

**Western Illinois University
Institutional Distinctiveness Committee**

Final Report

May 27, 2021

Revised/Updated

September 26, 2021

Introduction

Using the University's Strategic Plan, _____, _____, as a basis, this report details the characteristics that make Western Illinois University a distinct institution of higher learning. Before moving forward to highlight the programs, people, and places that lead to Western's excellence and unique distinction as a school, it is imperative to recognize that the foundation of these qualities is found primarily in the institution's long, historic purpose—that is, to educate students who lack access to higher education, and thus access to equity and transformative personal and financial success.

For 122 years, Western's core mission has been to provide educational opportunities to underserved populations (first generation, lower socio-economic status, etc.), and this mission continues today. Almost 40% of Western's current student population is first generation students from underserved populations. We will note here that this distinction now aligns well with the wider IBHE Strategic Plan, specifically in regards to statewide equity and degree completion targets for the public higher education institutions.

Western's great distinction is that it provides the most for those who have the least. Beyond the outstanding academic degree programs that provide a path to economic stability and mobility, Western has solid support programs in place to ensure that its students, from all backgrounds, succeed. A number of these programs are listed in this report, and include financial support, mental health support, other kinds of social support, and career placement support.

Put simply, for our students and their families, and for over 120 years, Western Illinois University has been and will always be the University of Social Equity, the University of Transformative Learning, and the University of Great Opportunity.

Institutional Distinctiveness Committee

Darcie Shinberger, University Communication (Chair)
Brad Bainter, WIU Foundation
William T (Billy) Clow, Deans Council
Doug Freed, Admissions
William Fabyan, WIU-QC SGA & Int'l Student
Nicky Friedrichsen, Civil Service Employees Council
Noe Jurado, Multicultural Center
Tammy Killian, Chairs Council
Jessica Lambert, University Marketing
Alisha Looney, University Marketing
Jeanette Malafa, Government Relations/parent of a WIU freshman
Patrick McGinty, UPI (alternate)
David Miller, WIU Foundation Executive Board
Rocio Ayard Ochoa, Multicultural Center/Student Services
Padmaja Pillutla, WIU-QC Faculty Council
Christopher Pynes, Faculty Senate
John Sanders, Alumni Council; J
Justin Schuch, Executive Director of Retention Initiatives, Council of Administrative Personnel
Bill Thompson, UPI
Kinsey Tiemann, SGA.

PART ONE: PROGRAMMING

Academic Programs of Distinction*

Our academic programs are linked directly to the core values articulated in our strategic plan: Academic Excellence, Educational Opportunity, Personal Growth, & Social Responsibility.

The following outline lists specific characteristics for each of the academic programs we find particularly distinctive

Emergency Management (within School of LEJA)

- ! WIU's re-designed Emergency Management curriculum is the only program within the state credentialed by the Illinois Board of Higher Education, and has a fully operational Emergency

Sports Broadcasting

- ! The program provides immediate training on equipment through unique applied curriculum.
- ! The program features outstanding internship programs, excellent placement for graduates, and award-winning program.
- ! Undergraduate students majoring in Sports Broadcasting can earn a B.A. in Sports Broadcasting and an M.S. in Sport Management in five years (4+1 program)
- ! Broad spectrum of experiences in

Distinctive Characteristics of Current Signature Academic Programs

Accounting

- ! WIU's accountancy program is one of the first in the region to realign its curriculum in accordance with the CPA Evolution (CPA exam).
- ! A strong history of excellent CPA pass rates. There have been several years in which WIU students have had the highest pass rates in the region.
- ! WIU's Chapter of NABA (National Association of Black Accountants) was one of the first schools in the country to pilot the "CPA Project" that specifically works to decrease the underrepresentation of minorities who sit for the CPA exam.
- ! The WIU School of Accounting, Finance, Economics, & Decision Sciences employs a faculty member who holds one of the records for the highest CPA test score and is a top presenter for CMA preparation.
- ! WIU-Macomb Chapter of Beta Alpha Psi received Superior Chapter status for 31 consecutive years.
- ! Dual accreditation by AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business).

Biology

- ! Offers the only program at a public institution in Illinois with access to the Mississippi River and surrounding terrain through the Alice L. Kibbe Life Science Station and Nahant Marsh.
- ! Hands-on laboratory experiences such as monitoring crayfish for side effects from OTC medications; food DNA extraction to research genetic engineering; DNA fingerprinting; working with wild (captive) animals at an area zoo, and more.
- ! Extensive undergraduate research opportunities through RISE (Research Inspiring Student Excellence).
- ! Collaborative linkages with agencies such as the United States Geological Survey, the National Science Foundation, and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

Engineering

- ! The only engineering program at a public institution in western region of Illinois.
- ! Accredited by ABET-

Musical Theatre

- ! The first BFA in musical theatre in Illinois at a public institution, and one of the few select programs offered at an Illinois public institution.
- ! Comprehensive three

New and Developing Minors to Serve New Student Needs

The following are examples of new minor programs developed or could be developed to meet current student needs. Again, these programs ultimately lead to the distinction of Western—a University that is student-

of Natural Resources owns 1,458 acres adjacent to the Kibbe Station. The total 1,680 acres comprise the Kibbe Macro (KM) site. The Department of Biological Sciences at Western Illinois University began conducting summer classes in 1966, and has held summer sessions at the site ever since. The site

In adhering with our strategic planning documents, Western has numerous support focuses, student support services, and faculty focuses that are distinct and admirable.

As a regional mid-sized public university, WIU has the ability to put personalized programs in place to meet the needs of its students: success-related programs (e.g., tutoring); extracurricular programs (e.g. clubs/activities); financial incentives (e.g., scholarships) and more.

Commitment to Access & Affordability

- ! As 40% of our students are first generation students, it is clear that we are leader in high education institutions when it comes to providing access to higher education.
- ! In terms of affordability, our Cost Guarantee Program locks in all tuition costs for UG students. Only IL public to include room and meal plan locked in.
- ! 80% of Western students receive Pell/MAP Grant funding

Support for WIU Students & the University Community

- ! MCC/Resources to Support Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (SR, PG, EO)
- ! Commitment to Social Justice Matters/Issues (SR, PG, EO)
- ! Availability of childcare on campus (Horrabin & Head Start)
- ! Military friendly campus/resources. WIU is the only Illinois four-

! 79% noted WIU is safer than its counterparts;

! 90% noted that WIU is easier to get into than its counterparts

- ! Highlight the uniqueness of our core institutional values. Reposition WIU as a leader in social justice, educational opportunity, student engagement and success.
- ! QC campus as THE dual enrollment campus for QC region.
- ! Streamline degree completion (from Retention Committee draft).
- ! Core values guide institutional practices, programs, etc.
- ! Mentoring/in depth advising and support programs.
 - Western First Year Experience (FYE) program provides support for first-generation students through their first year of college and beyond.
 - Office of Retention Initiatives (ORI) and the Student Development and Success Center (SDSC) have a number of student success programs in place to help students, including the Leatherneck Care Referral program, which gives students, families, faculty and staff, an opportunity to refer students and situations to staff for personal follow-up;
 - Additional resources and education for first-generation college students and families
 - Building Connections and other mentor programs; success initiatives; and early interventions.
- ! Highlight faculty: Innovative faculty research, their professional, international, local, regional, state-level forms of service, and their professional experiences and applications of their expertise.
 - Faculty research and professional development opportunities; international, local, regional, state-level forms of service, and their professional experiences and applications of their expertise.