
"Building on our strengths, Weber State University will continue to evolve as a vibrant multi-campus, learner-centered university."

— F. Ann Millner
President, WSU



Message from the President

President, WSU

Weber State University is evolving into a dynamic multi-campus university, while still embracing its long-standing role as a teaching university. A dedicated, talented faculty and staff work closely with students to provide high quality learning experiences that prepare them as professionals and citizens. Within the university, there is a collective sense of commitment to the university and students that creates a collegial environment across the campus and extends to the alumni and community we serve.

In the last ten years, the university has coped with enrollment growth and decline, legislative funding increases and cuts, higher tuition increases, expanded private support, dramatic online program growth, the addition of the WSU Davis campus and a shift from the quarter to semester system. However, the university community is unwavering in its focus on

teaching and learning and providing a high quality learning environment. Through the self study process, facilitated by the steering committee leadership, an institutional awareness of strengths and challenges has emerged. This will target future university planning--building on our strengths and addressing challenges.

Strengths

Commitment to the "teaching and learning" mission

Faculty and staff are committed to teaching and learning. While they are actively engaged in scholarship and service to the university, their disciplines and the community, teaching is the first priority. The faculty to student ratio is 23:1 and 70 percent of the courses are taught by full-time faculty. The teaching focus is reflected in hiring and faculty evaluation processes and institutional activities such as the Teaching and Learning Forum. Students and alumni cite personal interaction with faculty and staff as the strength of their WSU experience. Current undergraduate research and service learning initiatives involving students and faculty mentors continue to build on this strong institutional value.

Flexible, varied programs and courses of high quality

WSU offers a wide range of professional, technical and liberal arts programs at the associate, baccalaureate and master degree levels that meet the range of community college and university student and workforce needs in our region. Seamless articulation between degree levels facilitates student access and progress toward graduation. Day, evening, weekend, off-campus and online offerings provide an array of location and scheduling options geared to meet the needs of our students. Weber State University has become the state model for a teaching university serving the community college and university role in its region.

Multi-campus university

With the addition of the new campus in Davis County, WSU Davis, and our online campus, WSU Online, Weber State University is well positioned to meet the next surge in student growth anticipated to be from 2005 to 2015. Departments, from facilities to academics, are transitioning from a central campus orientation to an integrated university perspective of serving students through multiple campuses and outreach sites statewide. WSU Davis was established to meet higher education needs for one of the largest and fastest growing counties in the state. In 2003-04, eight degree programs had more than 3200 enrollments per semester. This campus is envisioned to primarily serve growing professional program needs in the region.

WSU Online, begun in 1997, allowed the university to accommodate enrollment growth over the past five years and currently has more than 9,000 course enrollments per semester (12 percent of the WSU enrollment). The dramatic growth has required continuous retooling of course systems, policies, technology, faculty and student support. The university is a leader in internet education and makes widespread use of web-based tools in more traditional courses and services.

Shared governance

The university has a culture of shared governance that permeates the campus. Consultation with faculty, staff and students in major planning and policy decisions is expected and respected. The process of decision making is carefully considered in all major university issues allowing for consideration of different viewpoints and more informed decisions. Academic programs and policies are primarily the purview of the faculty, and changes are managed through a deliberate faculty senate process that also allows administrators and students to have a voice.

Library resources and services

The university's library collection and services have improved significantly in the past decade. A combination of state and private funding and significant effort by our library leadership has resulted in a collection focused on academic program needs and enhanced by superior access to electronic resources and services. The library provides excellent support for faculty and student learning.

Information technology support

Information technology is viewed as a strategic asset to enhance learning and university services. Through carefully planned investments, our technology infrastructure, computer classroom and lab facilities, computer access, administrative systems, web based tools and services for faculty, staff and students have improved dramatically. While the campus is experiencing the inherent strains of major software conversions, anticipated to be complete in 2005, the new systems will provide the foundation for expanded use and access to web based services that will keep the campus on the leading edge. The opening of Lampros Hall for Teaching, Learning and Technology in the fall 2004 provides a state of the art facility, with co-located information technology professionals, to better support faculty, staff and students.

Sound financial management and expanded external support

The university carefully manages its resources to meet the programmatic needs of the university without putting the university at risk during the economic ups and downs affecting state and tuition funding. Administrators at all levels are conservative in budgeting and spending. During the last few years, expanded private and sponsored project funding addressed some critical university needs for program, student and facility support and enhanced university excellence.

Diversity and inclusiveness

Weber State University has made significant strides in creating a campus culture in which everyone feels respected and valued. The Assistant to the President for Diversity and the Diversity Steering Committee provide leadership for university wide efforts including annual conferences and programs, division action teams, the diversity course requirement for students and interaction with the community advisory board. In the Shepherd Union Building, the Diversity Center provides diversity programming for all students. Faculty, staff and students across the campus participate in these activities.

Challenges

Changing fiscal environment

In the last five years, the portion of the university's appropriated budget funded from tuition revenues has increased from 28 to 40 percent of the budget and is expected to increase in the future. Reduced state funding and increased reliance on tuition and external funding sources will require the university to rethink many of its processes related to university and academic planning; budgeting; tuition setting; enrollment management including recruitment, financial aid packaging and retention; and enhancing private and sponsored project support. This shift from a state-funded to a state-assisted university must be a major focus for future university planning.

Multi-campus university identity

Establishing a strong community identity as a learner centered, multi-campus university offering quality academic programs and services to students across the region is critical for the future. The university must see itself and be seen by others as an outstanding multi-campus teaching university. Developing more effective strategies for communicating the quality of the Weber State University experience was identified as a major initiative in the recent planning cycle.

Student retention and graduation

The strength of our commitment to students must be demonstrated in our ability to retain students, helping them progress to graduation and transition successfully to careers or graduate and professional education. While the first Year Experience program has increased retention, there is more to do to help students succeed at WSU. Academic support, financial aid, advising, student mentoring and other support strategies must be enhanced through a strong partnership between Academic and Student Affairs. As the university continues to grow, academic programs must also intentionally create experiences, such as undergraduate research, service learning and internships, that engage students in active learning with faculty and produce exceptional graduates. Significant work on these issues has already begun as a result of the university planning process.

Faculty and staff support

Since 2001, the state has only provided a one percent ongoing salary increase for state employees. While the university has supplemented salary increases slightly through student tuition, significant salary dollars are needed to address the growing gap between average salaries at WSU and its peer institutions. In 2002-03 average salary gaps ranged from eight to 14 percent for staff and faculty, respectively. In addition, annual double digit cost increases in health insurance premiums require the university to share cost increases with employees beginning in 2004-05.

While struggling to meet compensation needs of faculty and staff, the university must also expand its investment in the professional development and scholarship of employees. This extends beyond our full time faculty to adjunct faculty and part time staff who are increasingly essential to the university. Salary increases and an inclusive, supportive environment that allow the university to attract and retain quality faculty and staff is a top priority for the university and has emerged as a major initiative in university planning.

Facilities

The WSU Ogden campus was fifty years old in 2003-04. The buildings constructed in the early days of this campus now require major renovation to meet the needs of growing enrollment, more sophisticated building codes and a technology oriented society. At the same time, the new campus in Davis will require the construction of new facilities to meet the rapid growth of the population in Davis County. Balancing the renewal of the Ogden campus with new construction needs at the Davis campus will require careful planning and execution of the facility master plans for both campuses.

University planning, budgeting and assessment

While the university has made great strides in assessment in the past five years and has begun an ongoing university planning process, the planning, budgeting and assessment processes must be better integrated. Assessment results need to link more clearly to the planning process and budget priorities should be determined by the plan. The university is currently developing university level performance measures that will inform future planning efforts, and we are examining ways to improve the university planning process itself. In the future, annual budgeting of both revenue and expenditures should be consistent with the university plan.

External mandates

Expanded federal, state and Regent requirements mandate strengthened compliance and internal controls within the university. This spans from financial controls to employment law and privacy issues. This will require increasing sophistication of university processes, training and internal controls.

Where do we go from here?

Building on our strengths, Weber State University will continue to evolve as a vibrant multi-campus, learner-centered university. As a leader in articulated programs from the associate to the graduate level offered at various physical and virtual sites, faculty and staff will increasingly engage students in active learning in and out of the classroom, online and in the community to prepare exceptional graduates for careers, graduate school and life. The campus will continue to nurture an inclusive, supportive environment in which faculty, staff and students thrive, while expanding our connections with and support from alumni and external communities. As the identified challenges indicate, this desired future will require more attention to a university planning process that integrates academic program, student support, enrollment, communications, infrastructure and financial planning in a changing fiscal environment. The specific strengths and challenges identified in the self study will inform the university planning process.



F. Ann Millner, President, WSU