



Application Submission

An interested institution should submit its application to Academy@hlcommission.org (paper applications are not accepted). Applications should:

**Academy Application
2013-14 and 2014-15**

WESTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY	MACOMB, IL	AUGUST 21, 2013
Name of Institution	City, State	Application Date

Preferred Point of Entry to the Academy

Please choose 3 possible dates, with at least one date in 2014 and one date in 2015

- (1) March 12-14, 2014 (required Information and Planning Workshop event December 12-13, 2013)
- (2) June 18-20, 2014 (required Information and Planning Workshop event March 17-18, 2014)
October 2014 (required Information and Planning Workshop event July 2014; dates TBD)
- (3) February 2015 (required Information and Planning Workshop event November 2014; dates TBD)
June 2015 (required Information and Planning Workshop event March 2015; dates TBD)
November 2015 (required Information and Planning Workshop event August 2015; dates TBD)

Note: The Commission determines Academy entry point based on the selection process, which includes the process of constructing cohorts based on needs, goals, institutional types, mission, size, and other factors.

Cohort Groups in the Academy

Institutions will join the Academy in cohorts of 16-20 institutions. Within these cohorts, the Commission plans to group institutions by general type, by Academy Track (A or B), and if possible, by size. Some institutions have indicated that they'd like to participate based on the student group that is the focus of the work. Other institutions have indicated that they wish to join in conjunction with one or more institution(s) and to work collaboratively with these institutions on the shared issues while in the Academy. **In these cases, the institution should contact Amber Holloway, aholloway@hlcommission.org, for specific directions on applying for participation in the Academy.**

Purpose for Academy Participation

Institutions in the PEAQ, AQIP, Standard, and Open Pathways may join the Academy at any time for their own benefit as long as they are eligible. For institutions on the Open Pathway, the Academy may serve as the Quality Initiative if engaged at the appropriate time in the accreditation cycle. For institutions in AQIP, the Academy may serve as one or more action projects.

Check the applicable purpose below.

- Open Pathway Quality Initiative (Institutions must begin participation no later than June of Year 5 and complete no later than June of Year 9. Institutions may join in Year 4 at the completion of their Year 4 review and decision process, if applicable.)
- AQIP Action Project(s)
- Other institutional purposes (Institutions on the PEAQ, AQIP, Open, and Standard Pathways may join the Academy at any time for their own benefit.)

Application Questions

The institution should provide its responses to the following questions in no more than eight pages at ten-point type.

Recent Efforts

1. Provide a brief overview of your recent efforts to improve student persistence and completion. Include the groups and individuals that have been involved in these efforts.

Recent efforts to improve retention and graduation rates include revising the First Year Experience program in Macomb, initiating a dual enrollment (Linkages) program with regional community colleges in the Quad Cities, and completing a 2010 Special Emphasis on Strengthening Distance Education as part of Western Illinois University's *Self-Study for Re-Accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission-North Central Association of Colleges and Schools*.

Western Illinois University-Macomb is a residential campus that serves over 10,000 students in a rural community. The First Year Experience (FYE) program was designed as a comprehensive approach to ensure first year students make a successful transition to college.

The FYE begins with the mandatory one and a half day Summer Orientation and Registration (SOAR) program. Students attend academic sessions with faculty, participate in math and English placement exercises, meet with academic advisors, register for fall classes, learn about campus resources and services, receive their student ID card, experience the residential environment, and interact with other students. Family and guests become familiar with academic and advising processes, attend family orientation sessions, learn how to adjust to common transition issues faced by students and families, gather information about campus resources and services, meet other family members, and share common experiences

Freshmen take two FYE courses during their first semester--UNIV 100 (a college transition seminar) and a "Y" section of a general education or pre-professional course. These special courses are limited to freshmen only and offer small class sizes of approximately 22 students. All First Year students live together in designated first year residence halls and all new freshmen participate in the Building Connections mentoring program that pairs each student with a faculty or staff mentor.

Western Illinois University-Quad Cities (WIU-QC) is located in Moline Illinois, serving over 1,400 students in an urban area of over 400,000 residents. WIU-QC began implementing a dual enrollment (Linkages) program with local community colleges (Black Hawk College, Eastern Iowa Community Colleges, and Sauk Valley Community College) in 2011. The program allows students to enroll at Western and the partner community college at the same time beginning the freshman year, provided the student meets WIU admissions and continuation standards .

The program was designed to advance priorities and goals in WIU's *Higher Values in Higher Education* and the Illinois Board of Higher Education's (the State's coordinating board for higher education) Illinois Public Agenda strategic plans. This includes:

- *Reducing College Costs.* WIU's four-year Cost Guarantee ensures that students do not receive tuition, fee, and housing increases after the time of admission for four years provided the student maintains continuous fall/spring enrollment. Linkages students can save up to 25% of their college costs and for students on financial aid, there is no unmet need.
- *Decreasing Time-to-Degree.* Community colleges do not require advisement in all programs. Students were transferring to WIU with more credit hours than required for the baccalaureate degree. WIU-QC requires mandatory advisement to reinforce the importance of timely degree planning and completion. There is demonstrated need for tighter integration between the community colleges and WIU-QC.
- *Increasing Educational Attainment Levels.* Rock Island County (the host county of WIU-QC) has the fourth highest percentage of Associates degree recipients of 103 Illinois counties, but the fourth lowest percentage of baccalaureate degree recipients. There is demonstrated need for tighter integration between the community colleges and WIU-QC.

- *Implementing Best Practices.* The Illinois Board of Higher Education and the Illinois Student Assistance Commission practice supported WIU's Linkages proposal as an innovative best practice. The literature in higher education shows that retention rates can increase by as much as 25% in dual enrollment programs.

Linkages program enrollment increased by 477 percent, from 26 students in fall 2011 to 150 students in fall 2013. The program is entering its third year and to promote continuous process improvement, transparency, accountability, and to inform assessment of student learning occurring within departments and schools, it is time to engage in program evaluation.

Western has Illinois' first and largest extension (off-campus) program. WIU offers on-line degree programs in Master's in business administration, master's instructional technology, bachelor's in General Studies, M.S. Ed. in Elementary Education, and RN to BSN completion (2011). Western also uses distance education (on-line and two-way, audio video connections) to ensure that all 42 academic programs at WIU-QC can be completed on-site and/or supplemented by distance education to increase educational access and achievements of place bound residents.

WIU codes student enrollment by campus and where the student receives the majority of credit hours (on- or off-campus). The latter includes distance education, which is a growing market segment. The number of off-campus students in Macomb increased 5.9% in the last four years, from 779 in fall 2009 to 825 in fall 2012. Likewise, the number of off-campus students in the Quad Cities increased by 184%, from 61 to 173 during this time.

Providing distance education advances institutional and statewide priorities of increasing educational access to place bound residents. Evaluating factors effecting and influencing off-campus retention will lead to programmatic modifications and continuous process improvements that were commitments in WIU's Strengthening Distance Education Special Emphasis.

2. List the data sets you have related to persistence, retention, and completion and how you have used the data to determine ways to improve persistence and completion. Please be specific and relate your data to student types/groups.

Western Illinois University has a comprehensive "cradle to grave" Student Information System enabling cohort and longitudinal data analyses. Information keyed by University Identification Number includes application, acceptance, enrollment, graduation, and alumni files. Information is available on student preparation (e.g., ACT, high school rank), demographics, and academic progression. Course information files linked to student information files produce analyses of academic performance. Issues of retention and graduation can also be studied by linking financial aid files. Over 75% of WIU University students receive financial assistance (scholarships, grants, loans, and/or student employment).

WIU has several years of National Survey of Student Engagement and National Clearinghouse data, and the Office of Institutional Research and Planning (IRP) administers alumni surveys one, five, and nine years after graduation on a rotational basis. IRP produces an annual Fact Book (wiu.edu/IRP/factbook.php) on descriptive measures of Western Illinois University students, faculty, and staff. Persistence, graduation, and time-to-degree data are displayed for total cohorts and selected populations (e.g., by race, gender, or major).

IRP also produces an Academic Performance Measures (www.wiu.edu/IRP/academic_productivity/index.php) that are used at the Provost's annual summer retreat and include five-year trends in enrollment, credit hours, retention and graduation rates, degrees conferred, number of courses offered, and external funding by college and department/school to monitor and evaluate quality and empirically inform academic and institutional planning.

The availability of data promotes a culture of empirical decision-making. For example :

- Program faculty in General Education and all undergraduate and graduate programs are responsible for defining intended student learning outcomes, collecting assessment data, analyzing findings, and reporting results, achievements and process improvements (current or planned)

annually to the Provost's Office for review and response. The Student Learning Assessment Committee, Assessment Facilitator, Associate Provost for Undergraduate and Graduate Studies, and data provided by IRP supports departmental assessment efforts.

- All academic programs engage in the program review process to demonstrate academic quality and viability. When a new program is established, it is placed on a state-mandated three-year review cycle. At the time of the three-year review, the program is continued, suspended, or eliminated. If a program is continued, it is placed on an eight-year review cycle, where academic evaluations are made with regard to enrollment, percent of graduates employed in the field, alumni career advancement, graduate/employer satisfaction with the program, retention and graduation rates, time-to-degree, and percent of students involved in faculty research or other projects.
- The President's Leadership Team (President and Vice Presidents) established a First Year Experience Review Team to evaluate program effectiveness first-year retention rates decreased from 73% for the fall 2005 through fall 2009 cohorts of new freshmen to 68% for the fall 2011 cohort of new freshmen. The Review Team consisted of 19 students, faculty, and staff who reviewed institutional data, and campus survey and focus group results. As a result of the Team's work, the FYE was modified for fall 2013. Changes include clarifying program goals, eliminating common reading, requiring a transition and small General Education/pre-professional course, branding the program, and providing residents assistants with campus resource training .

Purposes and Outcomes

3. Explain the issues you want to address while in the Academy and why these issues are significant and relevant at this time.

There are three areas of student retention and graduation (issues) that WIU wishes to address while in the academy. These areas are stated as research questions below with justification for why each of these issues are significant and relevant at this time.

- *Research Question 1: What are empirical reasons for lower retention and graduation rates and have programmatic changes in the First Year Experience helped reverse these trends?* WIU invested significant resources (operating and personnel) to the First Year Experience and is committed to advancing student retention and graduation rates.
- *Research Question 2: How effective is the Linkages Program and are there different results based on categorization of students and community college partners?* WIU implemented new dual enrollment programs three years ago. From an accountability perspective, it is time to evaluate program effectiveness to ensure that students admitted through the program are successful and have access to effective academic and student support services.
- *Research Question 3: What are empirical reasons for off-campus student attrition and how do retention and graduation rates for off-campus students compare to retention rates on-campus students?* WIU makes strong commitments to place bound students through its Extension program and electronic student services. To engage in empirical analyses of off-campus students will provide support continuous process improvement and inform academic program reviews.

4. Describe the student groups that will be the focus of your efforts while in the Academy and why you've chosen these specific groups.

- Research Question 1 will focus on data from the fall 2005 through fall 2013 cohorts of first-time freshmen on the Macomb Campus.
- Research Question 2 will focus on data for Linkages students admitted to Western Illinois University-Quad Cities from fall 2009 to fall 2013.
- Research Question 3: will focus on Extension students from both campuses for the last five years.

5. Explain the specific outcomes you wish to achieve in terms of the issues and student groups you've identified.

The research questions above were specifically chosen to:

- *Advance the culture of informed empirical decision making* by building on past policy analyses and disaggregating the data to further understand trends, recognizing that some process enhancements made be targeted to subpopulations instead of one solution applied to all students.
- *Use data to implement solutions.* Academy participation offers a place for experimentation, innovation, and learning.
- *Build upon Academy experiences to implement other structures and processes.* Two of the three research questions focus on freshmen. While WIU 's freshmen retention rate ranges between 68% and 73%, the University's six-year graduation rate averages around 54%. Additional attrition happens between the sophomore and senior years. WIU will apply analytic strategies and process improvements learned in the Academy to all levels of students, just as we generalized the assessment processes for general education learned in the Commission's Assessment Academy to all undergraduate and graduate programs.

6. Describe potential challenges and issues in implementing the initiative.

The distribution of total state appropriations has changed from 49% general revenue and 51% university income fund (tuition) in Fiscal Year 2009 to 41% general revenue and 59% university income fund in Fiscal Year 2013. With decreasing state support and increasing reliance on tuition income, it is essential that the University understand factors effecting and influencing student retention and that programs achieve optimal effectiveness. This is especially important to an institution where over 75% of students receive financial aid, and more students are experiencing unmet financial need, both in terms of frequency and magnitude.

A challenge in the Academy will be not to rush to solutions. Taking the time to disaggregate data will lead to better understanding of issues and challenges for the population and subpopulations of WIU students. The opportunity to take advantage of the program modification, experimentation, implementation, and continuous process improvement will occur after data analysis.

An opportunity as a result of implementing this initiative is to increase distributed data and use. WIU 's Student Information System is based on a legacy system and requires programming for data analyses. The University has initiated data warehouse projects and Academy participation gives additional priority to sustain this momentum.

Scope and Significance

7. Explain how work on persistence and completion aligns with current academic or strategic priorities.

Question #1 demonstrated how WIU's Academy participation advances the University's strategic plan and Illinois Board of Higher Education's statewide strategic plan for higher education. Question #1 also demonstrated how Academy participation advances WIU's Strengthening Distance Education Special Emphasis.

8. Explain your goals for participating in the Academy and the intended impact on the institution as a whole.

WIU's goals for Academy participation and the intended institutional impacts are to implement empirically based actionable items that:

- Advance institutional and statewide strategic planning goals. Question #1 explains how Academy participation relates to reducing college costs, decreasing time-to-degree, increasing educational attainment levels, and implementing best practices.

- Understand reasons for decreasing freshmen retention rates on the Macomb Campus, evaluate the effectiveness of the Linkages Program on the Quad Cities Campus, and to better understand persistence and retention of off-campus students. Questions #3 and 4 provide additional details.
- Expand the culture of informed empirical decision-making, use data to implement solutions, and build upon Academy experiences to implement/adjust processes and structures supporting sophomore through senior retention. Question #5 provides additional detail.
- Support WIU's Strengthening Distance Education Special Emphasis. Questions #1 and #7 provide additional detail.
- Provide evidence for the University's 2020-2021 accreditation visit.
 - By engaging partner community colleges in the evaluation of Linkages, WIU will engage external constituencies and respond to their needs (Core Component 103). Student retention and graduation rates are shared interests and bases for Linkages agreements.
 - By better understanding the population and subpopulations of students and infusing this knowledge into training, student service staff will be supported in their professional development (Core Component 3C6).
 - By implementing new initiatives and engaging in continuous process improvements, WIU will provide evidence that student support services are suited to the needs of student populations (Core Component 301).
 - By successfully following Academy design, WIU will have evidence that it collects and analyzes information on student retention, (Core Component 4C2), uses this information to make improvements (Core Component 4C3), and works systematically to improve performance (Core Components 5C1 and 5C2).
 - By providing data to help inform program review and consolidated annual reports, WIU will be able to show it links processes for assessment of student learning, evaluation of operations, planning, and budgeting (Core Component 5C2).

Commitment and Capacity

9. Describe the level of internal support from faculty, staff, and administrators for Academy participation and your planned work on persistence and completion.

Internal support for Academy participation began with the President and Vice Presidents agreeing on the importance of this initiative and sharing this application with the campus community through a Western Illinois University Board of Trustees item.

Campus support for increased enrollment, retention, and graduation rates and decreased student time-to-degree are mutually agreed upon priorities in the University's *2010 Self-Study for Re-Accreditation to the Higher Learning Commission, Higher Values in Higher Education Strategic Plan, and the Long-Term Plan for Western Illinois University*. Each of these institutional planning documents were endorsed by all campus governance groups on both campuses (Civil Service Employees Council, Council of Administrative Personnel, Faculty Senate, Quad Cities Faculty Council, and Student Government Associations-Macomb and Quad Cities) and approved for implementation by the Board of Trustees.

The work plan for Academy participation is detailed in the three research questions in Question #3 and responses to Questions #10 and #11. These plans are subject to modification based on Academy participation.

10. Identify the groups and individuals that will lead or be directly involved in implementing the initiative.

A Steering Team for Academy participation will be responsible for facilitating institutional participation in the Academy. A subset of the Steering Team will also represent WIU at Academy meetings and roundtables. Steering Team membership is:

- Dr. Gary Biller, Vice President, Student Services, Co-Chair
- Dr. Joseph Rives, Vice President, Quad Cities and Planning, Co-Chair
- Dr. Andy Borst, Director, Admissions
- Dr. Richard Carter, Director, Distance Learning, International Studies, and Outreach
- Ms. Lindsay Fender, Assistant to the Vice President, Quad Cities and Planning
- Ms. Rhonda Kline, Director, Institutional Research and Planning
- Dr. Angela Lynn, University Registrar
- Ms. Sara Lytle, Assistant Director, Retention and Student Success
- Dr. Kristi Mindrup, Assistant Vice President, Quad Cities and Planning
- Ms. Brenda Parks, Director, Administrative Information Management Systems
- Dr. Nancy Parsons, Associate Provost
- Dr. Ron Williams, Assistant Vice President, Academic Affairs
- Appointments to be made by the Civil Service Employees Council, Council of Administrative Personnel, Faculty Senate, Quad Cities Faculty Council, and Student Government Associations-Macomb and Quad Cities

11. List the human, financial, technological and other resources that the institution has committed to this initiative.

Members of Administrative Information Management Systems, Institutional Research and Planning, Office of the University Registrar, and Office of the Vice President for Quad Cities and Planning will support analytic work.

Members of the Academy Steering Team will form working groups to address the University's three research questions stated in Question #3. Each of the working groups will have representation for the represented academic departments and administrative units and each of the University's governance groups. Each working group will provide recommendations to the Steering Team who will work closely with the President's Leadership Team (President's and Vice Presidents) to determine next steps and ensure coordination and collaboration with intact structures and processes.

Similar to other university planning activities, the Vice President for Quad Cities and Planning will keep the campus community informed and seek input through monthly Strategic Plan Updates (www.wiu.edu/university_planning/planningupdates.php) and reports to the Western Illinois University Board of Trustees. Requests for new resources and reports on reallocated resources from Academy participation will be presented in annual consolidated reports produced by the vice presidents, areas that report to the president, and departments/units that report to the vice presidents.

Institutional Contact Information

Primary Institutional Contact Person for Academy Participation:

Joseph Rives, Ph.D.
Name

Vice President, Quad Cities and Planning
Position title

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Office phone(s) and extension(s) Office fax Email address

Name and address to which the Commission should send invoices for Academy participation:

Ms. Chris Brown

Name

Administrative Aide, Office of the Vice President for Quad Cities and Planning

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HLC Academy for Student Persistence and Completion

Before you email your *Academy Application* to academy@hlcommission.org, make certain it has been reviewed and approved by your institution's CEO. See Affirmation page.



Academy Application Affirmation

I affirm that the application emailed to academy@hlcommission.org presents our institution accurately, and that we agree, if admitted, to commit to meaningful and productive participation in the Academy for Student Persistence and Completion.

Jack Thomas

Signature of Institutional CEO

August 21, 2013

Date

Jack Thomas, Ph.D., President

Printed/Typed Name and Title

Western Illinois University

Institution name

1 University Circle

Institution Address

Macomb, IL 61455

Institution City, State, Zip

Include the affirmation in the electronic delivery of the application
or fax it to the Commission, attention Academy: (312) 263-7462.