

Western State College of Colorado
2004-2009 Academic Strategic Plan
May 14, 2004

Introduction and Overview

The purposes and goals of this strategic plan are necessarily different than those of five years ago. The changing landscape of public higher education underscores the need to think differently about the College's academic program as we position Western to thrive in this increasingly challenging environment.

This plan sets strategic goals that will strengthen teaching, learning, professional activity, and regional service and thereby raise the visibility and reputation of Western and its attractiveness as a destination college. This will be done through development of an academic program that better capitalizes on the unique environment of the Gunnison Valley, builds on existing strengths, and enhances the College's ability to respond to market demands and regional needs. Success in this endeavor will enhance the College's visibility and reputation, aid in the recruitment and retention of students who not only benefit from their education at Western but also contribute to the College's unique culture, and encourage private investment.

The strategic goals and actions set forth in this plan are consistent with state, board, and institutional goals and priorities.

The development of this strategic plan included analysis of all academic programs including consideration of the program's productivity, centrality of the program to the College's role and mission, and an overall assessment of the program's immediate and future status. As a result of this assessment, no new academic programs are proposed as part of this plan and no existing academic programs are identified for discontinuance.

Western does have four recently initiated majors that have yet to complete their respective probationary periods and must receive final approval by the Colorado Commission on Higher Education during the life of this plan. The performance of Anthropology (review due in 2004-2005), Environmental Studies (review due in 2005-2006), Interdisciplinary Studies (review due in 2006-2007), and Computer Information Science (review due in 2007-2008) will be closely and continually monitored.

The following strategic goals will guide the campus through the next five years to fulfill this vision. Not all academic programs are specifically mentioned in this plan. Omission is not a statement of a particular program's worth. In fact, many of the programs not immediately addressed in the plan are among the strongest and most essential on campus. This plan includes only selected goals that will lead to measurable outcomes that can substantially redefine the academic program as we approach 2009.

Strategic Initiatives

School of Business. The establishment of a School of Business represents opportunities to elevate Western as a center and resource to the business and economic development needs of the region. Efforts to secure private funding for a new business building are in progress and should be completed within the first years of this plan. Programming in the new building will build upon the successes of existing programs such as the Summer Business Institute and the Small Business Institute as the School explores ways to enhance undergraduate education and meet regional needs. Fund raising will also incorporate faculty and program endowments for the School of Business.

Center of Environmental and Regional Studies. The development of a Center for Environmental and Regional Studies is an important step toward defining a market niche and providing regional service opportunities for Western. Perhaps the most complex issue facing the Rocky Mountain west is the challenge presented by the often competing forces of economic development and environmental stewardship. Western is positioned to provide leadership and service in this area because of our location, programs, and people. The Center will enhance Western's role in providing opportunities for community leaders to develop strategies and models for successful stewardship on both fronts.

In the next five years we will establish the Center and its administration of Environmental Studies, the Headwaters Program, the Colorado Water Workshop, and any new initiatives. Planning for resource and space allocation for this interdisciplinary unit will begin immediately. The development of goals and strategies for an ambitious private investment campaign for the Center is also an immediate priority.

Center for Teaching Excellence. Campus-wide, the overall commitment to excellence in undergraduate teaching and learning will be heightened through private funding initiatives to enhance the Center for Teaching Excellence. The role of this effort may be expanded to include the promotion of scholarship and professional development beyond the immediate enhancement of teaching and learning. This may better meet the needs of faculty while also assisting faculty as we advance strategic efforts.

Honors Program. The Honors Program, particularly given its continued growth and curricular strengths, also represents strategic opportunities for the College. A strong honors program presents strong possibilities for private funding. Staffing, scholarships, professional development and space allocation are areas that must be addressed. Elevating the visibility and accomplishments of this program will strengthen the academic reputation and assist in recruitment and retention of some of our best students.

Western as a regional resource for the arts. Western's programming in the arts plays a prominent role in the cultural enrichment of the campus, the community, and the region. Art, music, theatre, and creative writing represent programs that, together with regional interests, can increase the scope and visibility of arts and provide enhanced co-curricular activities for our students. Strategies will be developed to further strengthen regional relationships and to secure private investment to fund visiting artists and program

enhancements in these three areas. These efforts will establish the Gunnison Valley as a destination for the performing and visual arts.

Administration and management of academic units. Organizational structure is a means to facilitate the effectiveness of programs and people. In some cases it can also be a means to create private investment opportunities and enhance communication with external audiences.

We must organize academic units to represent goals and aspirations rather than the assurance of uniformity. Further consultation with faculty is needed to address some of the administrative complexities inherent in a structure that is less uniform than what has been customary on our campus. Among the issues to be resolved is consideration of compensation and reassigned time for the administration of these units to reflect the inevitable differences in size and function.

There are two specific reorganization moves that must occur. One is the separation of Art and Music into separate units. The other is to move Physics into an alignment with the Natural and Environmental Sciences.

The performance nature of Music creates opportunities for recruitment of students interested in continuing their interest in music without pursuing this interest as an academic major. Music represents recruitment opportunities to enhance the enrollment mix of the college. Plans will be developed to increase the visibility of opportunities for music participation in recruitment efforts. The honors choir, honors band, and summer music camps bring prospective students and high school faculty to the campus. Organization and oversight of these kinds of activities, in addition to organizing performances throughout the year necessitate administrative direction that is best facilitated as its own unit. Private funding opportunities can be enhanced with a clear strategy and vision for the role of music in enhancing the visibility and reputation of the College.

Unlike music, students interested in pursuing degrees in art are almost exclusively majors in the academic program. And there has been extraordinary growth in the enrollment of art majors in recent years. Art also has a visible, cultural component through the many exhibits and art shows of students and faculty. Administered as its own unit, art may be better identified for its excellent academic program and lead the region in promoting the visual arts.

Physics serves an increasingly important role as a supporting discipline for curricula in biology, chemistry, and geology. The laboratory, budget, scheduling, and staffing needs of physics are similar to those of the other sciences, and the opportunities for collaborative efforts and interdisciplinary staffing are found with the other sciences. Physics will join the existing disciplines of anthropology, biology, chemistry, and geology to form an expanded Natural and Environmental Sciences.

The academic units are not only disparate in size, they also have contrasting budgetary and programmatic needs. Institutional values must be reflected in all academic units; however, there is room to recognize

uniqueness. By 2009 we will have common budgetary and staffing measures used to determine resource allocation to academic units. We will also establish agreed upon and widely understood limits within which academic units can uniquely manage their resources. Included in these definitions may be operating and travel budget expectations, establishment of teaching loads, array of class sizes, terms allowing faculty reassigned time and overall workload, allowable support staffing, and the permitted use of private funds to augment budgets and enhance programming.

The intent is to have in place coherent academic units and management flexibility that promote individual discipline success while also strengthening institutional cohesiveness and identity.

Revised and re-energized marketing plan. Western is unlike any other small public institution in America by virtue of the percentage of students that come from beyond a 100 mile radius of the college. What we value at this “destination college” is essential to the message and will be articulated and used for the purposes of recruitment, fund raising and broadening public awareness about Western. A clear marketing strategy will be developed to highlight certain academic and complimentary extra-curricular programming, but not limited to:

- Academic and extracurricular programs that capitalize on our unique mountain location. Environmental Studies, the disciplines within the Natural and Environmental Sciences, and Recreation have historically and currently capitalized on this. These are complemented by extracurricular programming such as Wilderness Pursuits and Wilderness Based Orientation
- Academic and extracurricular programs that promote active and healthy lifestyles. We attract and retain students that are active and we can benefit by packaging these opportunities into a marketing theme. Academic programs in Kinesiology and Recreation are complemented by extracurricular education and activities in the Fitness Center, Wilderness Pursuits, extreme sports, varsity sports, club sports, and intramural sports. A new program name for Kinesiology must be given consideration. The name must clearly reflect the nature of the program to prospective students and other external constituents.
- An engaged student body. Our academic programs promote active and experiential learning both in and out of the classroom. Co-curricular, extracurricular, residential, and community service activities can complement these. Students engaged in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities are most likely to succeed academically, be better campus citizens, and are more likely to graduate from Western. A well rounded Western graduate will become a defining characteristic of the College.
- Promotion of academic programs that disproportionately attract more non-resident students (e.g. Recreation and Environmental Studies)

Recruitment and enrollment goals. Recruitment strategies developed four years ago included efforts to redevelop recruitment markets within Colorado. As a result, Colorado resident student enrollment is now at its highest level in 15 years. Simultaneously, students from outside Colorado enrich the campus and their recruitment cannot be ignored.

We will develop an enrollment plan that will define our desired student body in 2009. This includes the number of students, their academic preparation, and geographic and cultural diversity. Included in this plan will be clear institutional priorities for scholarship allocations to recruit and retain the student body profile we seek.

Scholarships are critical for recruitment and retention and the limited funds must be used to most effectively recruit students that develop the desired student profile. Western has been successful in linking scholarships to required engagement (e.g. ALP scholars, student-athletes), and these models can be extended to require participation in other areas such as the arts and the honors program. The intent is to increase the quality of the academic experience as well as develop a talented, diverse student body.

The Academic Program as a Campus Priority

This strategic plan comes at a pivotal time in the history of public higher education in America. Public colleges and universities that develop a vision and plans to create opportunities for both greater public service and private investment will be successful in this rapidly changing national landscape. Western will be a leader among small public colleges in this environment. This will be accomplished through strategic allocation of resources and initiatives to increase revenue.

Providing competitive faculty salaries is a priority of the administration and the Board of Trustees and will remain so. Maintaining a student:faculty ratio that the faculty, students, and their parents have come to expect will also be a priority. The most significant challenge to salary increases and a reasonable student:faculty ratio will be to identify sources of funding to make these priorities reality.

Diminishing general fund support for public higher education, including difficult cuts to Western in recent years, require re-examination of general fund support for all programs and consideration of optional funding sources for some programs. Grant writing must continue and increasingly contribute to financial needs in the academic program. The private investment goal is to supplement state revenues at levels appropriate to meet funding needs by 2009.

During the development of this plan, the academic program was examined in the context of the greater campus and the many activities that support teaching and learning. Many of the issues discussed during the lengthy planning process are not presented in this document, but this plan will nevertheless prompt review of these campus programs and encourage planning that complements the academic goals and initiatives outlined here. Campus programs and themes requiring certain strategic attention include

campus technology, conference services, intercollegiate athletics, and the concept of branding Western as a leader in resource efficiency.

- Technology is increasingly important in the conducting of campus business and the teaching and learning central to the mission. It is also demanding more resources as faculty, staff, and students, as well as external entities, require technological upgrades. The campus must continue to plan for infrastructure, hardware, and software needs that allow efficient and contemporary operation. The *2002 Amendment to the Facilities Master Plan* is to form the basis of such planning.
- Conference services is an important auxiliary enterprise that can not only be profitable and thereby enhance other campus operations, it can also raise the visibility of the academic programs and the campus. Essential is that conference scheduling complement the academic mission and facilitate new and expanded academic programs. This will become increasingly important as the College better meets regional educational, cultural, and research needs.
- Intercollegiate athletics serves over 300 students who, as a group of students, are retained and graduate at a higher rate than non-athletes. Athletics can engage students and enrich their educational experience and athletic events contribute to campus and community culture and institutional visibility. Intercollegiate athletics is a vital part of the College and currently receives support from private donations, auxiliary funds, and the general fund. In consultation with the athletic program and the broader campus community, the administration will undertake a comprehensive review of general fund support to athletics and explore alternative funding models.
- Western has been active in environmental responsibility through campus programs such as recycling and the purchasing of wind power and capital improvements that promote energy efficiency and cost savings. The College could benefit from the cost savings and the recognition that environmental responsibility could bring. Students have actively initiated and endorsed sustainable practices, and campus identity in this area could be a valuable marketing brand and may also facilitate private giving to capital projects.

These initiatives, along with the strategic goals outlined in this plan, will result in a strengthened academic program that is poised to succeed through 2009 and beyond.