

Academic, Student & Athletic Affairs Committee (ASAAC)

Academic Affairs Report

Jose E. Coll, Provost

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Focusing on Excellence in Teaching and Learning While Responding to the Changing Landscapes of Artificial Intelligence and Workforce Demands

I. Commitment to Teaching and Learning Excellence

Western Oregon University's strength lies in its commitment to the excellence of teaching and learning—an enduring hallmark of our mission and values. As we move forward in an era shaped by artificial intelligence, shifting workforce expectations, and evolving student needs, we must integrate the timeless strengths of a liberal arts education with innovative, high-impact academic practices.

Our aim is to ensure every WOU student—whether traditional-aged, adult, first-generation, or transfer—develops the core competencies essential for success: **critical thinking, communication, analytical reasoning, and interdisciplinary problem-solving**. These foundational skills must be embedded across all academic degree programs and co-curricular experiences, preparing our graduates to adapt, lead, and thrive in complex and rapidly changing environments.

II. Aligning with Presidential Priorities and Academic Affairs Planning

In alignment with President Peters' reaffirmation of WOU's commitment to **in-person instruction, student engagement, and academic excellence**, Academic Affairs will initiate a **structured evaluation and planning process** focused on five key areas:

1. **Intentional Online Course Designation**
 - Each academic unit will identify courses appropriate for ongoing online delivery, supported by enrollment and performance data.
2. **Faculty Presence and Support Expectations**
 - We will collaboratively explore expectations for on-campus presence among faculty teaching both in-person and online to ensure meaningful student access and engagement.
3. **Hybrid Course Definition and Oversight**
 - Academic Affairs will establish clear institutional definitions for *hybrid* and *online* courses, including consistent criteria for approval and implementation.
4. **Online Program Review**

- We will conduct a comprehensive review of fully online programs to assess mission alignment, market demand, and long-term sustainability.
5. **Reexamining Faculty Office Hours**
- In partnership with WOUFT, we will reexamine office hour policies to promote flexibility, equity, and in-person engagement.

III. Reaffirming Mission and Student Commitment

The mission of Academic Affairs is to **deliver a high-quality, accessible education** that empowers students to reach their full potential and make meaningful contributions to their communities and professions.

This mission must remain our compass as we embrace new technologies, reimagine instructional models, and design systems that reflect the realities of our students' lives. To achieve this, we must adopt evidence-based, student-centered approaches that integrate:

- **Transformative online courses** that are purpose-driven and outcome-oriented;
- **High-impact hybrid models** that thoughtfully blend in-person and digital learning for maximum engagement;
- **Expanded in-person options**, including evening and weekend courses that reflect student and workforce needs.

IV. Challenging Structural Assumptions

It is time to ask difficult, transformative questions:

Why, in 2025, are we still organizing our university around structures created by Harvard in 1636?

Our current academic structures—colleges, departments, and divisions—reflect historical precedent more than contemporary necessity. If we are to respond effectively to the needs of modern learners and the workforce, we must be willing to evolve.

To that end, the **Deans have been charged** with evaluating our current academic organization by:

- Assessing whether existing structures foster or hinder innovation, collaboration, and student success;
- Identifying opportunities for greater interdisciplinary alignment with market and societal needs;
- Engaging faculty and staff in meaningful dialogue on how structure impacts the student experience.

Western Oregon University is implementing a comprehensive restructuring of **Graduate Studies** to strengthen student support, enhance academic quality, and align operations with national best practices.

This initiative advances WOU's **Strategic Enrollment Plan** and institutional commitment to **excellence, equity, and innovation**.

The new structure establishes a **coordinated, student-centered framework** that provides continuity of service from inquiry through graduation, clarifies institutional roles, and fosters cross-divisional collaboration.

Key Roles and Responsibilities

- **Faculty Director of Graduate Studies**
Provides academic and curricular leadership, oversees graduate policy, ensures program quality, and serves as the primary faculty liaison for accreditation and academic standards.
- **Graduate Admissions Coordinator**
Manages recruitment, outreach, and admissions processes; supports departments with application review; and leads marketing strategies to strengthen graduate enrollment.
- **Graduate Student Success Advisor/Coordinator**
Promotes retention and completion through proactive advising, professional development, and student support initiatives; coordinates graduate assistantships and key assessment efforts.

Together, these roles form an integrated model that balances **academic leadership, recruitment and admissions support, and student success services**, ensuring that graduate education at WOU is sustainable, high-quality, and responsive to workforce and community needs.

V.Strategic Priorities for Academic Affairs: A Roadmap for Action

1. Reimagining Teaching and Learning Excellence

We will reaffirm the liberal arts foundation—critical thinking, communication, analytical reasoning, and interdisciplinary problem-solving—while embedding technological literacy and adaptability across curricula. Students must be prepared for a world defined by **AI, climate shifts, and societal transformation**.

2. Strengthening Shared Governance

We are committed to an inclusive, transparent framework for decision-making. Faculty Senate, WOUFT, staff, and students will be **central partners** in shaping academic policy, curriculum development, and strategic initiatives, ensuring shared ownership and mutual accountability.

To enhance our capacity for **data-informed, inclusive decision-making**, Academic Affairs will establish a **collaborative governance framework** that ensures:

- Transparent communication and timely information-sharing;

- Meaningful input from faculty, staff, and students at every stage of policy and process development;
- Joint ownership of academic initiatives and accountability for outcomes.

3. Enhancing Efficiency and Innovation

We will pursue innovations that improve administrative processes, streamline operations, and reduce unnecessary burdens—allowing faculty and staff to focus on what matters most: **teaching, mentoring, scholarship, and service.**

- Invest in Scholarly software which enhances efficiency for faculty and institutions by streamlining research, teaching, and administrative workflows. These tools support data management, collaboration, publication tracking, and assessment processes, reducing manual tasks and improving accuracy. Faculty can more easily manage citations, analyze data, and share findings, while institutions benefit from integrated systems that facilitate accreditation reporting, grant management, and performance analytics. Ultimately, scholarly software enables more informed decision-making, fosters collaboration, and allows educators and administrators to focus more on academic excellence and student success.

VI. Deans' Charge: Learning Spaces, Engagement, and Collaboration

To operationalize these priorities, the Deans have been asked to lead efforts in the following areas:

- **Learning Spaces and Student Engagement**
Evaluate and redesign classrooms and learning environments to support active, contemporary pedagogies.
- **Experiential and Community-Engaged Learning**
Expand internship, research, and service-learning opportunities that connect students with real-world experience and community impact.
- **External Partnerships and Philanthropy**
Strengthen collaborations with industry, community organizations, and the WOU Foundation to support innovation, research, and workforce development.
- **Shared Governance and Communication**
Foster cross-unit collaboration, transparency, and inclusion to advance academic transformation.

VII. Investing in Efficiency and Effectiveness

To support long-term institutional sustainability and effectiveness, Academic Affairs will invest in and deploy models that promote **process improvement and user satisfaction.**

Key areas of focus include:

- Streamlining academic processes such as **course scheduling, curriculum review, advising, and registration**;
- Modernizing **faculty workload reporting** and other operational systems;
- Reducing administrative burden and increasing satisfaction among faculty, staff, and students.