built and natural features

- Good integration of newer forms and materials
Open Spaces and Pathways

- Varied planes are interesting
- Greenscape and hardscape are well maintained
- Curved, soft forms
- Indirect, meandering paths
- Water feature

- Transparent, layered space
- Curved forms
- Green courtyard
- Places to sit in the greenscape

- Lively and energetic
- Eclectic but human-scale
- Textured hardscape
- Planters with flowers and trees
- Pedestrian friendly
• Pathway is framed by trees
• Pathway is curved
• Materials integrate well

• Stairway provides pedestrian barrier from street
• Stairs have built-in seating areas along the way
• Opportunity for built-in learning objects or art
• Opportunity for built-in water feature
• Pedestrian-friendly streetscape
• Detailed brick storefronts
• Tree-lined sidewalk and streets
• Quaint, well proportioned signage

• Natural landscape is well integrated with the built environment
• One feature engages pedestrian
• Bright and cheery colors
• Large water feature
• Integration of water and art

• Large water feature
• Sheltering provided by delicate trees
• Occupied seating suggests this is a place that is used

• Irregular path
• Areas for seating
• Areas of shade
• Natural landscaping
Waterfront Spaces

- Simple, light materials – steel, glass, wood – seems appropriate at waterfront
- Transparent/brings lots of light indoors
- Natural (versus artificial) waterfront
- Amphitheatre built into beach
- Steps engage the waterfront pedestrian walkways creating an interesting and artistic expression
Preservation

- Preserved elements are integrated into the landscape and architecture
- Seating areas are built into the preserved features

Sustainability

- Natural waterscape integrates with built environment
- Boulders provide points for stopping, reflection and interaction
• Culvert serves as attractive transition between water and landscape environments
• Pedestrian walk benefits from water features

• Hardscape and greenscape features are artfully integrated

• Hardscape and greenscape features artfully integrated
Next Steps

This draft report summarizes the creative character study process and its results. The presentation to the Board of Trustees will seek reactions and suggestions of the Board, as part of a continuing discussion. In the fall, the character study process will be completed following further campus community review in the context of ongoing programmatic and facilities planning.