

HIGHER VALUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION 2017-2027

Month, Day, 2022

Preamble

Western Illinois University was founded in 1899 as the Western Illinois State Normal School to address teacher preparation in the State's grammar schools. The faculty and students of Western were eager to meet this need, and the institution soon became known for its well-rounded, deeply committed graduates, a tradition that continues to this day.

As the years passed and the name was changed to Western Illinois State Teachers' College in 1921, and then to Western Illinois University in 1957, our mission continually broadened to include academic majors that prepared high school teachers; the state's earliest and most successful extension program; a multifaceted graduate school; a liberal arts program; and, eventually, distinguished colleges devoted to the Arts and Sciences, Business and Technology, Education and Human Services, Fine Arts and Communication, and Honors.

Through the 20th and 21st centuries we earned and maintained a reputation for expanding access to affordable, high-quality degree programs and fostering student involvement in University activities.

We are now a leading University with campuses in Macomb, the Quad Cities, and online. By virtue of our quality, opportunity, and affordability, we serve students from Illinois, across the nation, and around the world.

Together, we provide a transformative educational experience through the caring educator model. We empower students and graduates to become engaged and productive global citizens committed to making a difference in the diverse communities and professions they represent. Our alumni are leaders in their fields equipped with the knowledge, problemsolving skills, and community awareness necessary to address the professional, economic, and social issues of our time.

Through the successful implementation of Higher Values in Higher Education 2017-2027, we will advance Western Illinois University's Vision, Mission, Values, and related goals and priorities discussed in this Plan.

HIGHER VALUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION 2017-2027

Vision, Mission, and Values

Our Vision

Western Illinois University aims to be the leading public regional university in providing educational quality, opportunity, and affordability.

Our Mission

Western Illinois University empowers students, faculty, and staff to lead dynamic and diverse communities. We provide student-centered undergraduate and graduate programs characterized by innovative teaching, research, and service, grounded in multidisciplinary, regional, and global perspectives. We engage our students in educational opportunities guided by a professional and diverse faculty and staff in collaboration with alumni and community partners.

Our Values

Academic Excellence

Central to our history is the commitment to teaching, to the individual learner, and to active involvement in the teaching-learning process. Western Illinois University's highly qualified and diverse faculty promotes critical thinking, engaged learning, research, and creativity in a challenging, supportive learning community. We are committed to student success in an academic environment that encourages lifelong development as learners, scholars, teachers, and mentors.

Educational Opportunity

Western Illinois University values educational opportunity and welcomes those who show promise and a willingness to work toward achieving academic excellence. We are committed to providing accessible, high quality educational programs and financial support for our students.

Personal Growth

Western Illinois University values the development of the whole person. We are committed to providing opportunities for personal growth in a transformative educational environment that supports the development of wellness, ethical decision making, and personal responsibility in the global community.

Social Responsibility

Western Illinois University is committed to civic and community engagement, equity, social justice, and diversity and will maintain the highest standards of integrity in our work with others. We create an environment that fosters and promotes citizenship. We serve as a resource for and stimulus to educational, cultural, environmental, community and economic development in our region and well beyond it for the public good. -

HIGHER VALUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION 2017-2027

Executive Summary

Our Plan

As updated in June 2022, *Higher Values in Higher Education 2017-2027* defines Western Illinois University's vision for the next five years. It is based on results from empirical environmental scanning completed by the Social Responsibility Task Force, which was comprised of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members during academic year 2017-2018, as well as from a year-long, university-wide discussion, evaluation, and revision guided by the Provost's Office and the Strategic Plan Revision Steering Committee in 2021-22.

This plan is *a call to action* for the students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends of the University. Together, we will advance our traditions of excellence and implement new initiatives that will position the University for a strong and sustainable future.

To make this vision a reality, [Integrated Parallel Plans](#) were produced (in 2020-21) and will continue to be produced and implemented through 2027. These documents will address unforeseen changes and opportunities at the time of the initial writing of this strategic plan. Engaging in annual environmental scanning and continuous improvement will help to ensure that by 2027, Western Illinois University has achieved the priorities outlined by our twelfth President, Dr. Guiyou Huang in January of 2021: a stable, steadily increasing enrollment; an annual increase in retention and graduation rates; a more adept budgeting model that will lead to financial sustainability; a clear vision of institutional distinctiveness; and a culture that embodies and celebrates diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism.

Our Institutional Learning Outcomes

Western has four institutional learning outcomes, all of which are based on our core values and our mission statement. At Western students will:

- Develop problem-solving skills and engage in transformative learning experiences;
- Acquire significant content knowledge, various disciplinary skill sets, and engrained professional behaviors that lead to success;
- Practice professional integrity and ethical decision making;
- Celebrate diversity, equity, and inclusion, and commit to anti-racist practice and protocols.

These outcomes will be measured, reported, and reviewed through annual internal reporting documents, annual state-level reporting documents, and other means.

Our Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism

Western Illinois University has made it a priority to focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Everyone is welcome at Western, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, religion, age, marital status, national origin, disability, genetic information, and veteran status. Each person matters and deserves a respectful, civil, and supportive living, learning, and working environment.

Western Illinois University fosters respect, equity, and inclusion for all students, faculty, and staff. Western is committed to anti-racism, anti-oppression, equity, social justice, and diversity. We value inclusion as a

core value and as an essential element of Western's public service mission.

Western embraces individual uniqueness and a culture of inclusion that supports broad and specific diversity initiatives. Western believes in the educational and institutional benefits of diversity in society as integral to the success of all individuals.

At Western, we will:

- Maintain a safe and secure environment for all members of our Western communities;
- Educate and empower students, staff, and faculty to be social and environmental justice advocates;
- Provide curricula, programs, training, resources, and environments that reflect and strengthen the diversity of our communities in order to elevate cultural awareness and understanding;
- Ensure fair, equitable, and inclusive access to University facilities, programs, resources, and services;
- Create inclusive and equitable policies and practices;
- Diversify the University's workforce by assessing hiring practices to attract, retain, and develop talented staff and faculty from diverse backgrounds;
- Address disparities in representation, retention, learning outcomes, and graduation rates;
- Create a University-wide diversity plan to ensure a continued commitment to anti-racism, anti-oppression, equity, social justice, and diversity.

Our Strategic Goals

The strategic goals of Western Illinois University are stated below and represent how we as a university community will advance the values of the institution as we fulfill our mission and pursue our vision. Annual reports completed by every academic department and administrative unit, planning and accomplishment presentations made by the Vice Presidents and areas that report to the President, strategic plan reporting to university governance groups, continuing accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission, and our social responsibility as professional, caring educators hold us accountable to achieving the goals of this strategic plan.

Further, Western will strive to provide access and opportunity to those who are historically underrepresented in higher education, with particular attention paid to Black, Latinx, low-income, rural, disabled, veteran, and working adult students.

We are committed to providing accessible, high-quality educational programs, and financial and other support for our students to ensure they can all thrive at Western.

Goal 1: Enrich Academic Excellence

Action 1: Focus on the individual learner, prioritize collaborative and peer learning, and increase support for student success and achievement.

Action 2: Recruit, support, and retain high-potential and diverse students, faculty, and staff.

Action 3: Maintain high standards of excellence in instruction and in the assessment of student learning.

Action 4: Provide strong commitments to research, scholarly, and creative activities.

Action 5: Promote civic engagement, service learning, experiential learning, applied projects, and volunteerism.

Action 6: Upgrade and deliver user-centered, accessible information technology, and implement a

university-wide commitment to the use of Western Online and other course delivery technologies.
Action 7: Enhance and deliver accessible academic programming within and across disciplines.

Goal 2: Advance Educational Opportunity

Action 1: Establish and implement institution-level equity plans and practices to close access, progression, completion, and attainment gaps.

Action 2: Focus on quality in every aspect of the institution, including the student's campus experience, classroom experience, and residential life experience.

Action 3: Engage in educational outreach and recruitment activities targeted to populations historically underrepresented in higher education.

Action 4: Advance affordability and decrease time-to-degree rates.

Action 5: Increase retention and graduation rates, with special focus on opportunity gaps.

Action 7: Align academic programming with potential economic growth in our communities.

Goal 3: Support Personal Growth

Action 1: Promote physical and mental health and wellness of students, faculty, and staff.

Action 2: Enhance student and community engagement.

Action 3: Create a safe, accessible, and attractive campus in Macomb, the Quad Cities, and Online

Action 4: Educate students on the processes, procedures, and support services at Western

Action 5: Clearly commit to supportive and shared governance of the university

Goal 4: Promote Social Responsibility

Action 1: Promote civic engagement and service learning.

Action 2: Use state, local, and other partnerships to advance university, community and economic development.

Action 3: Celebrate diversity

Action 4: Create anti-racism actions, protocols, and policies.

HIGHER VALUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION 2017-2027

GOAL 1: ENRICH ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Western Illinois University will continue to recruit, retain, and support diverse, high-potential students, faculty, and staff. At its core, Western is defined by an activity that leads to a larger public good: our faculty and staff teach our learners, who then develop and grow as they move from our campuses into their professional, civic, and private lives.

We attract high-potential students, excellent faculty, and committed staff because we set, expect, and achieve high standards for the institution and one another. We strive for and are achieving national leadership in quality and in opportunity, and we empower students, faculty, and staff to lead dynamic and diverse communities.

To continue recruiting and retaining our students, faculty, and staff, we will provide supportive, inclusive, and intellectually rich classroom and campus environments where our Western community can thrive. We will continue to develop institutional policies and procedures that promote a culture that responds to student, faculty, and staff needs as we individually and collectively advance the vision, mission, and values of the University.

Action 1: Focus on the individual learner, prioritize collaborative and peer learning, and increase support for student success and achievement.

We continue to advance student success through the caring educator model. From the onset of their educational experience, learners at Western work closely with faculty and staff in their discipline and across the University.

During the next five years, we will continue this individual focus and its resulting excellence by doing the following:

- a) Support contractual agreements that place instruction as the highest priority of faculty
- b) Use Annual Reports and the Integrated Parallel Plans as a way to evaluate and subsequently enhance academic and support structures for students on all campuses.
- c) Engage in planning and implementing priorities to increase student engagement in educational activities highly correlated with persistence and completion.
- d) Engage in planning and implementing initiatives to increase both peer learning and individual mentorship.

Action 2: Recruit, support, and retain high-potential, diverse students, faculty, and staff

To enrich the academic experiences on Western's campuses, we must create a learning and living environment that is diverse and supportive. As such, we will do the following:

- a) Advance faculty and staff recruitment
- b) Enhance university-wide support and retention for students, faculty, and staff
- c) Increase accountability for all university programs, departments, and units per HLC and other accrediting bodies.

Action 3: Maintain high standards of excellence in instruction and in the assessment of student learning

Embedded in the University's history is the commitment to teaching and the individual learner. Providing high-quality instruction is the highest priority of the faculty. We will continue delivering high standards of instructional excellence, with strong commitments to the assessment of student learning, and a continuous improvement model at all levels of the educational experience. We will also continue to promote an academic culture that values and engages in transdisciplinary interactions and provides professional development opportunities to faculty and staff.

To honor these commitments and maintain these standards, we will:

- a) Follow the University's Assessment Plan to use results from assessment of student learning in general education, undergraduate majors, and graduate programs to inform curricular revision and development.
- b) Support multidisciplinary course, program, institute, and center development and sustainability.
- c) Demonstrate institutional commitments to instruction by maintaining the highest percentage of institutional expenditures in support of instruction and the academic mission of the University.
- d) Better integrate Western Online into the daily operation and delivery of academic curriculum.

Action 4: Provide strong commitments to research, scholarly, and creative activities

We will continue to demonstrate strong commitments to research, scholarly, and creative activities.

The faculty and staff of Western Illinois University are highly accomplished in scholarship and creative activities. In order to continue this success, we will:

- a) Allocate institutional resources and assistance to support faculty and staff in research, scholarly/creative activities, and grant-generating activities.
- b) Evaluate the effectiveness of programs, services and events designed to support scholarship and creative activities.
- c) Use available resources to support student, faculty, and staff travel to professional associations, conferences, and workshops, which is a necessary component of tenure and professional currency.
- d) Support faculty sabbaticals as a means for faculty members to advance their research and scholarly agendas.
- e) Provide educational leave opportunities for staff members where such opportunities are used for study, research, and/or professional growth.
- f) Augment institutional resources to encourage and promote research, creative, and scholarly activities with special emphasis on supporting new and junior faculty members.
- g) Host domestic and international visiting scholars, executives, and artists in residence programs.

Action 5: Promote civic engagement and service learning

We will continue national leadership in the provision of mission-driven public service and civic engagement. As of Fall 2020, Western Illinois University is classified as a Best Practice, "Community Engaged" Institution by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Our students, faculty, and staff apply disciplinary expertise and professional commitments to advance the social, economic, cultural, and ethical quality of life for members of our host communities, regions, and beyond. We serve as volunteers and board members, and actively participate in civic engagement, service

learning, fundraising, and many other activities designed to advance the public good.

In order to continue to build stronger, more resilient, more dynamic communities, we will:

- a) Support student, faculty, and staff public service actions that are consistent with the University's Community Engagement classification.
- b) Use university public service centers, the Auxiliary Facilities System (UHDH, University Union, and Campus Recreation), University Libraries, institutes, and broadcasting services to support community engagement.

Action 6: Deliver user-centered information technology and implement a university-wide commitment to use Western Online and other course-delivery technologies

We will provide user-centered information technology to support instruction, research and scholarly/creative activities, educational outreach, public service. University Technology provides a secure, reliable, and high-speed technological infrastructure; an efficient and effective operations environment; integrated information management solutions; and other high-quality, timely services to support to the University community.

Likewise, University Libraries identifies, collects, organizes, preserves, and provides access to information resources and services to support students, faculty, staff, and external patrons.

Both University Technology and University Libraries have liaison programs, committees, and other processes to encourage communication and shared planning to meet the needs of Western's students, faculty, and staff. Both entities are committed to supporting a connected, modern educational environment.

As such, we will continue to prioritize a university-wide commitment to these forms of information technology, as well as an intentional plan to better use Western Online. In order to accomplish this last goal, we will:

- a) Continue to engage in IT Shared Governance and other means to increase communication, collaborative planning, and better use of technologies on our campuses.
- b) Provide user-centered library services and resources to support and meet the needs of students, faculty, staff, and community patrons.
- c) Develop accountability and more intentional practices in the use of Western Online and the services of the Office of Distance Education and Support.

Action 7: Enhance and deliver innovative and accessible academic programming

Academic programming sits at the center of Western's pursuit of academic excellence. In order to enhance and develop our innovative and accessible programming, we will:

- a) Continue to apply, at every level, heavy scrutiny to all new academic course or program proposals
- b) Promote innovation and creativity in developing new programs

- c) Align all new programing with high standards of accessibility and community needs

GOAL 2: ADVANCE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

We define educational opportunity as providing a service to high-potential, diverse students with high-quality academic programs and learning communities. We have a strong academic portfolio and we will continue to deliver excellent educational opportunities to our immediate region and the surrounding communities.

Action 1: Establish and implement institution-level equity plans and practices to close access, progression, completion, and attainment gaps

We will strive to provide greater access and opportunity to those learners who are historically underrepresented in higher education. We recognize that the first step in this work comes from planning and developing new practices and perspectives in our everyday culture.

To take this first step, we will:

- a) Align our planning with both the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) strategic plan, *A Thriving Illinois*, and the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) strategic plan, *EVOLVE*.
- b) Participate in the second cohort of the American Council of Education (ACE) project, The Learner Success Lab (LSL), which will allow us to develop specific, granular-level initiatives that will increase retention rates for those students in historically underrepresented groups
- c) Foster widespread university and community investment in these initiatives.

Action 2: Focus on quality in every aspect of the institution, including the student's campus experience, classroom experience, and residential life experience.

We will emphasize our institutional quality as we move forward through the next five years. We will increase our market-share of high school graduates, international students, transfer students, and students looking to pursue graduate education. In order to do this, we will:

- a) Emphasize the quality, outcomes, and personal attention associated with Western Illinois University in marketing and public relations materials.
- b) Use program review and discipline-specific accreditation processes to assure and advance programmatic quality and viability
- c) Use co-curricular assessment and other annual reporting to focus on quality in residential life experiences.

Action 3: Engage in educational outreach and recruitment activities targeted to populations historically underrepresented in higher education

We will increase the number of prospective students visiting campus each year, and we will improve the campus experience during these visits.

In this work we will include historically underrepresented student populations with the intention of increasing accessibility and opportunities for these learners.

To do this, we will:

- a) Increase year-round educational outreach activities that bring prospective applicants to Western

Illinois University and engage faculty and staff who want to participate in these actions .

- b) Bring more applicants and students who have been accepted to campus prior to initial registration and enrollment.
- c) Implement specific strategies to capture a greater market share of enrollment from the University's immediate 16-county service region to prevent continued population loss in west central Illinois.
- d) Enact new recruitment strategies inside and outside the University's 16 county service region to attract more dual enrolled students, freshmen, transfers, and graduate students from Illinois and beyond.
- e) Increase recruitment partnerships.
- f) Provide new educational opportunities by developing the new programs and reinvesting in existing programs that have a clear, high demand.
- g) Advance opportunities by focusing recruitment initiatives on underrepresented learner groups

Action 4: Advance affordability and decrease time-to-degree dates

At Western, we value student access, persistence, and completion when providing national leadership in access and affordability.

We emphasize quality, affordability, and cost predictability. These are all key tenets of Western Illinois University. As of Spring 2022, over 75% of our students receive financial assistance, with 49% of the Macomb students and 32% of the Quad Cities students receiving Pell Grants.

Western Illinois University is poised to reduce the opportunity gap in Illinois.

To build on these efforts and advance our national leadership in access and student persistence and completion, we will do the following:

- a) Continue to engage in fiscally conservative, mission-driven spending that limits cost increases to new students.
- b) Maintain competitive values for Western Commitment Scholarship and other financial aid programs.
- c) Implement and evaluate new strategies designed to decrease or eliminate the difference between student costs and financial aid.
- d) Work with Financial Aid Office, Budget Office, and others to improve the student experience.

Action 5: Increase retention and graduation rates with focus on the opportunity gap

We will improve retention and graduation rates, and we will reduce the opportunity gap that defines the experience of many learners in the state of Illinois. To do this, we will:

- a) Address costs and relevance of programs.
- b) Enhance the institution's student-readiness through comprehensive annual assessment.
- c) Improve college transitions and the sense of belonging.
- d) Increase responsiveness to learner needs by expanding delivery modalities that promote increased graduation and decreased time-to-degree rates.

- e) Participate in statewide and national initiatives designed to decrease time-to-degree

Action 6: Align academic programming with the potential economic growth of our communities

As noted in the Preamble of this plan, from its inception Western Illinois University has been an institution devoted to the needs of the west-central Illinois region, and an institution connected to the economic growth and stability of that region.

In order to maintain this tradition, we will:

- a) Pay close attention to the feasibility of and market need for all new academic programs
- b) Conduct annual analyses of market, economic, and intellectual needs in the region
- c) Continue our long commitment to educating students who will become teachers, professionals in legal and justice administration, professionals in public health and social work, professionals in business and technology, and professionals in the traditional STEM disciplines, the Fine Arts, the Humanities, and the Social Sciences.

Goal 3: Support Personal Growth

We will continue to take a holistic approach in supporting the personal growth of students, faculty, and staff. With the understanding that optimal health and wellness supports optimal personal and professional growth, we provide comprehensive programs, services, and events in these areas. We also emphasize the sense of belonging and community. Engagement inside and outside the classroom is a proven correlate of goal attainment, student persistence and completion, and professional achievement.

Our support of personal growth extends to community-university engagement, and the social, economic, and cultural development and enrichment opportunities it provides. We value lifelong learning and participation in university events to these ends.

Action 1: Promote mental and physical health and wellness of students, faculty, and staff

We will continue to support physically- and psychologically-healthy lifestyles, which will in turn continue to create healthy learning and working environments. To cultivate mental and physical well-being in every aspect of university community, we will:

- a) Increase health, wellness, and recreational programs, services, and activities provided by the University.
- b) Expand health, wellness, and recreational partnerships with local/regional providers to address needs and services for students, faculty, and staff.
- c) Evaluate the feasibility of establishing new sports clubs and other areas of campus recreation.

Action 2: Enhance student and community engagement

We will insist that students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members become more engaged with the University. Participation in these university events supports analyzing ideas, experiences, and lines of reasoning and artistic display in depth; forming new ideas and understandings; encouraging contact among individuals from different backgrounds; and engaging in lifelong learning.

Participation and support of female and male intercollegiate athletic programs also has many benefits related to personal growth, and as such, we will promote participation in these activities.

To advance a high level of participation we will:

- a) Engage high-profile university speakers and performers on both campuses to increase campus and community engagement
- b) Use artist/scholar/expert-in-residence programs to enable visiting professional(s) to be actively engaged with students, faculty staff, and community members on topics of interdisciplinary interest(e.g., tax preparation, religious understanding) during their stay at the University
- c) Provide the university and surrounding communities with a diverse season of quality cultural entertainment opportunities
- d) Offer professional development opportunities in academic disciplines to members of our host and external communities
- e) Enhance opportunities for lifelong learning of senior citizens
- f) Support a broad-based National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I and Football

Championship Series varsity intercollegiate athletics program. This includes funding commitments to support our athletic program at a level that allows student-athletes to be successful and competitive within our respective conferences and nationally

- g) Demonstrate strict adherence to NCAA operating principles related to governance and rules compliance, academic integrity, equity, and student-athlete welfare
- h) Host arts and selected athletic events in the Quad Cities to increase community engagement and support for the University

Action 3: Provide safe, accessible, and attractive campus environments in Macomb, Quad Cities, and online.

We will provide safe and secure learning and living environments for our students, faculty, staff, and guests of the University. Our safe and accessible campus environments are guided by our Campus Master Plans; our objective, as outlined in these plans, is to provide the premier facilities and grounds that premier students, faculty, and staff deserve. As part of our facilities planning and curricular delivery, we are strongly committed to environmental sustainability and justice.

- a) Support educational programs, services, and partnerships committed to the prevention of crime; protection of life and property; preservation of peace, order, and safety; and enforcement of laws and University policies
- b) Enhance university facilities.
- c) Demonstrate statewide and national leadership in environmental sustainability.

Action 4: Educate students on the processes, procedures, and support services at Western.

[Use integrated parallel plan and HLC evidence file for this]

Action 5: Clearly commit to supportive and shared governance at Western.

[Use HLC evidence file for this]

Goal 4: Promote Social Responsibility

We will continue to uphold our social responsibilities. Students, their families, taxpayers, and donors invest in the *Mission* of Western Illinois University to prepare students, faculty, and staff to lead in dynamic and diverse communities. We understand that we are the stewards of these donations and tuition dollars, as well as the time that each learner invests in their pursuit of a degree from Western. And we understand that we have a social responsibility to provide safe, accessible, responsive, and sustainable environments to support our academic mission.

In preparing students to lead in dynamic and diverse communities, we will advance civic engagement and economic development. We will work with business, industry, education, governmental agencies, municipalities, non-profit agencies, and other individuals from the public and private sectors to make Western Illinois University the partner of choice in advancing educational, organizational, cultural, environmental, community and economic development in our region and well beyond. At the same time, we will use partnerships to advance the vision, mission, goals, and priorities of the University, and we will remain accountable and transparent in achieving the goals of this *Strategic Plan*.

Action 1: Promote civic engagement and service learning

We will continue advancing civic engagement as means for preparing students to lead in their communities. Through Western's transformative, active, and engaged educational process, our alumni have the knowledge, analytical skills, and civic disposition required to address local and global challenges.

Our alumni are prepared to lead and have an immediate impact in their chosen professions. Many Western Illinois University students have had professional experiences through internships, student teaching, simulations, and other forms of experiential learning. The American Association of Colleges & Universities emphasizes the importance of these experiences accompanied by structured reflection because these actions enable students to build practitioner skills in the transition from theory to practice. To continue this work we will:

- a) Form a Task Force of students, faculty, and staff to focus on communication, collaboration and increasing and supporting student civic engagement on the three campuses.
- b) Prepare students for civic engagement and the global workforce by emphasizing diversity and inclusivity in race, culture, socioeconomic status, religion, and other dimensions of personal and community identity in the curriculum, programs, services, and events.
- c) Increase student participation in service learning, internships, student teaching, simulations, and other forms of experiential learning.

Action 2: Use state, local, and other partnerships to advance university, community, and economic development

We will continue to be essential our region. Western Illinois University provides an educational experience that develops the talent needed for our local and global communities.

Serving as the largest employer in the Macomb region and as the only public university in the Quad Cities region illustrates the symbiotic and mutually beneficial relationships between the University and our host communities and regions. A strong University strengthens its community and regions, while their strength likewise strengthens the University.

Western has a proud tradition in community and economic development. The Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs (IIRA), for example, was established in 1989 after a Task Force on the Future of Rural Illinois completed 25 public hearings. IIRA was chartered as a companion agency to the Governors Rural Affairs Council and charged with finding innovative solutions for rural issues that can be implemented in Illinois and providing technical assistance to policy makers. These efforts have focused on economic development, value-added rural development, health care, transportation and infrastructure, public management, housing strategies, and information technology.

By valuing our role in university, community, and economic development, we will continue to work with members of the western Illinois region to recruit and retain talent, business, and industry, which in turn creates and expands jobs, and sustains a strong tax base. Likewise, we will use new and enhanced partnerships to leverage additional goals and priorities of the region and the University, with the latter including decreasing institutional tuition reliance.

We will:

- a) Enhance University partnerships.
- b) Expand community and economic development partnerships by using the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs (IIRA), the Illinois Innovation Network, and other similar structures

Summary and Conclusion

As members of the Western Illinois University community, we share in the goals of recruiting, retaining, and graduating students in a transformative educational experience where learners engage in the discovery, acquisition, and application of knowledge for personal enrichment and in preparation for future occupations and/or graduate and advanced studies. We do so in a manner that is inclusive and engaging; it is an educational environment built upon the foundation of our core values-- academic excellence, educational opportunity, personal growth and social responsibility.

We are nationally recognized for our leadership in quality, opportunity, affordability, community and economic development, and graduating more students than predicted based on academic preparation variables.

We empower students to become engaged and productive global citizens committed to making a difference in the diverse communities and professions that they represent. Our alumni are leaders in their fields equipped with knowledge, problem solving skills, and community awareness necessary to address the professional, economic, and social issues of our time.

We are a strong and resilient university. Simply stated, Western Illinois University's traditions of excellence have and will continue. This will be evidenced by the successful attainment of the goals, priorities, and actions in this *Strategic Plan*.