



WOU President's Message to all Faculty and Staff
Rice Auditorium
September 16, 2015

Good morning friends and colleagues and thank you for being here today – welcome to the start of Western's first year of independence!

Last year was filled with anticipation and tremendous work to establish our new Board of Trustees as we begin our journey as an independent mid-sized comprehensive public university.

A number of our Board members are with us today—please stand as I introduce you:

1. Jaime Arredondo
2. Ivan Hurtado
3. Lane Shetterly
4. Marshall Guthrie
5. Sofia Llamas

Our board chair, Jim Baumgartner, is not able to attend because of jury duty. I also welcome the chair of our Foundation, Paul Kylo, and fellow board members that may be joining us today.

I am so appreciative for our trustees—it is clear to me that they hold Western in high esteem and have high expectations for continued success.

Shared governance is of paramount importance to a university's health and future—I would like to recognize the president of the Faculty Senate, Dr. Laurie Burton, the president of the Staff Senate, Chris Solario, and the ASWOU president Corbin Garner.

Next I would like to recognize our new staff that have joined the WOU team this past year, and importantly, serve our students and faculty alike.

Please stand and be recognized as I announce your name and department. And, please be seated as I move to the next department.

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From the Admissions Office:	In the Athletic Department:
Jacyln Digmann	Kegan Bone Michael Hayes Tyler Patterson John Potter Jim Shaw Megan Shifflett Ben Stensland Adam Tolley
In Business Services:	In the Bookstore:
Laura Freeborn Jonathan Limont Suzanne Hart Sandra Holland Leta Howell	Rebecca Chadd Sarah Crockett
In the Budget & Payroll Office:	In Campus Dining:
Cody Prescott	Pamela Flippo Benjamin Lipp
In Career Services:	In Division of Creative Arts:
Kathryn Plummer	Stefani Price
With the Center for Academic Innovation:	In the College of Education:
Weiwei Zhang	Zigmond Derochowski Beth Jones Steve Tillery

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In the Office of Disability Services:	In the Financial Aid Office:
Rian Gayle Sarah Hill Audrey Loudenback	Kella Helyer Romeo Lopez Gonzalez Denise Maciel Kara Westervelt Parker
With the International Education & Development Office:	In the Multicultural Student Services & Programs:
Akaanchya Pradhan	Marlene Lopez Cruz
In the Office of the President:	With our Public Safety Department:
Rex Fuller Ryan Hagemann Reina Morgan	Rebecca Chiles Kelby McClelland
In the Student Health & Counseling Center:	In Student Media:
Roxanne Crossley Miguel Gonzalez Megan Miller Chelsea O'Neill Veronica Rodriguez Elizabeth Scroggins	Rhys (<i>Reese</i>) Finch
With The Research Institute:	In University Housing:
Kate Maxwell	Jenea Nixon Karen Schlieder
With the Upward Bound Program:	In the Werner University, Student Leadership & Activities Office:
Michael Caldwell	Kelsey Shults

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My first two months here have been very full. We have moved our household, assisted with the move of one of our daughters and family to Portland, registered to vote, licensed our cars, and passed the Oregon driver's license test. With the help of faculty and staff, I have toured the campus and its facilities and met with key leaders from Monmouth, Independence, Polk and Marion counties, as well as our legislators and leaders of K-12 and the community college.

Within the WOU family, I've tried to meet as many people as possible before the new academic year started. So I've met with a broad swath of university leaders, including both unions, the Faculty Senate, Foundation Board members, retirees, and alumni – and I have enjoyed greeting new students and their very happy families at two SOAR events.

Susan and I have enjoyed community events such as the 4th of July parade; on campus we have attended a concert from Paul Roberts, outdoor Shakespeare, the Smith Fine Arts Auction, a golf fund-raiser for athletics, and our first home football game where we hosted the leadership of the cities of Independence and Monmouth. Over the upcoming weekend we will have move-in day which is followed by a full week of activities including convocation on Monday. This week Hamersley Library has an exhibit, Hiroshima Ground Zero: Never Again. And, on Thursday we will have our traditional “Fan Fest” in The Grove. These are a few examples of the many that Western has every week.

All of these events have been executed with a high degree of professionalism—my deepest thanks to the many people who make those events seem so effortless. The welcoming events send a strong message to parents and first –time students that Western's success is dependent upon student success.

This talk is advertised as my “State of the University” address. In a nutshell, I will say the state of Western Oregon University is excellent.

So much has been accomplished:

- Celebrated one of our largest graduating classes—Western leads the TRU's granted annually
- Experienced growth in external grants to support academic programs, such as our well-known Student Enrichment Program, which includes TriO
- Diversity of enrollment and high success rates for our diverse students and the work of the University Diversity Committee—this fall, on October 13th, we will host renowned speaker Tim Wise, author of *White Like Me*.
- Increased efforts in tutoring internship opportunities for our students

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- High academic success rates for student athletes
- Academic partnerships with Keizer-Salem school district and our College of Education
- Enhancing student engagement through improved residence halls and new student programs
- Continuing to provide support and a sense of community through the Veterans Resource Center
- Improved access to college through our Willamette Promise program whereby high school seniors earn college credit in dual credit courses in Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Psychology, Writing, Communications, Spanish, and Computer Science
- Finished last fiscal year with a 15.7% fund balance – slightly better than budget due to prudent management of our resources
- Construction of the \$18.6M Woodcock Education Center has begun in earnest and is expected to be complete by this time next year
- Renovating athletic facilities and academic buildings and making sure the campus is beautiful and welcoming
- In the past 18 months, nearly \$2 million has been committed to construction and scholarships in support of our College of Education and the “Dare to Campaign” which speaks directly to our values of academic excellence through access and affordability. The campaign is based on the quote “Who Dares To Teach Must Never Cease To Learn.”
- The WOU Foundation received just over \$2 million in financial support and an increase in the number of gifts received; the average gift increased by over 25% and there were 900 first-time donors.

So you can see why I can say, without reservation, the state of the university is strong.

As we all know, 2015-16 will be the first year of independence for Western from the former Oregon University System. With independence comes the responsibility and opportunity to sharpen our focus and commitment to ***access, affordability, excellence, and opportunity.***

Shortly after I arrived at Western in July, the legislature and Governor finalized the 2015-17 biennial budget. This year, state appropriations were allocated to universities by the Higher Education Coordinating Commission using an ***outcomes-based budgeting model.***

I am pleased to report, that due to the dedicated work of many in the room, WOU’s **state allocation increased by over 20%**—the largest percentage increase among the seven public four-year institutions in Oregon. I want to thank former president Mark Weiss for his tireless effort on

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behalf of Western—without his leadership on this matter, the outcome would have been less favorable to WOU. Of course President Weiss was supported in this effort by WOU’s administrative team that I have come to appreciate and admire since arriving in July.

The increase, including funding for shared services, increased by 28%. Shared services represents a \$1.2 million increase in revenue and expense—essentially money-in and money-out for services formerly performed by the OUS Chancellor’s Office.

With increased funding for student success (and because of our commitment to affordability) Western has allocated nearly \$1 million in additional monies to offset the cost of attendance for Oregon residents. Western will target this aid to assist families and students who have exhausted other forms of financial aid. That’s right – we are committing additional funding to support Oregonians.

This is on the heels of Western’s smallest increase in tuition of all public four-year intuitions in the state. Because so many of our students are the first in their families to attend college and many of our students comes from less advantaged economic circumstances, we must continue to examine our position of access and affordability.

This leaves about \$2.6 million in increased funding to be allocated for on-going needs. This year the budget process started before I arrived and has continued throughout the summer months. I am pleased that we have reached a tentative agreement with SEIU and I look forward to the contract’s ratification and upcoming bargaining with faculty. That said, a majority of funding is needed for salary and fringe benefit increases for all employees. From this amount, Western will also need to invest in select initiatives that further our goals. These new base commitments will be essential to our effort to differentiate ourselves from the other public universities.

A portion of the funding allocated to the university was designated by the legislature toward improving student success and we will direct funding in a manner that will enhance and improve outcomes for Western’s students.

Going forward it is clear that WOU’s budget, and the budgets for all public universities, will be increasingly determined by outcomes.

Outcomes that drive the funding are part of the DNA of Western. The metrics include degrees granted, and retention and graduation rates. Outcomes also focus on providing access and opportunity for first-generation, rural, and diverse students. These measures are ones that Western will continue to focus on, while continuing to provide access for other students such as transfers, veterans, returning adults and traditional campus-based 18 year olds.

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Last year we celebrated a graduating class of over 1,300 students. For Oregon to reach its goal of 40/40/20, higher education must be accessible and affordable and Western will lead the way in this great and noble endeavor. For this reason, we will continue to carefully monitor our tuition rates and provide alternatives such as the Western Promise for those students and families that prefer to lock-in tuition for a four-year period. Quite simply, *access without affordability is not opportunity*.

We have committed additional student success funding to hiring an additional staff member in the Student Enrichment program. We have over 2,500 students who qualify for some intervention and we are serving, with this expansion, about 500 students. I want to congratulate the TriO program for its successful grant application that will bring \$1.6 million to campus over the next 5 years to assist with our efforts to ensure student success. SEP works—students in the SEP program have a retention rate of nearly 79% compared to Western’s overall average of 69%. If our general population were retained at the 79% rate, we would keep 90 more students from their freshman year to their sophomore year and beyond.

In recent years, Western’s enrollment has not grown appreciably—one way to reverse that trend is to see more students retained through positive intervention. Our future is dependent on being seen as a place where students graduate in a timely fashion with degrees that enable graduates to take the next step. Looking forward we have more work to do in improving retention—Western’s overall retention rates is slightly below our peers, and we need to find ways to extend the successful approaches of SEP to a broader population.¹

Additionally, we have targeted student success funds to improve support for academic intervention and early warning through the Academic Advising and Learning Center and the use of the Wolf Connection System. Researchers have found that early feedback to students on meaningful work serves to improve retention and academic performance. Vincent Tinto calls early warning systems one of the critical foundations for college success. (*Completing College*, p. 123). Finally, we have added support for returning veterans in a joint project between academic and student affairs, designed to recruit and retain more veterans. Additional budget commitments have been made to support hiring a director of institutional research.

On the capital budget side, I am pleased to report that Western received funding of \$6 million to renovate the natural science building. Additionally, the university sold the Stadium Street residence and is holding the proceeds from the sale for projects that will improve meeting room spaces on

¹ IPEDS 2014, freshman to sophomore retention rate for WOU was 69% compared to 74% for peers.



campus. In the February legislative session, the legislature may consider the long-term use of the Oregon Military Academy and Western will be evaluating potential uses for that space if this becomes a reality.

As I mentioned earlier, this is the first year of independence with oversight by the Western Oregon University Board of Trustees. At the July Board meeting, the Board reaffirmed our budget reserve target of 15%. This reserve amount is appropriate and supports Western's commitment to its fixed rate tuition plan. The Board also reaffirmed the university's mission, a critical step as we prepare for our seven-year accreditation review by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities:

WOU Preamble

Western Oregon University offers exemplary undergraduate and graduate programs in a *supportive and rigorous learning environment*. Oregon's *oldest public university*, WOU works to ensure the success of students and the advancement of knowledge *as a service* to Oregon and the region. The University works in *partnership* with PK-12 schools, community colleges and other institutions of higher education, government, and local and global communities.

WOU Mission

Western Oregon University is a comprehensive public university, operating for the public good, which:

- Provides effective learning opportunities that prepare students for a fulfilling life in a global society;
- Supports an accessible and diverse campus community; and,
- Improves continuously our educational, financial, and environmental sustainability.

The Higher Education Coordinating Commission has responsibility for all public universities and ensuring that collectively, the universities are meeting state goals. In this sense, all universities have a state-wide mission and the overarching goal is to improve access and outcomes.

How will Western continue to meet its mission and differentiate itself from the other public universities?

I believe a key is to hold onto the foundation that has made Western well-respected within the state—a comprehensive liberal education. Comprehensive universities must excel at providing educational opportunities in fields of study that society demands—such as business, education, and STEM fields, but comprehensive universities must also recognize the vital contribution of humanities and social sciences. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences in *The Heart of the Matter* states that a liberal, or comprehensive education, is an approach to college that:

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“... provides *both broad knowledge in a variety of areas of study and knowledge in a specific major or field of interest*. It also helps students develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as intellectual and practical skills that span all areas of study, such as communication, analytical, and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings.” (The American Academy of Arts and Sciences, *The Heart of the Matter*, p. 33, 2013)

Put differently, schools that follow this approach provide an educational footing that is relevant and long-lasting. Graduates of these programs—Western’s programs – are prepared to make a positive contribution to their communities and society at large. In this sense, the experience for our students at Western is *transformational*.

On September 28, faculty will welcome our new students into their classes. For a significant number of freshmen, *they will be the first in their families to attend college, and you will be their first professor. Others will be their first advisor, residence hall director, financial aid advisor, librarian, business office professional, college coach, or campus safety officer*. The point is that we are all engaged in the transformational process that will make a life-long impact on our new students and each of us makes a difference in that process. This type of impact is critical to our nation’s future and Western is at the forefront of this exciting, transformational process—for that reason I am extremely honored to have joined you.

As we begin the academic year, I ask each of us to set high expectations for all aspects of our work as a comprehensive university. We must be committed to measuring outcomes—how will we know that our programs are meaningful and successful if we do not include appropriate assessment. We must be persistent; engagement matters and the educational process is developmental and long-term. Finally, to excel in our journey we must be willing to examine ourselves with a critical eye toward continuous improvement.

In life, timing is everything. In the prospectus for the presidential search it said: “WOU is accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. They are currently in the *middle years* of the accreditation cycle.” Well, we are accredited, but we are in the seventh and final year of the accreditation cycle, not the middle years.

This year, we will be able to use the accreditation process to do a thorough self-examination of Western Oregon University. The standards are all encompassing, and I am sure we will find many strengths. But, we are bound to discover areas for improvement and I challenge each of us to be thoughtful, honest, and responsive as we move through the process. And, when we discover areas for improvement, I expect all of us to work collaboratively to identify strategies and actions that will lead to sustainable improvement. The final accreditation standard states:

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Based on its definition of mission fulfillment and informed by the results of its analysis of accomplishment of its core theme objectives, the institution develops and publishes evidence-based evaluations regarding the extent to which it is fulfilling its mission. The institution regularly monitors its internal and external environments to determine how and to what degree changing circumstances may impact its mission and its ability to fulfill that mission. It demonstrates that it is capable of adapting, when necessary, its mission, core themes, programs, and services to accommodate changing and emerging needs, trends, and influences to ensure enduring institutional relevancy, productivity, viability, and sustainability. (Standard Five—Mission Fulfillment, Adaptation and Sustainability)

One can easily argue that the expectations of Standard Five are the expectations of the citizens and leaders of Oregon as we enter the first year of independence. With independence came the creation of the Higher Education Coordinating Commission and its charge to evaluate universities with regard to mission fulfillment and with regard to the set of public higher education institutions meeting state goals concerning higher education outcomes. Yes, the new normal is about outcomes and mission—and long-term adaptability.

Let me address some initiatives that will help Western continue to be a school of choice—a destination campus. First, we must leverage the upcoming accreditation process into a comprehensive strategic planning effort that will begin in 2016. The planning process will include opportunities for campus-wide participation and it must include opportunities for various stakeholders to provide input. For example, the effort by the City of Monmouth, Monmouth Engaged, has found that a deeper connection to Western is a high priority. In my brief time here, I have found the City of Independence has similar goals. To reach our potential, Western must be a vital partner in the activities that promote societal needs of the mid-Willamette valley.

A second focus must be to align our efforts with the stated goals of the state of Oregon and the measures that HECC will use to allocate resources. Fortunately, these are aligned with our deep traditions and mission. Western has always been committed to access and opportunity and by seeking enrollment from growing diverse populations, rural areas, low-income families, and first-generation college attendees Western will excel.

This summer, I met with an extended group to discuss opportunities in the coming year. One idea that was discussed was the need to develop clear pathways for degree attainment. Over time, course requirements change—some courses are added and others become optional. In some cases this leads to confusing pathways toward graduation—especially for first-generation college attendees. I will be asking Academic Affairs to review its degree pathways to ensure that students



are receiving clear guidance on how to attain a degree within 180 hours and four years of full-time study.²

At the graduate level, we need to evaluate our current program array and identify opportunities for development of new programs. Nationally, the growth rate within graduate programs exceed that of undergraduate programs. I have asked many this summer to identify opportunities that exist to strengthen our existing programs and to develop new programs that will serve our region. As part of our accreditation and planning process, we need to evaluate our graduate program array in relation to the emerging needs of the state of Oregon.

One of Western's historic strengths is its external grants and sponsored research. Again, comparing Western to its peers, WOU generates a greater percentage of its funding from external grants than its counterparts. This is in large measure due to the success of **The Research Institute** as well as faculty and staff throughout the university. This summer I approved a request to rename the Teaching Research Institute to **The Research Institute** with the expressed goal of seeing our success in securing outside funds continue to grow. In many cases, we need a perfect score from reviewers to secure funding, and this means that our efforts need to be world-class. TRI will be responsible for working with faculty and staff to develop high quality proposals for submission to external agencies. Once additional funding and staffing can be identified, TRI will provide added stimulus to these important activities. TRI will report to the Provost but also be invited to periodic extended cabinet meeting to ensure that our focus remains a priority.

At the July Board meeting, Chair Baumgartner stated: Western needs to move from “best kept secret” to “best known opportunity.” I agree, and I hope you agree too.

To become the best known opportunity, we must raise our visibility and name recognition—recognition that will be built on the sustained excellence of so many programs. To achieve this goal, we need to think of coherent unified marketing efforts around all aspects of our work. From the fine arts to athletics, I believe Western can leverage its success to promote interest and reputation, which I believe will secure our future place in the state of Oregon as a premier destination campus.

Thank you again for welcoming Susan and me here over the past weeks. I'm delighted at the opportunity to serve as president of this outstanding university. I welcome feedback as we launch this new academic year and continue our focused, purposeful journey.

² Estimates for the average credits to degree for WOU exceed 210 hours, nearly two quarters of full-time study worth of credits.



Toward that end, each of you will have an opportunity to provide your thoughts on the strengths, traditions, and opportunities for Western—and I seek your advice on the most important next steps. A brief survey will be emailed to you and I look forward to your response. Together we can make Western the school of choice for generations to come.

2015-16 will be a historic year for Western. The unofficial motto of the search committee last year was “brave new world.” With independence, Western is poised to create its own future. Like Lewis and Clark and the “Corps of Discovery” we must navigate the new frontiers of higher education in Oregon to ensure that WOU maintains its academic vibrancy and fiscal sustainability. Building on Western’s foundation of excellence, we will forge deeper and stronger connections to our partners throughout the state. Oregon’s state motto is: “She flies with her own wings.” I ask for your active participation and support as Western flies on its journey. Go Wolves!

After some time for questions and comments, I invite you to the Pacific room for lunch. I encourage you to introduce and invite our guests to your table so they may receive a more personalized perspective of WOU. I thank you and wish you all a great academic year.

Respectfully,

Rex Fuller, President