Memorandum to Faculty and Staff

I concluded my last letter to the campus by highlighting the new faculty and Academic Affairs staff who would be joining us in August of 2005. I want to open this letter by welcoming these new colleagues to Weber State University. Few activities are more important than recruiting talented faculty and staff to WSU and providing them with the support they need. During the opening of school retreats and meetings, I had the chance to meet many of our new faculty and staff, and I hope to meet all of them over the coming months.

In mid-September, I was asked to make a presentation to the Utah Legislature's Higher Education Appropriations Subcommittee and members of the Board of Regents on our efforts to help students succeed. I talked about Weber State’s first-year student retention rates and our overall graduation rates. Both our first-year retention and overall graduation rates are significantly higher than the averages for other four-year institutions in the Utah System of Higher Education.

For several years, improving the retention of our first-year students has been part of a larger effort to foster student success. As a result of continued attention, WSU’s retention of first-year students rose from 59 percent in 1995 to our present level of 71 percent.

Graduation rates have also increased since 1996, from 33 percent to 44 percent. Our success in retaining and graduating an increasing proportion of our students is especially noteworthy because we serve a large number of working, commuter students, and these students traditionally have higher rates of attrition and lower rates of graduation.

Improvements in WSU’s retention and graduation rates are reflected in the U.S. News & World Report rankings of colleges and universities. In the 2006 ratings, released in August of 2005, WSU was ranked in the top tier of masters universities in the western region and ranked 13th among public universities in the west. The masters universities designation, derived from the Carnegie classifications of colleges and universities, includes schools which predominantly award bachelors and masters degrees. Other masters universities include Boise State University, Gonzaga University, San Jose State University, and most of the universities in the California State University system. The U.S. News rankings are a formal acknowledgment of the quality and the excellence found at WSU and are a direct result of the hard work of WSU’s faculty and staff.

Looking ahead, we will continue to focus upon practices which promote quality for our students, and for our faculty and staff. Even though we are early in the academic year, work is progressing on the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities’ October 2004
recommendations concerning the mentoring and evaluation of adjunct faculty, the assessment of general education, and the use of assessment results for improvement. The Faculty Senate has approved the formation of an ad hoc committee to oversee the assessment of general education. The Salary, Benefits, Budget and Fiscal Planning Committee has been asked to examine teaching loads for adjunct faculty and the associated issue of employment benefits.

The assessment of general education has been an ongoing activity for WSU faculty since 2000. The faculty who have been involved with the core and breadth general education assessment groups and those who served on the 2003-2005 Faculty Senate ad hoc general education committee were invited to a luncheon to discuss the steps we need to take in 2005-06 to continue to make progress in assessing our general education program and to demonstrate how the results of assessment are used for improvement. On August 22nd, during the opening of school meetings, Andrea Leskes, of the American Association of Colleges and Universities, offered helpful suggestions and cogent insight into our general education assessment efforts. Recently, President Millner, Associate Provost Jim Hutchins, Senate Chair Bruce Handley and I had a conference call with Sandra Elman, President of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, to discuss our effort to respond to the Commission’s recommendations and insure that we were taking appropriate steps.

Andrea Leskes will return to Utah on November 11th for a state-wide conference on general education assessment. I take this opportunity to invite WSU faculty to attend the November 11th conference; my office will cover the registration fee for any full-time or adjunct faculty who provides an RSVP to Chersti Crawford, extension 7804, by October 14, 2005.

I want to extend my best wishes for the coming academic year. I hope the year is both productive and rewarding for each of you.

Sincerely,

Michael Vaughan, Provost