



# AD HOC REPORT Spring 2024

*Submitted to Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities*

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# Western Oregon UNIVERSITY

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# Response

## Recommendation 2: Spring 2023 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness

### Introduction

This ad hoc report is submitted in response to the July 21, 2023 letter from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) regarding the Spring 2023 Evaluation of Institutional Effectiveness of Western Oregon University (WOU). The official record of action taken by NWCCU at its meeting on June 21-23, 2023 included the reaffirmation of accreditation with two commendations, three recommendations, and future evaluations, including this ad hoc report in Spring 2024 and an additional ad hoc report with a visit in Spring 2025.

Since receiving the commission's letter on July 21, 2023, WOU's leadership has taken action to ensure that WOU is on track to fully meet the commission's criteria for the Standards aligned to each recommendation. This report addresses our progress made to date with regard to Recommendation 2, addressing financial health, stability, and sustainability. Recommendations 1 and 3 will be addressed in the Ad Hoc Report preceding the site visit in Spring 2025.

Western reviewed its progress on Recommendation 2 and appraised it using a four-level scale. To best make use of this formative appraisal, we allowed for features to fall between levels.

- **Initial** = Minimal or no evidence of the practice or feature
- **Emerging** = Evidence of intermittent practice or feature. Practices or features for which a plan for regularization has been recently adopted and is now being implemented are also included here, though we view these as further along in development than intermittent practices or features.
- **Developed** = Evidence of regularized practice or feature, following a plan
- **Highly Developed** = Evidence of wide-spread, multi-year use of a regularized practice

## Recommendation 2: Financial Health, Stability, and Sustainability

*Further development and the systematic use of effective enrollment, financial planning and financial management practices to ensure realistic development of financial resources to ensure short term financial health and long-term financial stability and sustainability. (2020 Standard(s) 2.E.2)*

### Development and Systematic Use of Effective Enrollment & Financial Practices

Effective enrollment, financial planning, and financial management practices designed to ensure both short-term financial health and long-term financial stability and sustainability are being addressed through a variety of efforts. These efforts are intentionally designed to inform the goals and outcomes that have been defined in strategic planning. We define planning as: (1) choosing and prioritizing goals; (2) identifying outcomes that may inform the realization of goals as well as the impact of our efforts; (3) identifying metrics that inform the monitoring of goals; (4) devising strategies to achieve goals; (5) aligning resources relative to our priorities, so strategies can be implemented; and (4) monitoring both implementation and outcomes. The current strategic plan is in its earliest stages of adoption, however it will be the compass that guides our efforts in achieving each goal.

The Western Oregon University Board of Trustees unanimously voted to approve the strategic plan at its meeting on February 14, 2024. The updated and revised mission statement will be reviewed by the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission in April 2024 and the work to implement it will begin across the campus.

This plan marks a new phase for Western Oregon University. This institution has always sought academic excellence, been committed to community engagement, and worked for the success of students and employees. Now we are leaning into new strategies and directions, articulating with greater clarity just what type of institution we plan to be.

Our new plan will serve as a framework for individual units within the university creating and implementing their own strategic plans. Centering Students, Embracing Diversity, Fostering Accessibility, and Valuing Community are the core values that will inform both our initiatives and decision-making across the institution. We will learn from the assessment and evaluation of our actions, making timely and needed adjustments to ensure successful implementation of the plan, and be guided by our mission and vision.

The updated mission states:

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

In addition to the mission statement, the new strategic plan articulates four institutional priorities with goals, metrics, and outcomes. The four institutional priorities are Institutional Sustainability, Student Success, Transformational Diversity, and Community Strength.

With the university-wide strategic plan in place, WOU has the framework to develop complementary strategic plans to align units at all levels with WOU's overall mission and priorities. This work is underway; further detail is provided in the following sections related to enrollment and financial practices. In addition, the Office of Institutional Research & Effectiveness is preparing to hire a new full-time director and work with University Computing Services to integrate data for more comprehensive analyses to inform decision-making.

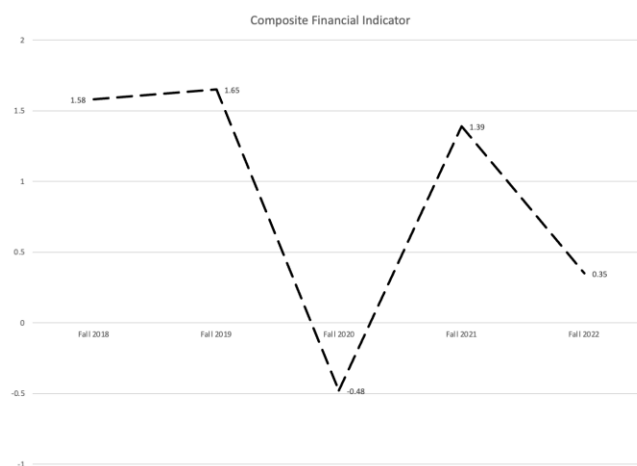
## Strategic Planning and Integration of Effective Financial Planning and Management Practices

Institutional sustainability is one of the pillars of the new strategic plan. It explicitly addresses the recommendation of the commission and refers to the ability of an educational institution to operate in a manner that meets the needs of the present without compromising future success. It involves a commitment to environmental, social, and economic practices that contribute to long-term viability and resilience. The goal, metrics, and outcomes clearly address the recommendation to both develop and systematically use effective practices that ensure short term financial health and long-term financial stability and sustainability.

Goal: Enhance the financial stability and sustainability of the institution through strategic financial planning, responsible resource allocation, and innovative revenue-generation initiatives, ensuring long-term resilience and success.

Goal Monitoring Metrics:

[Composite Financial Index](#) (CFI) measures the relative financial health of the institution, and is used widely throughout higher education. The CFI includes four commonly used financial ratios: Primary Reserve Ratio; Viability Ratio; Net Operating Revenue Ratio; and Return on Net Assets Ratio.



The following is a summary of CFI ranges and a sense, in general terms, of how the CFI score positions an institution:

- 1 to 1 – Assess viability to survive
- 0 to 3 – Reengineer
- 3 to 5 – Direct resources to allow transformation
- 5 to 7 – Focus resources to compete in the future
- 7 to 9 – Opportunities to experiment with new initiatives
- 8 to 10 – Deploy resources to achieve a robust mission

[Endowment Growth](#). Endowments are designed to provide a permanent source of income for the university by keeping the original amount invested and using the accrued investment income for its charitable purpose. The WOU Foundation endowment has grown due to the generosity of donors through bequests, outright gifts and other planned gifts, as well as investment earnings.

Outcomes:

- Western adapts to changes in the higher education landscape and implements strategic responses to emerging trends.
- Streamlined and efficient processes enhance teaching methods, research capabilities, resource allocation, and administrative efficiency.

We appraise our status regarding the further development and systematic use of effective financial planning and management practices as **Initial to Emerging**. Examples of practices being implemented below illustrate alignment with the strategic plan goal and outcomes identified above as well as practices that have potential of being implemented and refined systematically through the process of assessment for continuous improvement.

To inform resource allocation, the division of Academic Affairs created the Revenue Cost Attribution Tool (RCAT) as a tool to help us understand how general funds flow into and through the university (academic affairs) and to establish fiscal transparency. The Provost Office plans to use the RCAT as a tool to help us engage in conversations and planning around financial sustainability, investments, and strategic alignment. When used in a meaningful way, the RCAT can serve as a mechanism to help us gain insight and inform our strategic decisions.

Examples of initiatives to increase revenue include the launch of a comprehensive campaign by the WOU Foundation and ongoing efforts to support increasing grant indirect revenue by the Sponsored Projects Office.

Western Oregon University (via the Western Oregon University Foundation) is in the silent, leadership phase of its first-ever comprehensive campaign. The overall campaign goal is \$20 million, with the main focuses being Student Scholarships, Wolves Athletics, and Student Success.

The Sponsored Projects Office (SPO) partners with faculty and staff in seeking and obtaining external funding, as well as overseeing the management of all externally funded awards. The Sponsored Projects team processes all grant and contract agreements to ensure compliance with federal, state, and university procedures, policies, and regulations. Grant indirect revenue is an example of efforts to increase revenue generation. The fiscal year 2025 (FY25) projections for grants and contracts are more than eleven million dollars. The projected grant indirect revenue is over \$500,000 and the indirect amount awarded to date is in excess of one million dollars.

FY25	Proposals	Amount Proposed	Proposed Indirects	Amount Awarded	Amount Awarded Indirects
Unsubmitted/ In Progress	5	\$5,808,886.00	\$98,516.00	\$-	\$-
Submitted/ Waiting on Answer	12	\$2,083,355.00	\$156,165.00	\$-	\$-
Awarded/ Contract in Review	3	\$550,804.00	\$36,615.00	\$520,840.55	\$58,523.62
Awarded	21	\$2,238,913.00	\$184,464.00	\$10,625,118.34	\$1,570,816.00
Denied	2	\$399,710.00	\$39,128.00	\$-	\$-
	43	\$11,081,668.00	\$514,888.00	\$11,145,958.89	\$1,629,339.62

## Strategic Planning and Integration of Effective Enrollment Practices

In January 2023, Tina Fuchs, Vice President of Student Affairs, and Hillary Fouts, Dean of Graduate Studies and Director of the Sponsored Programs Office, began the process of strategic planning as co-chairs of the Strategic Enrollment Management Strategies Workgroup. The effort was initiated to ensure that the enrollment strategies being implemented by members of each of the newly formed subgroups (i.e., Admit to Enroll; Student Success and Retention; and Visibility, Outreach, Recruitment, and Engagement) were coordinated and intentionally designed to achieve the goals on the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan 2017-2023.

In that process it was determined that the plan developed in 2017 may have been appropriate in the time it was developed but was no longer relevant under the conditions experienced during the pandemic and post-pandemic era. The Strategic Enrollment Management Workgroup decided to develop a new plan based on two priorities, (1) Maximizing Enrollment Efficiency - optimizing processes and strategies to effectively attract, admit, retain, and graduate students while utilizing resources wisely; and (2) Increasing Market Share – a strategic endeavor that involves a combination of strong academic offerings, effective marketing, student-focused services, and a commitment to providing value to students. The new plan will be aligned to the yet to be developed strategic plans for the divisions of Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Finance and Administration.

To date, the final draft of the [Strategic Enrollment Management Plan 2024](#) is in the final stages of editing by the Strategic Enrollment Workgroup. The subgroups have developed logic-model informed project plans for their initiatives ([example from the Student Success & retention group](#))



and [aligned them to the outcomes](#) for one or more of the four goals: Efficiency; Differentiated Brand Position; Inclusive Process and Procedure; and Retention and Success. Similar to the progress on the university strategic plan goal that addresses financial planning and management, the processes for determining the alignment of resource allocation to opportunities for continuous improvement need to be developed and implemented for the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan 2024.

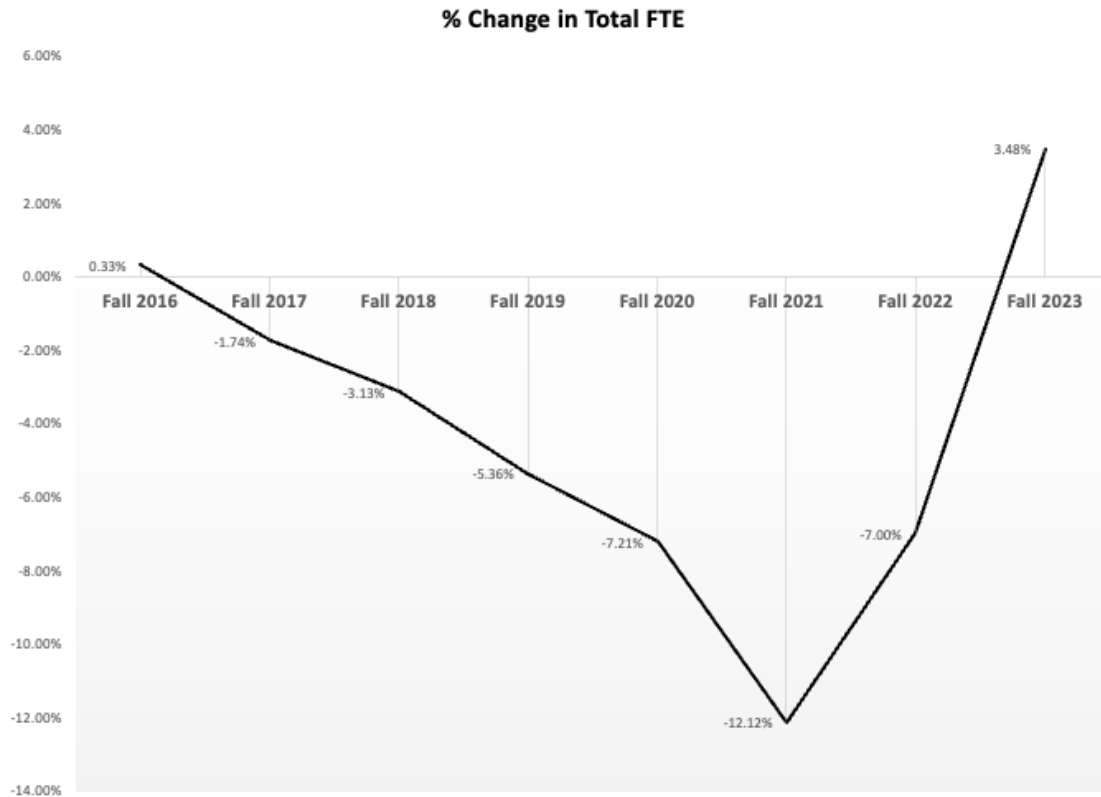
The subgroups have identified and are implementing specific initiatives that are intentionally designed to inform the goals and outcomes of their subgroup plans. The outcomes of the subgroup plans are aligned to the outcomes identified for each of the goals on the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan 2024. The summer bridge program known as Destination Western is one example of an initiative led by the Office of New Student and Family Programs in the Student Success and Retention subgroup that is being assessed on a regular basis to inform continuous improvement as well as to document the impact of the initiative on student retention.

Destination Western (DW), WOU's Summer Bridge program, has been funded by a grant from the State of Oregon. DW is designed to assist 150-200 fall-admitted new undergraduate students build the skills needed to succeed in college-level courses, orient them to campus resources, and connect them to peers socially. The intent of DW is to provide new students with *additional* support and resources to help ease the transition to college life. Destination Western is an application-based program that emphasizes support for students who belong to historically marginalized communities in higher education. Additionally, this program incurs no additional costs to students.

[Data](#) from the first three DW cohorts indicates significantly higher retention rates of DW participants over their non-participant peers. While the State of Oregon is no longer prioritizing funding for bridge programs at the collegiate level, WOU is committed to continuing the DW program by providing funding from the general operating budget for the 24-25 academic year because of the impact this programming has for student retention.

We appraise our status regarding the further development and systematic use of effective enrollment practices as **Emerging**. The following are examples of additional initiatives as evidence of this appraisal.

In Fall 2023, Western Oregon University realized the first increase in total enrollment since Fall 2016.



Western Oregon University was recently awarded a prestigious U.S. Department of Education Title III grant, securing the full amount of \$2,048,136. This accomplishment was the result of a collaborative effort that engaged individuals from all corners of the university.

U.S. DOE Title III grants are federal funds designed to help qualifying institutions of higher education expand their capacity to support underserved students by improving and strengthening academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability. The primary goal of Western's grant is to increase the retention of first-time students, reduce equity gaps in retention, and foster a sense of belonging among its students. These funds will allow Western to innovate, expand, and improve systems for student support.

To date, funds have been used to expand the use of technology to identify students who are at highest risk of leaving due to a broad range of factors, including those related to financial, academic, and basic needs.

# Conclusion

Since the recommendations were received from NWCCU in July 2023, Western Oregon University has (1) developed a new strategic plan including an implementation and assessment plan; (2) developed a strategic plan goal with metrics and outcomes that directly informs financial planning, stability, and sustainability; and (3) created the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan 2024 with action plans and outcomes alignment informing effective practices in enrollment. These actions are acknowledged as initial steps in fully realizing the recommendation. Initiatives that are aligned to these strategic plans provide evidence that some practices are being implemented regularly to support decisions about effective resource allocation, revenue generation, and student retention.

Next steps include the following:

- Consistent development and implementation of strategic plans by the relevant units in the organization, aligned to the University Strategic Plan outcomes for Institutional Sustainability;
- Development, implementation, and ongoing assessment of strategies and tactics intentionally designed to promote the outcomes related to financial planning, stability, and sustainability;
- Development and implementation of a reporting system for leadership to respond to (1) requests for resources to implement efforts of continuous improvement where the evidence indicates potential, and (2) to monitor progress in realizing meaningful change.

Western Oregon University is pleased to submit this ad hoc report that addresses recommendation 2 as directed in the commission's July 21, 2023, letter. We look forward to working with the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities in future accreditation reviews.