

To: Members of the Western Illinois University Board of Trustees
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From: Joe Rives, Vice President, Quad Cities and Planning

Date: July 19, 2016

Re: July 2016 Strategic Plan Update

Western Illinois University has a proud tradition in the delivery of distance education, serving as Illinois' first and largest Extension (off-campus) program. The provision of a high quality distance education program supports university goals and priorities to serve place-bound students who cannot access a WIU campus (e.g., those who are deployed for military service or relocated for work), ensures that all degrees can be completed in a timely manner, and supports the recruitment of working professionals as students in the President's Executive Corporate Cluster.

With these and many more advantages, this month's *Strategic Plan Update* documents the enrollment growth and quality (national recognitions received) of distance education at Western Illinois University. The data shows that Western provides in-demand, growing, high-quality distance education programs that are consistent with the vision of *Higher Values in Higher Education* to serve as a national leader in quality, opportunity, and affordability.

The Distance Learning Portfolio

Western Illinois University has Higher Learning Commission approval to offer courses, degrees, and post-baccalaureate certificates through distance education modalities, as appropriate to the discipline. The Commission defines distance education modalities as courses delivered in videoconference, online, and/or hybrid format. The University is a member and follows National Council for State Authorization for Reciprocity Agreements *Guidelines* to assure quality in distance education delivery.

Western's undergraduate degrees that can be completed fully online include Fire Administration, General Studies, and the RN to BSN. Master's degrees in Business Administration, Elementary Education (Elementary Curriculum and Literacy specializations), Instructional Design and Technology (IDT), and post baccalaureate certificates in IDT can be fully completed online, as well.

The University added new hybrid programs to its distance education portfolio in fall 2015 with the establishment of hybrid master's degree programs in business administration and college student personnel. Students in the hybrid model receive 25% of their course instruction on-campus and the remaining 75% online.

In addition to degrees that can be fully completed online or in hybrid format, the University has 81 undergraduate options/emphases and six graduate programs where 50% or more of the degree requirements can be completed through distance education modalities. There are other programs that have 50% or less of degree requirements available from distance education modalities.

Enrollment Growth in Distance Education

Figure 1 shows a 39% increase in distance education headcount enrollment from fall 2011 compared to fall 2015, and again from spring 2012 compared to spring 2016. Summer 2011 to 2015 off-campus

headcount enrollment remained relatively constant, increasing by 1.3% or from 2,034 students in summer 2011 to 2,061 students in summer 2015.

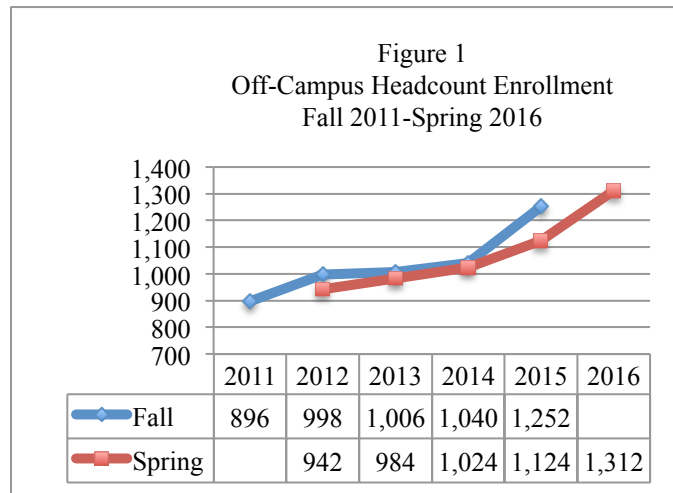
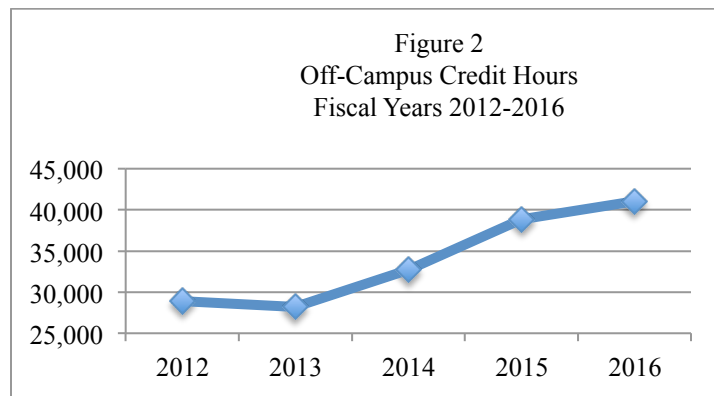


Figure 2 shows similar gains in total student credit hour production in distance learning between Fiscal Years 2012 and 2016. Credit hours earned in off-campus courses increased by 42%, from 28,986 hours in FY12 to 41,049 hours in FY16.



Distance learning enrollments are expected to increase as the University continues to earn national recognitions for excellence in distance education (described below), expands recruitment of working professionals through the President’s Executive Corporate Cluster, and responds to market-based distance learning opportunities. For example, 94% of the seats offered in the fall 2015 new hybrid programs were filled. Based upon this success, the University will be adding a hybrid master’s degree in Community and Economic Development in fall 2016. The Illinois Institute of Rural Affairs will deliver this new program.

National Recognitions for Quality

Previous *Strategic Plan Updates* have documented Western’s placement in national rankings of quality for distance education. For example, the *February 2016 Strategic Plan Update* showed that US News and World Report placed the University’s distance learning program in the “2016 Best Online Programs: Bachelor’s Category.” This was the fifth consecutive year that the University has earned this distinction. Western ranked 92nd in the review of colleges and universities from across the United States.

Most recently, the College Choice recognized Western Illinois University as a “2016 Best Midwestern Regional University,” and the School of Nursing as a “Best Online RN to BSN Degree Program.” These rankings were based academic reputation, financial aid offerings, cost, and success of graduates in the post-college job market. Western ranked 44th overall and the RN to BSN program ranked 18th.

A future Strategic Plan Update will provide detailed comparisons of the College Choice rankings. For the purposes of this *Update*, it is clear that Western’s distance learning program contributes to student success and institutional quality measures. Within academic year 2015-2016, this includes:

- The United States Department of Education placing Western Illinois University in the top 2% of 2,053 public and private four-year institutions in the retention and graduation of low-income students.
- The *Washington Monthly* placing Western in in the top 7% of 403 colleges and universities contributing to social mobility (recruiting and graduating low-income students), research (producing cutting-edge scholarship and PhDs), and service (encouraging students to give something back to their country).
- The Economist’s placing Western in the top 24% nationally (ranking 303rd on the list of 1,275 institutions) in the positive difference between actual and predicted alumni salaries.

These rankings triangulate other university recognitions received during academic year 2015-2016. Western was named: a “Best Midwestern University” by US News and World Report for the eleventh consecutive year, a “Best Midwestern College” by the Princeton Review for the twelfth consecutive year, and a “Military Friendly School” by Victory Media for the seventh consecutive year.

Summary

The data provided in this month’s *Strategic Plan Update* shows that Western Illinois University provides in-demand, growing, and high-quality distance education programs. The delivery of these programs is consistent with the vision of *Higher Values in Higher Education* to be a national leader in quality, opportunity, and affordability in both synchronous and asynchronous learning environments.

Please contact me if you have any questions about the materials presented in this month’s *Update* and/or feedback for the continued successful advancement of *Higher Values in Higher Education*.

cc: President Thomas CSEC President Dorethy SGA President Frank
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