



Western Oregon University

A Vision for the Future

Jesse Peters, President

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Our Mission:

Western Oregon University provides a personalized learning community where individuals experience a deep sense of belonging and empowerment.

I have no doubt that Western will become a strong and stable university, securing a sustainable and visible presence in Oregon's Higher Education landscape. We will be known as the university that provides a vibrant learning community grounded in personalized support, belonging, and empowerment. We are the oldest public, four-year university in the state, and the first and only four-year public Hispanic Serving Institution in Oregon. We are a regional comprehensive institution that is grounded in liberal arts and sciences, focused on serving the cultural and economic needs of our region.

Where We Were

Shortly after I arrived, we started some important work here at Western. In order to move us into the future and strengthen our institution, we established a plan of action, including a five-year sustainability plan that anticipated some cost reduction, coupled with enrollment growth -- with a goal of 5000 students by the end of year five. We started to implement best practices, shoring up and expanding enrollment and recruitment strategies, increasing graduate opportunities, investing in Institutional Research, and expanding our marketing and social media presence. We became more visible and competitive, telling the story of Western more often and to more people.

Over the last two and a half years, I have worked with the WOU community to implement better systems and achieve better practices across campus. We have addressed topics like procurement, contracting, policies, lobbying strategy, community outreach, fundraising, employee training, grading system, admissions strategy, student support, advising, retention, etc. This work continues and now connects directly to our strategic plan. Every day, we continue progress towards our goals of resetting and establishing new strategies that move the university in positive directions. We have also been able to provide salary increases for employees, and enrollment has been flat over the last two years.



Where We Are

Now that we have a better grasp on actual expenses, we updated the five-year sustainability plan this year. This work was initiated by Interim Vice President for Finance and Administration Mike Green and continued by VPFA Kwabena Boayke (KB). It is clear that we must reduce costs while we continue the work to stabilize enrollment and increase revenue. Budgets are maps that depend on assumptions and projections, and we must forecast in a way that leads to a balanced budget where revenues and expenses align. And we must also imagine how to position the university for future success and sustainability.

We are in a moment in higher education where enrollment is declining nationally, especially at regional institutions. The 24-26 enrollment cliff is upon us, high school graduation rates are declining, and fewer graduates are choosing college. Though I still believe our enrollment will improve and stabilize, reaching 5000 students will be difficult to achieve, and growth will be slow. There is stronger competition for a smaller group of first-time college students, and universities are struggling to attract and retain them. But what we provide here at Western, a strong academic experience grounded in an inclusive and welcoming community, will attract more and more attention. As the world seems increasingly divided and disconnected, the environment here at WOU offers a noticeable alternative. We will deliver on our promise to foster belonging and empowerment.

Where We Need to Go

Now is the very moment for needed structural change and innovation.

We will have to push ourselves to be creative, to make choices that will be difficult, to consider all the ways that we can increase enrollment and revenue. We will continue our focus on improving retention and graduation rates; we will recruit more adult learners who would like to complete a college degree; and we will work to further eliminate barriers to student success. We will build more direct admissions partnerships and make transfer from community colleges more seamless. And we will examine the ways that we deliver services, looking at everything from curriculum to facilities. How can we shift? How can we innovate? How can we make our university the best it can be? How can we best fulfill our mission and vision?

As we discussed at the town hall, and as I have announced in previous emails, we will have to reduce costs as we engage in this work. Our five-year plan calls for \$5 million in spending reductions over the next few years. We spread this out for a couple of reasons.



First, it gives us the best chance to implement positive strategies that are effective; large, drastic cuts can cause so much disruption that an institution loses positive momentum. This also gives us some key moments to reevaluate the five-year plan (as we have just done) to see what must be adjusted.

We have identified as many cost savings as we can for the next fiscal budget (25-26). But moving into the following budget year (26-27), we will need a clear map of actions that connect our structural foundation with our fiscal spending. And to do that well, we must be reflective and willing to change. And it will take all of us working together in order to make the best choices.

This is the moment to reimagine what we do at Western, using the strategic plan as our guide. Our strength is in our vibrant campus and personalized learning community. And the ways that we center students while supporting and educating them, especially first-generation students, is the cornerstone of our identity.

Our Next Steps

Over the last few years, we have deliberately invested in the following areas, both to improve our systems and to stabilize enrollment and budget.

- * We extended our partnership with EAB to increase our reach to potential students.
- * We have started direct admissions programs with local school districts.
- * We are increasing training and use of the Navigate (advising) and Slate (admissions) software platforms.
- * We are actively engaged in a project to optimize our Banner operating system.
- * We are continuing the Wolfie Chatbot software for student support.
- * We reorganized enrollment management under an Assistant Provost (Paige Jackson), better connecting admissions and advising.
- * We invested in Destination Western to boost retention and success rates.
- * We have invested in Institutional Research to improve our collection and use of data.
- * We have expanded our marketing reach and social media engagement.



But we still need to do more in order to make our university stronger. Therefore, I am asking each of the senior leadership to engage with the community and work with their teams/areas over the next 8 months to come up with plans of action that do the following:

Place Students at the Center

Address student needs as human beings first, paying attention to how they experience the university.

Identify the support services they need.

Invest in services directly related to student needs and support for success.

Eliminate or combine services to find efficiencies and expand more necessary services.

Make sure services speak directly to, and support, a diverse, first-generation student body.

Optimize financial aid awarding and packaging.

Develop innovative ways to reduce barriers for students.

Reimagine and Modify Curriculum

Identify what degrees we need to offer and why.

Follow best practices to identify how many credit hours should be in a degree.

Examine how our degrees compare with competitor institutions.

Produce/Update clear maps for a four-year graduation path.

Streamline offerings to maximize our resources. Colleges should build course schedules based on student need, working closely with advising to monitor needed seats / sections.

Identify what we should stop offering. In order to shift resources and invest in new programs, we must also be willing to reduce resource allocation in some areas.

Identify potential programs to invest in, ones that show potential growth and meet regional demands.

- I ask the faculty, working through the faculty senate and the Academic Sustainability Committee, to partner with the office of Academic Affairs to redefine, reimagine, and map new and innovative curriculum. How can the curriculum attract students?



How do we innovate based on who we are serving and on the needs of the future workforce? How do we shift resources and why? How might we combine programs in innovative ways?

Articulate our Connection to the Liberal Arts

Ensure graduates have the skills needed in the 21st century. Employers look for creativity, critical thinking skills, communication skills, leadership, and innovation in their employees.

Examine and potentially refocus the General Education curriculum so that it is easier to navigate and connects to our mission and focus.

Clearly align liberal arts goals into major curriculum.

Ground the Work in Community

Produce successful and clear pathways for transfer students.

Make sure students have practical and/or experiential opportunities.

Identify the best strategies to maintain an active and vibrant campus experience.

Expand degree programs to meet specific workforce needs. The partnership with the Department of Administrative Services and Uplift Oregon to provide accounting training is a good example of how we can engage in this work.

Expand adult learning, degree completion, and continuing education.

Enhance marketing strategies and messaging, including website improvement.

Create new ways of being present in our communities, conveying the message of the strength of our university.

Reimagining Resource Use and Budget Strategy

Develop a baseline budget with a clear process for requesting additional resources.

Use the University Budget Advisory Committee as a platform for communication and discussion around resources.

Further align resource use with strategic plan.

Determine and implement best practices for systems and improve functionality.



By February of 2026, I expect to see concrete plans for each major area of the university that address the goals above while connecting to the strategic plan. And I want these plans to demonstrate how we can deliver a clear, solid, educational experience with as few barriers as possible for students while investing in student support and success in innovative and efficient ways.

These plans should have clear cost analysis that reflect savings and/or needed investments. And they should articulate anticipated outcomes that help us achieve the university's vision.

Vision Statement:

Our vision is for Western Oregon University to be a model of intentional inclusion and accessibility. We strive to empower students to meaningfully impact our local community and beyond. Grounded in the principles of a public liberal arts education, we will enhance career and social mobility through a focus on critical thinking and communication skills that are essential for successfully navigating the complexities of life.

We set ourselves apart by delivering on the promise of empowering students so that our graduates have a visible, clear, and meaningful impact on their communities. *Our stability will come from our ability to reimagine how we deliver on our strengths.* Together, we can achieve our institutional goals.

Thanks for your positive outlook and partnership during these transitional moments.

We. Are. Wolves.