



Dr. Jesse Peters, President
Western Oregon University
Presidential Address 2025
The Power of Story

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Good morning, Western Oregon University! It has been great visiting with so many of you this morning, and today I plan to kick-off this academic year by talking to you a bit about where we have been, where we are, and where we are going. And I'm going to talk a bit about the power of story, of the ways that we talk about things, and of how important our stories are, to ourselves, to our communities, and to our institution. In many ways, everything is about how stories create realities, and how they move us. Let's take a minute this morning to pause and consider the stories of this land, of the indigenous nations, peoples, communities, and cultures that have inhabited this place since time immemorial. And let's think about the struggles that all humans face to maintain their lives and their humanity.

But before I get started, I'd like to recognize some people and some groups here today. First, we have several elected officials here, including Jennifer Ranstrom-Smith, Chief of Staff for Representative Paul Evans, Senator Deb Patterson, Mayor of Monmouth Cecelia Koontz, Monmouth City Manager Rochelle Roaden, and Independence Mayor Kate Schartzler, who is also a member of the Board of Trustees. Superintendent of Central School district, Jen Kubista is here. There are also several city counselors in attendance. Brandon Jordan, Deputy District

Office of the President



Director for Congresswoman Salinas is also here. We also are joined by members of our Board of Trustees and Foundation Board. I appreciate all they do to support this university and to help us tell our story. I'd like to thank all the people who make this event, and so many campus events, possible. From facilities services to catering, to computing services, audio visual, and interpreting services, let's give them a round of applause.

I'd also like to recognize our new employees. If you were hired in the last year, please stand. Thanks to you all for choosing to join the team here at Western; attending new employee orientation is one of my favorite activities. It is always energizing to hear the stories of our new employees and to talk about what we do here at Western, and how everyone contributes to our mission and vision. And I'd like to recognize faculty who received tenure and promotion this year. Please stand; thank you for your dedication to this university and to our students.

Slide 2



What Are We Facing?

- **Declining Public Faith in Higher Education**
- **Loss of Federal Funding**
- **Attacks on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility**
- **Fewer Students Overall**
- **High School Graduation Rates**
- **Low College-Going Rates**
- **High School Learning Outcomes**

This is a difficult time for higher education. Last week, there was a report indicating just how far the public perceived importance of higher education has fallen. In 2010, 75% of Americans said that college was very important. In 2013 it was 70%; in 2019 it was 53%, and in 2025, it has fallen to 35%. As I said in this address last year, so many people are defining “worth” when discussing the value of a college degree in very narrow terms. We need to shift that narrative. We need to remind people of the possibilities that a college degree unlocks, of the many skills people acquire along the journey towards graduation, not the least of which is critical thinking. People are forgetting the positive stories about higher education and what it affords people. Yes, careers and jobs are important, but there are so many other ways that a college degree empowers people.



Right now, higher education is facing many obstacles. As you have been seeing, there is real potential for the loss of federal funding at universities. Many universities in the US have been under investigation, had federal grants canceled, and are under the threat of sanctions for engaging in Diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. We remain uncertain about the continuation of our title III grant, and recently we were notified of the cancellation of our Pro-tactile Language Interpreter Training grant. When grants like these are canceled, they have direct effects on the employees funded through the grants, the students who benefit from the grants, and the communities that are positively affected by the work done through the grants. Additionally, the university loses indirect costs, thus putting further strain on our finances. We work to file appeals, when possible, but recent supreme court decisions make it less and less likely that universities will have much recourse when these decisions are made at the federal level. We are in a world where everything must match the agenda of the President of the United States, and the autonomy of universities is being slowly stripped away.

As you are aware, there are fewer students in the potential pool of applicants. Graduation rates in Oregon hover around 80%. A recent [report](#) titled "Knocking at the College Door" by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education predicts a 19% drop in high school graduates by 2040. Of those who do graduate, in Oregon only around half seek a postsecondary degree. In June, Ben Cannon, Executive Director of HECC said in an interview, "So we'd love to be a state where 60%, 70% or more of Oregon high school graduates are entering some form of post-secondary education, whether that's a certificate or degree program, a trade school, a private career school. Currently, only 53% of graduates enroll in such programs." Additionally, the learning outcomes for graduates are not where we would like them to be, and that can translate into fewer students who are ready to succeed at the university. And that means we must provide more support structures for those students.

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What Are We Facing?

- **Low State Support (37th overall nationally)**

- * For Oregon public universities, this rate is \$6,200 per student FTE, and significantly lags the national average, **ranking 46th among states**.

- * For Oregon community colleges, this rate is \$12,224 per student FTE, **ranking 15th among states**.

Note: This ranking lagged behind the national average as recently as 2019 but went up as enrollment declined.



Though state funding has increased numerically over the last 15 years or so, most of our public universities have experienced sharp enrollment declines. This matters quite a bit at a school like Western because tuition accounts for approximately half of our budget. Enrollment goes down, expenses continue to rise, and state support does not keep pace. Oregon's public institution enrollment declines from 2014-2023 were twice as steep as the national average. And just this year, Oregon fell from 44th in the nation to 46th in state support for public universities. In funding per resident student, we are below the level at the turn of the century for universities.

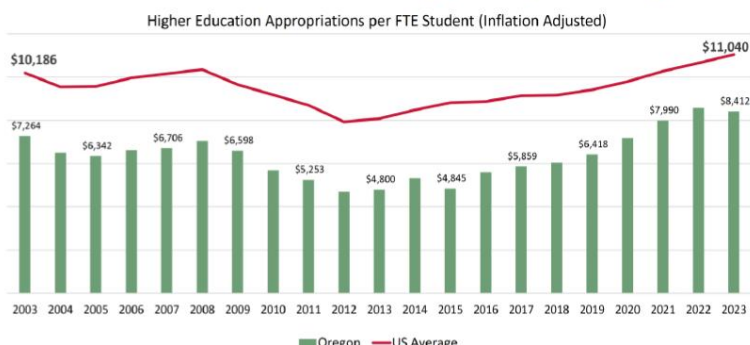
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What Are We Facing?

- **Low State Support (37th overall nationally)**

Oregon's Public Investment in Higher Education Has Increased in Recent Years but Remains Well Below the National Average, Ranking 37th Among States



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What Are We Facing?

State Support per Resident Student FTE (Adjusted for Inflation)





And universities are incentivized to grow. They need more tuition revenue, but the funding formula also rewards growth and degree production. There was a national trend as we emerged from the COVID crisis, for students to choose larger, flagship schools. These schools often have stronger reputations and recognition, but they also were better equipped to advertise the “college experience” as one full of community and connection, of vibrant campus activities and sporting and other co-curricular opportunities. There is also a lot of increased competition, not just within the state, but also nationally. Schools tried to grow as a way to attract more students, often adding many majors and certificates. However, we have not seen evidence that these efforts have attracted enough new students to offset the costs of establishing those programs.

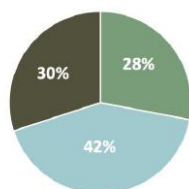
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What Are We Facing?

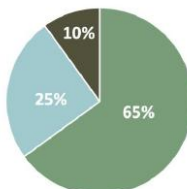
Students Contribute a Sizeable Proportion of the Total Education Revenue

Community Colleges
FY 2023



State Appropriations
Property Tax/Other Revenue
Tuition and Fees

Public Universities
FY 2023



These pie charts represent the percentage of institutions' education and general (E&G) fund revenue by contributor and by sector. Some of the tuition/fee revenue shown here is offset by grant aid.

In the 1960s, the state provided 75% of the revenue for public universities. This dropped to about 60% by the 1990s, and 40% by the early 2000s.

And of course, expenses have risen over the last 15 years as well. We continue to make efforts to increase wages for employees and remain as competitive as possible, which is a good thing. But we also see increases in supplies and materials, contracting, transportation, food, etc. We have had to steadily increase tuition to offset enrollment drops, and as we just saw, tuition and fees at Oregon institutions are the highest in the west.



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What Are We Facing?

Oregon Four-Year Tuition and Fees are the Highest in the West

State Average Resident Undergraduate Tuition and Fees at Four Year Institutions, Weighted, 2023-24



Tuition and fee levels are impacted by costs and revenues of the institutions and are closely impacted by state appropriations.

University tuition and fees are set by the Board of Trustees. Each campus has community and stakeholder processes to inform and shape the proposed increases.

*If the combined annual increase in resident undergraduate tuition and mandatory enrollment fees exceed 5% for a public university, the HECC or the Oregon Legislature must approve the increase.

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What Are We Facing?

- Increased Competition
- Growth of Large Institutions
- Increased Expenses

So, to recap, we are in a moment in Oregon where we have continued and necessary tuition increases, lagging support from the state, increasing expenses, challenging enrollment numbers, and a hostile climate towards higher education by members of the public and the federal government itself. When I arrived, I told you that I would always give you the real picture, and I stand by that. I'm not going to try to paint things in a prettier light than they actually are. We need to face these challenges as an informed community. And this community has been working extremely hard over the last three years to make needed changes and to reduce spending. But so did Southern Oregon University, and now they are in a historical moment, a declared financial



exigency. They have been forced into sudden and drastic changes to reimagine who they are and how they will set themselves up for the future. Their financial stresses are not new to most public universities in Oregon. We have identified large spending reductions twice in my three years here. PSU and UO also are making sweeping cuts. And sadly, none of this is unique to Oregon. We see many schools facing these tough decisions, often quickly and radically having to alter the very fabric of what they do.

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Tuition & Fees

Average for Public Universities: \$8,391 (AY2014-15)

- Growing 4.5% annually to \$12,433 (AY2023-24)

Average for Technical & Regional Universities (TRUs): \$7,977 (AY2014-15)

- Growing 4.2% annually to \$11,579 (AY2023-24)

Total for WOU: \$8,277 (AY2014-15)

- Growing 3.2% annually to \$11,025 (AY2023-24)

WOU had the 4th least expensive tuition and fees in AY2013-14, and the 2nd least expensive tuition and fees in AY2023-24, only surpassed by EOU.

We continue to make the best decisions we can to maintain our financial viability. Recently, when the legislature passed the budget, they attached a budget note to the PUSF directing HECC to produce a report on the costs, affordability, and spending of the public universities. Somehow, they remain unconvinced that we are in a crisis moment in Higher education in Oregon. I had a prominent senator tell me this last session that universities just needed to find grants to support themselves. So HECC answered the budget note with a preliminary draft analysis of data. We are currently reviewing their draft to provide feedback, but what we see is pretty clear evidence that what the presidents have been telling them about our needs and realities is true.



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Total Cost of Attendance

Average for Public Universities: \$22,668 (AY2013-14)

- Growing 3.1% annually to \$29,826 (AY2022-23)

Average for Technical & Regional Universities (TRUs): \$21,683 (AY2013-14)

- Growing 3.2% annually to \$28,772 (AY2022-23)

Cost for WOU: \$21,981 (AY2013-14)

- Growing 1.5% annually to \$25,158 (AY2022-23)

WOU had the 3rd least expensive cost of attendance AY2013-14, and the least expensive cost of attendance in AY2022-23.

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Total Cost of Attendance

- Measuring cost efficiency by affordability, WOU's cost efficiency improved significantly.
- With annual growth rate of 1.5% over 10 years compared with 3.2% for the TRUs, 3.1% for the public universities, and 2.3% national average.



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Average Net Price

(Cost of Attendance minus Financial Aid)

Average for Public Universities: \$13,632 (AY2013-14)

- Growing 3% annually to \$17,806 (AY2022-23)

Average for Technical & Regional Universities (TRUs): \$12,565 (AY2013-14)

- Growing 4.8% annually to \$16,647 (AY2022-23)

WOU's net price: \$13,723 (AY2013-14)

- Growing 0.4% annually to \$14,278 (AY2022-23)

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Average Net Price

(Cost of Attendance minus Financial Aid)

- The national average annual growth rate for the period is 4.8%
- WOU had the 5th least expensive net price in AY2013-14, and the 2nd least expensive net price in AY2022-23, only surpassed by EOU.
- Measuring cost efficiency by affordability, WOU's cost efficiency improved significantly. With annual growth rate of 0.4% over 10 years compared to 4.8% for the TRUs, 3% for the public universities, and 4.8% national average.



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Affordability Rate

(% of students whose expected costs are greater than their expected resources)

Average for Public Universities: 64% (AY2013-14)

- Declining 14% to 50% (AY2022-23)

Average for Technical & Regional Universities (TRUs): 61% (AY2013-14)

- Declining 18% to 43% (AY2022-23)

WOU's Affordability Rate was 61% (AY2013-14)

- Declining 26% to 35% (AY2022-23)

WOU had the 4th most affordable rate in AY2013-14, and 2nd most affordable rate in 2022-23, only surpassed by EOU.

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Operating Expenses

- From FY2015 to FY2024, operating expenses for the public universities grew 5.3% annually on average.
- The TRUs operating expenses grew 4.4% annually on average.
- WOU's operating expenses grew 3.1% annually.

WOU's operating expenses grew 3.1% annually, which is below the 4.4% growth for the TRU's, 5.3% growth for the public universities, the annual national average of 4.4% and inflation of 3.6%.



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Trend in Spending per Completions

(# degree completions per 1,000 student FTE & # degree completions per \$100,000 in spending)

Public Universities (from AY2014-15 to AY2023-24)

- Degree completions per 1,000 FTE grew 5.4% (from 254 to 267.7)
- Degree completions per \$100,000 in spending increased 54.5% (from 1.1 to 1.7)

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Trend in Spending per Completions

(# degree completions per 1,000 student FTE & # degree completions per \$100,000 in spending)

TRUs (from AY2014-15 to AY2023-24)

- Degree completions per 1,000 FTE grew 12.3% (from 261 to 293 on average)
- Degree completions per \$100,000 in spending increased 37.2% (from 0.7 to 1.0)

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Trend in Spending per Completions

(# degree completions per 1,000 student FTE & # degree completions per \$100,000 in spending)

WOU (from AY2014-15 to AY2023-24)

- Degree completions per 1,000 FTE grew 4.2% (from 259.5 to 270.5)
- Degree completions per \$100,000 in spending increased 71.4%



To recap, we have been keeping costs for students as low as we can, containing operating expense growth and improving degree completions. This is a strong institution, and this data illustrates that we are weathering the storm of scarce resources, doing all we can to serve this state and its citizens.

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Our Strengths

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

Vision: 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.

Students and alumni alike consistently speak about the supportive climate here and the personal interactions that helped them in positive ways.

But in the midst of the current challenges, this is the time we must pull together and lean into our strengths and what we must do to achieve a sustainable future. As I recently said to the campus, ***our stability will come from our ability to reimagine how we deliver on our strengths.*** All we have to do is look at our mission and vision statements to see the articulation of those strengths.

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

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.

This mission and vision grew out of the work of many individuals over many years. I chose to accept this job at this university because I knew that this would be the direction we would travel. I knew that the people here had worked within these principles for decades, and the community seemed ready to embrace this work and articulate it clearly in a strategic plan. We've done that. And we are ready to take the next steps needed.



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What Have We Accomplished?

- Achieved Designation as a Hispanic Serving Institution
- First Public Four-Year Institution in the State

Our Core Values

- * Centering Students
- * Embracing Diversity
- * Fostering Accessibility
- * Valuing Community

Let's talk a bit about what we have accomplished. During the last year, we have made some key moves and invested in systems and structures to help us both function more efficiently and also serve our community better. Most notably, we have achieved Hispanic Serving Institution status. We got here by serving students well, by exhibiting the core values of this institution: **Centering Students, Embracing Diversity, Fostering Accessibility, Valuing Community.**

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What Investments Have We Made?

- * We extended our partnership with EAB to increase our reach to potential students.
- * We have started direct admissions programs with local school districts.
- * We increased 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 continued the Wolfie Chatbot software for student support.
- * We reorganized enrollment management under an Assistant Provost to better connecting admissions and advising.
- * We invested in Destination Western to boost retention and success rates.
- * We invested in Institutional Research to improve our collection and use of data.
- * We expanded our marketing reach and social media engagement.



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What Did We Accomplished Last Year?

- Howl For a Change Climate Survey Completed and Recommendations Submitted by Equity Assessment Team
- Revamped Recruitment Practices in Human Resources
- Launched Web-Time Entry for Employees
- Developed a Digital Accessibility Process
- Launched Digital Parking Permit Stations
- Obtained Grant for Electric Vehicle Charging Stations
- Furthered Work on ADA and Code Upgrades
- Launched our Wolves Rising Campaign (Scholarships, Wolves Athletics, Student Success)
- Opened our Student Success Center Building
- Reached a Successful Bargaining Agreement with WOUFT
- Developed Strategic Plans for all Units
- Submitted Reports to NWCCU – Accepted as Largely in Compliance
- Received \$13 Million for a New Data Center

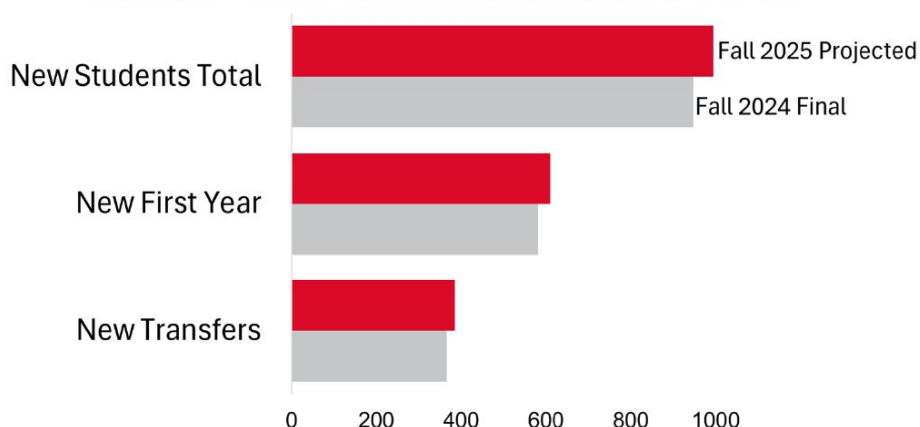
Everyone in this room should be proud of the things we have accomplished, and this is just a sampling. And the work continues. We have much to do to serve our students to the best of our abilities, to improve our systems. We have to remove barriers that students face; we have to be clear about curricular mapping; we have to connect advising points; we have to improve the website; we have to push marketing and outreach further; we have to reset our digital landscape for functionality; we have to improve support systems. We all know this. Much of this work has already begun, and we must lean into it this year. Our students are counting on us.

So, as we start this academic year, let's look at some data around our students.

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More Wolves Join the Pack

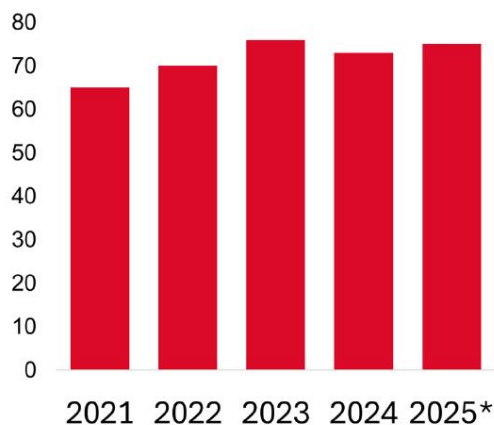




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Retention is Trending Up

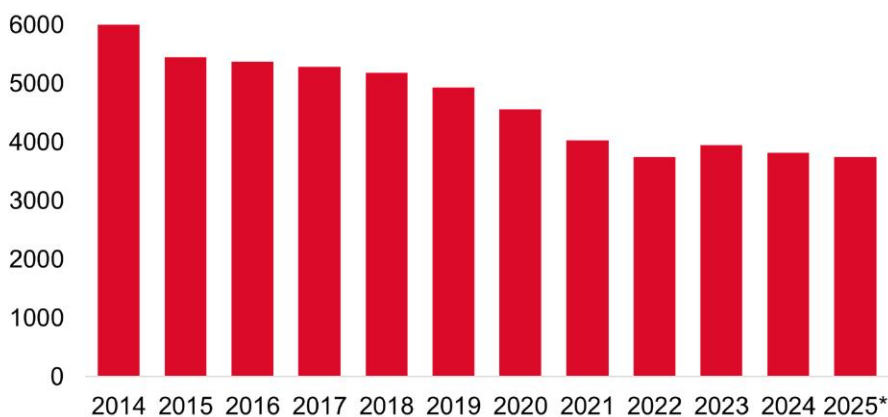


*projection

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Total Enrollment is Slightly Down



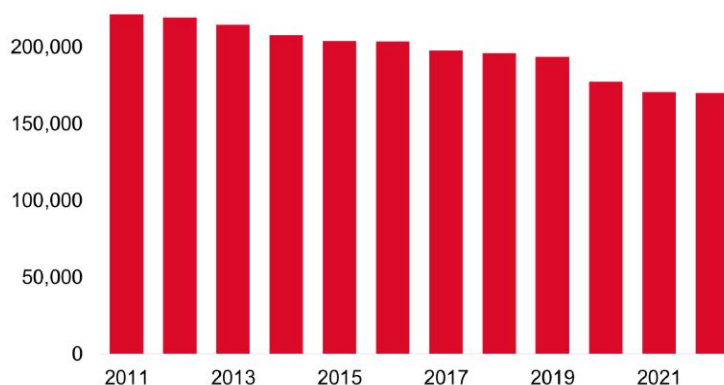
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UG Enrollment in Oregon Declines

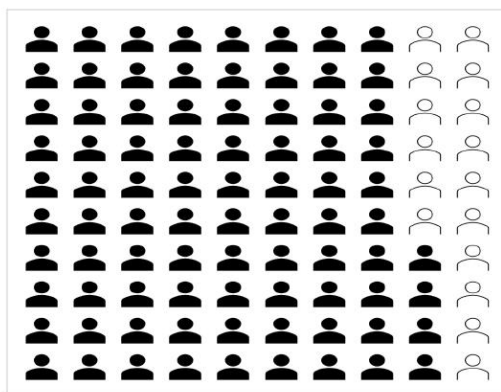


<https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data>

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Our WOU Students



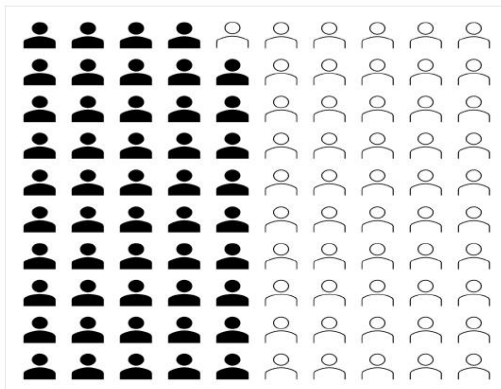
84% Oregon
Residents



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Our WOU Students

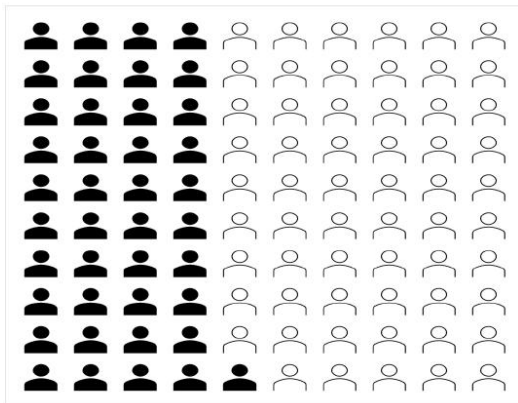


**49% First
Generation**

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Our WOU Students



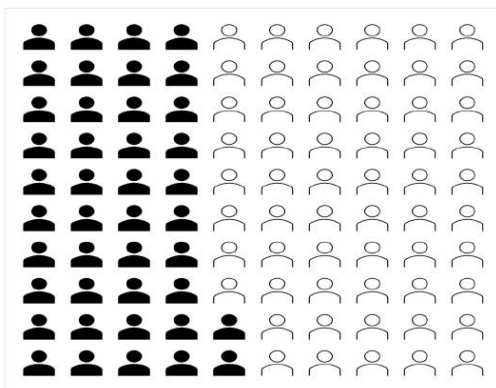
**41% Pell
Eligible**



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Our WOU Students

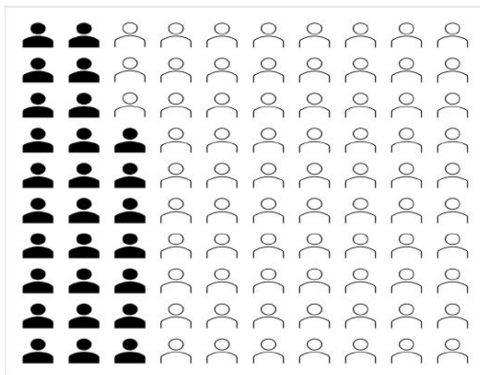


42% Students
of Color

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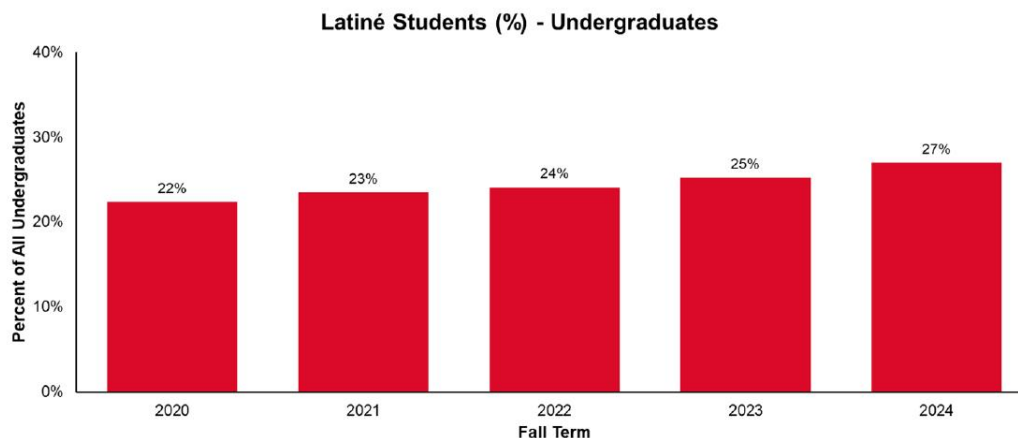
Our WOU Students



27% Latiné



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I'd like to thank Joy Brown, Director of Admissions, and Paige Jackson, Assistant Provost for Enrollment Management and all of the staff in admissions, financial aid, and advising for their work and dedication to telling our story to prospective and current students. I'd also like to thank Megan Haberman Guthrie and all the staff in New Student and Family Programs for welcoming students and their families to campus in good ways. And this list goes on: housing, grounds crew, athletics, catering, the library, foundation, human resources, etc., etc.

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Select Enrollment Initiatives & Strategies

- Expanded Direct Admissions
- New partnerships with mission-aligned CBOs
- Enrollment Marketing push to sophomores & juniors
- Earlier cycle launch & data informed recruitment strategy
- Continued progress in moving retention upward

Everyone contributes to the mission and vision of this university. Whether it's Michael Gonzales throwing t-shirts in the stands at a football game, Jessica Steed breathing new life into the Smith



Fine Arts Series and the Wolves Auction, Brittany Kima and Raeann Schalzenburg making sure we had a strong presence in the 4th of July and Woodburn Fiesta Mexicana parades, Smantha Brubaker and Georgia Armitage working to improve the Willamette Promise processing system, Julie McMurray focusing on making webtime entry a reality, Anabel Manzo providing support to units beyond academic affairs, CM Hall and Heather Holmes running the Protactile Language Interpreter Institute, or Misty Weitzel, Patty Flatt, and Tracy Powell developing a forensic education lab, the employees at WOU are doing amazing work that epitomizes our mission every day. Each of you here today furthers our mission.

And I want to take a moment to shout out to the faculty. There's a part of your job that people don't always talk about, and faculty don't even get much training to do it. It's the part of the job that goes beyond the subject matter. Students spend more time with you than anyone. They see you in many ways: as a teacher, as a mentor, as a role model, as an advisor, as an expert, and even as the pathway to their futures. And it matters so very much how they believe *you* see *them*. I might have never been standing on this stage today if Lucas Carpenter, and Homer Sharp, and Gretchen Schultz, and Mike McQuaide, and Ina Jane Wundrum had not seen me. Thank you for being engaged and present teachers for our students.

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Where We Need to Go

- Reimagine and reset budgeting (UBAC Town Hall Coming Soon)
 - * Achieve a balanced budget
 - * Move from a deficit to a surplus model
- Continue system improvement to streamline functions & remove barriers
- Redesign our website
- Identify what kinds of programs and support services we need to offer -- Innovation
 - * Understand the context of enrollment realities
 - * Understand the context of funding realities
 - * Understand the context of state needs
- Continue work to increase enrollment
 - * New students
 - * Transfer Students
 - * Degree Completion
 - * Retention & Graduation rates
- Restore our campus presence and vibrancy

So, what are our goals for this year. I already set the stage for this work at the end of the last academic year in my vision statement, and now in the harsh realities of federal policy and in the shadow of what has happened at SOU, we definitely need to reset. The future of this university is paramount, and I ask you all to join me in this work. It will not be easy, and we will have to make some hard choices, but we also can't afford to wait. We set a good stage during the last three



years, curtailing spending and moving our economic and sustainability indicators in the right directions. But we have work to do.

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Strategic Goals

As we do this work, we must always consider how our actions help us meet our strategic goals:

- **Institutional Sustainability**
- **Student Success**
- **Transformational Diversity**
- **Community Strength**

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. As I said in my vision outline that I sent to campus in May, I am asking each of the senior leadership to engage with the community and work with their teams/areas over the next few months to come up with plans of action to achieve our goals while doing the following:

- **Placing Students at the Center**
- **Reimagining and Modifying Curriculum**
- **Articulating our Connection to the Liberal Arts**
- **Grounding the Work in Community**
- **Reimagining Resource Use and Budget Strategy**

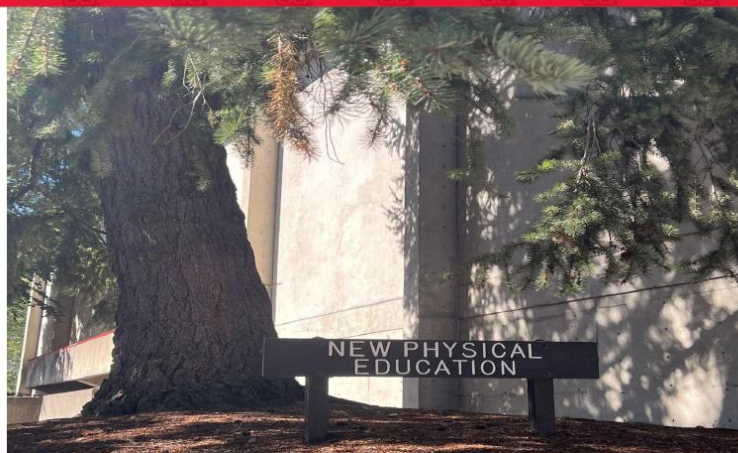
And we must stay focused on the strategic goals set forth in the strategic plan

Again, we must imagine new ways to deliver our strengths, and we will need to make changes in order to do that. We must change. We are being forced to change because of the contexts in which we find ourselves. But we also must change because the world is changing. The job market is changing; the ways we communicate is changing. And we haven't even really talked about how AI will change the landscape of education in radical ways, ways that we can't even imagine yet. And fast.



As a symbol of change, I have a special announcement. As you know, we have a new building on our campus. No, it's not the student success center, though that is an amazing building that helps us tell our story well.

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I'm talking about New PE. Have you seen it? Amazing! Built in 1972, it remains new. New PE, never growing old, always new. But seriously, why do we continue to call something new that never changes? And in a time of needed change and innovation, it is also time to change the name of that building. Therefore, after consulting with constituents, including alumni, students, coaches, athletic staff, etc., we will be changing the name of New PE to Kind of Old PE. But seriously, it will be called the Wolves Athletic Center.

Additionally, it seems only fitting that Old PE gets some consideration. Though we considered starting to call it New PE, a group of alumni and donors have instead been working with the foundation and VP Wojke to support a naming opportunity. So I'd like to announce that we will be changing the name of old PE to very old PE. Again, I joke. We will be naming old PE the Ruth Lautenbach Gym, honoring her legacy at Western. Professor Emeritus, Dr. Ruth Lautenbach, was a trail-blazing faculty of health and physical education and successful coach at Western Oregon University for more than three decades. She started her teaching career at Western (then OCE) in January 1940, was the only PE teacher on campus during World War II and retired in June 1974. In addition to helping establish the Health, Physical Education, and Athletics Departments, she coached Volleyball, Basketball and Bowling, was a club advisor, and manager of the swimming pool.



Dr. Lautenbach was a strong proponent of women's sports at a time when women's sports were limited to intramural competitions. She led the way for participation opportunities for women when they were not readily available, well before Title IX, which transformed women's athletics, was enacted in 1972. She is also a member of the NAIA Hall of Fame.

New names, new directions, new symbols. As we evolve, we also need to maintain and honor our story. That is our greatest strength, the story of WOU, the power of our story. You heard it in the video at the beginning of this address. And as we engage in our important work this academic year, I want you to keep in mind how stories tell us who we are. People sometimes say that data tells a story. No, it doesn't. It might inform the story, but humans tell the story. And when we tell stories, we define our realities. Join me in making our story stronger, in telling it across our state, in making sure everyone knows it.

The future is bright. Sometimes it doesn't seem that way, especially in today's climate. But look at this picture.

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This year, I led an excursion for Destination Western. Evan Sorce and I spent some time with this group of students, exploring the Salem Farmers Market, touring the Capitol grounds, visiting the WOU Salem building, and eating lunch together. After four hours with these young people, I can tell you the future is bright. They want to be teachers and politicians and entrepreneurs and social workers. They are kind and smart and engaged. This is who our students are; this is who we



are here for. (Pico, Anahi, Jay, Becca, Samantha, Esmerelda, Kepa, Malany, Monty, Eliana, Kendall, and Azeneth)

I plan to close with a funny poem that gets you thinking. But before I do that, I want to just take a minute to thank LouAnn Vickers for all that she does and who she is. In my opinion, she exemplifies the story of Western. Kind, Collaborative, Positive, Giving, Professional, Intelligent, Caring, Knowledgeable. After 19 years (work anniversary yesterday), she will be retiring this term. She is most definitely a wolf. Please join me in thanking her for all she has done for this university.

I am more hopeful about higher education than I ever have been before. That is a strange thing to say, I know, especially during this uncertain and volatile time. Each day, we face more and more threats to the success of higher education. As I said earlier, grant loss, attacks on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility, enrollment declines, lack of state funding, the perception of higher education as not being worthwhile are all serious obstacles.

So why am I hopeful? Because I'm at Western. We. Are. Wolves! Because we have a strength here that will allow us to succeed and to overcome these threats. The land here is fertile. The Pack is strong.

We've done a lot of good work over the last few years, and we still have a lot to do as we realize the full potential of Western. But I have no doubt that we will get there. 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. As we navigate fiscal realities and federal policies, we will remain true to our identity, mission, and vision.

We are here, together. It's different here.

I'll close with a poem by Tom Wayman that reminds us of how important what we do actually is, to our students, to our state, to our community, and to each other.

Did I Miss Anything? Tom Wayman (<http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/p180-list.html>)



Nothing. When we realized you weren't here
we sat with our hands folded on our desks
in silence, for the full two hours
Everything. I gave an exam worth
40 percent of the grade for this term
and assigned some reading due today
on which I'm about to hand out a quiz
worth 50 percent
Nothing. None of the content of this course
has value or meaning
Take as many days off as you like:
any activities we undertake as a class
I assure you will not matter either to you or me
and are without purpose
Everything. A few minutes after we began last time
a shaft of light suddenly descended
a heavenly being appeared
and revealed to us what each (person) must do
to attain divine wisdom in this life and
the hereafter
Nothing. When you are not present
how could something significant occur?
Everything. Contained in this classroom
is a microcosm of human experience
assembled for you to query and examine and ponder
This is not the only place such an opportunity has been
gathered
but it was one place
And you weren't here

Thank you, and let's be here together, telling our stories. We are wolves. And that means something to me. I will always fight for this institution and for you and for us.

Have a great year, and I'll see you this afternoon for some food and music.



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WE. ARE. WOLVES!

