



COVID-19 Planning and Process Changes

Institutional Response

Institution: Western Illinois University City, State: Macomb, Illinois (main campus) / Moline, Illinois (branch campus)

Name of person completing this form: Mark Mossman

Title: Associate Provost/Accreditation Liaison Officer Phone: 309-298-1066 Email: mark.mossman@wiu.edu

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Please complete the following questions based on the institution's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The prompts below are intended to help institutions articulate to peer review teams the adaptations made in response to COVID-19. Understandably, some prompts may not be relevant to all institutions; in such cases, simply indicate so. By focusing institutional adaptations in this form, institutions can provide information to peer teams about how they are handling the pandemic, while retaining the Assurance Argument's traditional focus on long-term, non-pandemic operations. The COVID-19 Institutional Response should not exceed 10 pages. Upload the form in the Forms tab of the Assurance System prior to the institution's lock date.

Questions

Criterion 1. Mission. Please answer the following questions describing any changes the institution implemented related to Criterion 1.

- What, if any, program changes has the institution implemented (e.g., program hiatus, closure, launch) this fall? How do these service changes align with the institution's mission?

There have been no academic program/curriculum changes implemented due to COVID-19.

Changes and enhancements that were made allowed us to continue our mission and ensure educational opportunity and access in socially responsible ways. Some programs were canceled when alternative delivery modes were not feasible. The following list includes the program changes that were made due to COVID-19:

- In SP 2020, the University went to a 100% online/remote mode of delivery for all courses after Spring Break;
- In SP 2020, the University developed a "COVID-19 Spring Semester Grading Policy." This policy provided a modification to the Pass/Fall grading option. It was

approved by faculty governance and the President for Spring 2020 Semester and second eight-week courses. The policy was modified as such:

- Within one week of Spring 2020 semester final grades posting, any Spring 2020 undergraduate student was allowed to change one or more undergraduate course grades of D- or above to “Pass” (P) using the Pass/Fail grading option (see Undergraduate Catalog, Grading Policies), and
- For Pass grades earned in Spring 2020 only, General Education, major and minor course requirements were fulfilled with those grades, and the semester hours of Pass grades accumulated in Spring 2020 would not count against the 12 semester hour maximum of general elective Pass/Fail credit allowed for graduation;
- In SP 2020, the University also developed a “Bypassing Academic Suspension/Dismissals” policy. This policy was also approved by faculty governance and the President for Spring and Summer 2020. The policy provided that students on academic warning or probation would not be suspended or dismissed for failing to meet GPA requirements as of Spring 2020 or Summer 2020 final grades. This allowed students to continue their education at WIU on academic probation in the Fall 2020 semester, if desired;
- In SP 2020, in response to COVID-19 and to the cancellation of ACT/SAT exam administrations, the University changed its FL 2020 admissions policy (see Core Component 5.A.2)
- In FL 2020 30% of academic courses were delivered in a 100% online format (this was up from 10% in FL 2019);
- In FL 2020 over 60% of other courses were delivered in a hybrid format;
- In FL 2020 the University’s Fall Break was cancelled;
- In FL 2020 the University went to a totally online mode of delivery for the final two weeks of the semester;
- In SP 20, SU 20, and FL 20 our Library Services were significantly changed to adhere to state-wide public health policies due to COVID-19 (see Core Component 2.E.2 and 3.D.4);
- For SP, SU, FL 2020 and SP 21 all student support services, like the University Writing Center and other discipline-specific tutoring, went to a 100% remote delivery (see Core Component 5.C.5);
- For FL 20 and SP 21 the University modified persistence and completion policies to accommodate student facing challenges due to COVID-19. These include moving events like academic success workshops into virtual formats and increasing attention on the Leatherneck Referral Program;
- From mid-March 2020 until now, youth programming and camps, LIFE programs, and other community programming that could not be delivered virtually were canceled. Study Abroad programs were canceled. Fine Arts programming (performances, exhibits, etc.) were canceled or moved to virtual formats;
- In SP 20 all athletic activities and competitions were canceled, and sports set to compete in FL 20 were postponed to spring 2021. All organized athletic activities have been modified according to multiple policies and guidance documents.

- How has the institution’s commitment to the public good been maintained during this period? What was the pandemic’s impact on its civic engagement/community-based work?

While there were changes in how Western engaged with and practiced its commitment to the public good, civic engagement and community-based work continued. For example, in late March 2020 we partnered with several other local entities to establish the County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) on the Macomb Campus. The EOC serves as McDonough County's central command and control facility during the COVID-19 pandemic and is comprised of members from local law enforcement and fire service agencies, the McDonough County Health Department, McDonough District Hospital, Western Illinois University, the City of Macomb, the Illinois Law Enforcement Training & Standards Board, Western Illinois GIS Center, and the McDonough County Emergency Services Disaster Agency (ESDA).

The EOC's main responsibility is providing the strategic direction and operational decisions that are involved with emergency preparedness. Over the last several months, members of the EOC have worked to collect, gather, and analyze data that directly informs many of the logistical decisions involved with operating Western during the pandemic. The EOC will remain active to provide further guidance and recommendations as we move through the academic year.

Western has continued community engagement in several ways: The Small Business Development Centers on both the Macomb and Quad Cities Campuses continue to deliver one-on-one consultation in person and virtually. They are also working to deliver zoom workshops and webinars to help businesses apply for financial support to survive the pandemic.

The Illinois Institute of Rural Affairs' MAPPING (Management and Planning Programs in Non-metro Groups) Program is a strategic visioning program. Prior to the pandemic, it hosted meetings in school gyms, church basements, and local city halls. During the pandemic it has continued to offer outreach, adapting to IDPH social distancing guidelines for in-person meetings and increasing its virtual outreach.

- Has the institution adjusted its recruitment, enrollment, and support strategies to serve traditionally underserved students? If so, how?

Western has adjusted many of its recruitment and retention strategies over the past year in response to the pandemic to reach and support traditionally underserved students.

We have moved all academic support service options like advising appointments and tutoring to online formats and have implemented targeted marketing for first-generation college students and other special populations. We have also implemented new mentorship programming through our Multicultural Center focused on peer-to-peer support and interaction in a virtual setting. This fall we launched "RaiseMe," targeting students in our Reach program and students below a certain GPA upon entering Western. The program engages them in a micro-scholarship platform to earn funds for their upcoming semester by partaking in activities that support their academic endeavors. The funds come from the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funding to support scholarship opportunities. Students earned funds by participating in tutoring sessions, workshops, other activities. Students who claimed their account and actively participated in the program had significantly higher GPAs than students who did not.

Relating to recruitment, we have changed our in-person recruitment to a virtual platform and we make outreach visits virtually. Admissions counselors maintain set schedules and meet with students in both a one-on-one and large-group virtual setting. We developed a virtual campus tour, in both English and Spanish, to allow students to see campus without needing to visit in person. We have facilitated in-person opportunities for students to have a one-on-one tour provided by a current student (in accordance with COVID-19 related guidelines).

Finally, after review by numerous shared governance groups, we changed the general admissions policy, scholarship award program, and Honors College admissions to be “test optional” in order to support students unable to take an SAT/ACT exam, which disproportionately affected underserved populations (see Core Component 5.A.2).

Criterion 2. Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct. Please answer the following questions describing how the institution maintained integrity, as outlined in Criterion 2, as it implemented changes to regular campus practices during this period.

- Has the institution altered any existing policies or procedures (e.g., admissions, grading, registration, etc.) in response to the pandemic? If so, please describe them. Will these changes remain in effect, or will they revert to the original policy after the pandemic has subsided?

Western implemented social distancing and face mask requirements on campus according to COVID-19 guidelines, closed common areas, and allowed for employees, when feasible, to have a Temporary Alternative Work Arrangement Agreement that allows remote work. Employees, students, vendors, and visitors to our campuses are required to complete an online COVID-19 self-check each day that they are on campus. The self-check issues an email pass. Some classes were moved online or into hybrid alternative modalities. Institution-sponsored travel was cancelled and campus events were curtailed with specific guidelines and policies in place to ensure safety guidelines were met. Random COVID-19 testing was implemented for Western employees and students, and test sites were set up at campus locations for students and employees who wished to be tested. A classroom compartment policy was implemented for Fall 2020, detailing expectations for in-person class attendance. Residence halls were closed in November 2020 at the beginning of Thanksgiving break and courses were moved to online formats, with few exceptions. Prior to the start of both the fall and spring semesters, students were asked to quarantine for two weeks before the semesters started. Spring break has been canceled for Spring 2021 so the semester will run 16 weeks straight, but classes have been canceled for March 10 and April 13 to allow for a brief break. Additional policy changes are discussed in this document under Criterion 1.

As COVID-19 vaccinations become more readily available and community spread slows, we expect to begin a return to a “new normal” where some health and safety guidelines remain (in accordance with CDC and IDPH guidelines) but operations, academics, and student life are able to resume on site.

- Has the institution made changes to any contractual agreements during this period that have a bearing on educational activities? If so, please describe them.

In March 2020, Western entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the faculty and staff labor union (University Professionals of Illinois, WIU Chapter). This MOA was in effect through August 2020, and was then revised extensively entering AY 2020-2021. The MOA permits faculty to choose the instructional modality of their assigned courses (in-person, online, hybrid, livestream, etc.) and also allows them to convert their courses to a remote instructional modality at any time during the semester. (Note: once a course is converted to a remote modality, it cannot be returned to in-person mode.) The MOA also suspended the student course evaluation process during Spring 2020, and converted all evaluations to an online format for AY 2020-2021. The WIU Administration has received positive feedback regarding the online course evaluation process, as well as the electronic faculty portfolio evaluation system that was

introduced in Fall 2020, thus Western intends to continue offering these electronic evaluation processes in the post-pandemic period.

- How did the institution communicate with students, staff and other stakeholders about any relevant operational changes during the pandemic?

Western created a COVID-19 advisory committee that works on behalf of the University to develop a Temporary Work Arrangement Agreement and subsequent policies and procedures that are specific to Western. A “Return to Work Plan” was created and closely mimics the state’s “Restore Illinois” plan that was released by the Governor of Illinois’s office. Western’s “Return to Work Plan” consists of a multi-stage approach for employees to safely return to campus and outlines the protocols and practices that are required of all personnel when coming to Western’s campuses. This plan and all procedures and practices that were implemented by the committee are communicated to all stakeholders on a regular basis through email, campus signage, press releases, a COVID-19 dashboard on the WIU website, and various types of social media. An example of campus signage is shown below.



- How has the institution's board been involved in monitoring potential disruptions to the institution's enrollment or financial stability?

The Board has maintained its oversight function throughout the COVID-19 response period. It left specific development of policies and procedures up to the Interim President and his response team. All trustees were informed of the potential need to close campus as soon as it was apparent that this could be necessary, and the Board chair was notified frequently through the decision-making process. As part of the broad COVID-19 response (and discussed previously in this document), the Interim President and the enrollment management team took steps very quickly to develop procedures, policies, and programming to best serve our students and community during the pandemic. The Board was informed about new strategies as they were developed. The Board chair and Interim President had frequent conversations about both the extra costs associated with the COVID-19 response and potential cost savings as normal academic activities were canceled. The strategies developed by the Administration resulted in the first freshmen enrollment increase in nine years and a small financial surplus. The Board specifically authorized the Interim President to make some decisions as required for a rapid COVID-19 response without a vote of the Board. In June 2020, for example, the Board authorized the Interim President, through approval of Resolution 20.6/5, to make room and board refund decisions without a prior Board vote. The Board felt very strongly that timely response required suspension of some usual rules. Throughout the year, the Interim President kept the Board informed at every juncture, but some usual rules were relaxed in the face of the emergency. Examples of such decisions include the approval of large expenses as required to purchase testing supplies, and several MOAs that were negotiated by administration with faculty and staff unions.

Criterion 3. Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources and Support. Please answer the following questions and describe the institution's ability to provide quality education, teaching and academic support services during this period.

- Which delivery modalities will the institution employ during the 2020-21 academic year? Check all that apply.

On-site classroom teaching, with social-distancing measures within the classroom

Fall

Spring

Summer

On-site classroom teaching, with fewer students in larger classrooms

Fall

Spring

Summer

Hybrid models, with some learning in a classroom and some learning online

Fall

Spring

Summer

50% models, with one-half of students in the classroom and one-half present by video conference for each session

Fall

Spring

Summer

- Synchronous classes, offered online for all students during the regularly scheduled class time

Fall

Spring

Summer

- Fully online classes, offered using an LMS integrated with regular student/teacher contact

Fall

Spring

Summer

- Other—Please describe:

- What type of training did the institution provide for its faculty members on distance learning/hybrid formats to prepare them for this work? Check all that apply.

Training for all faculty, delivered virtually

Individual training with IT professional on the campus

Access to online training on distance delivery offered by an outside provider to all faculty

Individual training/coaching offered by experienced online faculty members on campus

Department-level, department-specific training by subject area

Recorded or live webinars/resources offered by outside providers

Recorded or live webinars/resources offered by the LMS provider

Other—please describe:

Criterion 4. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement. Please describe how the institution maintained the evaluation and improvement, as outlined in Criterion 4, as it implemented changes to regular campus practices during this period.

- How has the institution's ongoing student assessment changed since the COVID-19 disruption? If the institution altered the regular assessment program or processes, what has the institution implemented instead to assess student outcomes during this period

There was minimal disruption to student learning assessment. Some programs required extra time to compile results or additional assistance with compiling results and completing reports, but assessment of student learning continued in both curricular and co-curricular areas.

- How has the current disruption affected the institution's or individual departments' ability to integrate assessment data into ongoing program improvement? Note successes, as well as gaps.

Successes during this period include the continued development of a co-curricular assessment model, as well as various program developments rooted in student learning assessment activities

(in programs like English and Mathematics, for example). Gaps in student learning assessment are few, but did occur in a limited way in some academic programs (e.g., Health Sciences and the Honors College). We are working to address and resolve those issues with the respective programs.

- How have the institution's retention, persistence and completion initiatives been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Western was able to continue all of its retention, persistence, and completion initiatives. New online retention efforts have resulted in an increase in our first-to-second-year retention rates. However, these initiatives sometimes faced challenges. For example, Western was unable to enact new face-to-face/residence hall programming in its First-Year Experience program.

Many of our retention and persistence initiatives have been directly impacted due to COVID-19 and the ability to have face-to-face interaction. In Spring 2020, we moved all of our tutoring options, [Rocky's Resources](#) and the [University Writing Center](#), to a virtual format (see Core Component 3.D.1).

Additionally, our Academic Success Workshops were moved to a virtual format, offering students the chance to zoom in to learn about study skills, test preparation, and more.

An additional impact COVID-19 has had on our operation has been a significant increase in [Leatherneck Care Referrals](#) over the last semester focused on academic concerns (see Core Component 4.C.3). Faculty submit referrals for students they are concerned about. We have seen a marked increase in submissions focused on student disengagement from class in the virtual environment. The Retention Initiative team then reaches out directly to students to share resources, encourage participation, and learn about barriers to class attendance.

Criterion 5. Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning. Please describe how the institution maintained effectiveness, resources and planning, as outlined in Criterion 5, as it implemented changes to regular campus practices during this period.

- How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected enrollments? For each term in the upcoming academic year, please indicate an approximate percent increase or decrease.

○ Fall 2020

Increase Decrease No change

Percent change:

Less than 5% 5% to 10% More than 10%

○ Spring 2021

Increase Decrease No change

Percent change:

Less than 5%

5% to 10%

More than 10%

o Summer 2021

Increase

Decrease

No change

Percent change:

Less than 5%

5% to 10%

More than 10%

o Other: Please describe any other COVID-19 enrollment impacts:

The following are notable enrollment impacts: significant decrease in international students; significant increase in domestic online graduate enrollments; significant number of deferments from both international and domestic students planning to delay enrollment until FL 2021 or after the pandemic.

- What is the likelihood that funding sources other than tuition will be unable to provide the funds budgeted? If likely, how much of a budget cut does the institution expect?

Western does not expect any budget cuts for FY21 and is positioned to end the fiscal year with minimal deficit balances, if any. Measures have been put in place to ensure that the University has a budget sufficient to cover the expenditures required. There is always the unknown of a state appropriation decrease and if this were to occur, we have plans in place to delay spending in order to counter any reduction.

- What measures is the institution taking to address any budgetary issues for the current fiscal year?

Western has purposely delayed expenditures in both personnel and operating line items to ensure the FY21 budget is balanced. An effort has also been made to reserve any non-committed funds in the event of any state appropriation shortfall. Monthly analyses are conducted to review and realign resources as needed to meet the pertinent and critical needs of the University.

- What interim steps has the institution taken to deal with temporary financial shortfalls?

Western is vigilant in budget management and has controls in place to sweep non-encumbered funds into a general account to offset any temporary financial shortfalls. It is the practice to restrict spending to only those critical needs during times of financial concern. All procurements over \$5,000 are further reviewed and approved by the CFO for determination of need. In addition, all vacant personnel positions must be approved for recruitment by both the CFO and the President. These efforts allow for additional control of expenditures during times of financial stress.

- What emergency policies or procedures, if any, has the institution invoked because of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Western was very aggressive in addressing the pandemic and developed and published [procedures and practices](#) to be followed by all University constituents.

- How have these changes affected institutional budgets for educational programs, support services and co-curricular activities?

Western allocated additional funds to support the conversion of educational programs to online formats, the modification of existing services as needed, and the development of new initiatives aimed at student success during the pandemic. This included funding for training, software, hardware, and associated infrastructure to effectively deliver programs and support student learning. Student Services were provided funds for additional staff and support for the Beu Health Center to address the required testing, associated protocol, and, if needed, quarantine facilities and personal attention to those impacted. Operational expenses included, but were not limited to testing kits, lab services, personal services for quarantine occupants, and specialized counseling services. While some of these expenditures may be offset by CARES Act Funds, the Western has utilized institutional funds in order to ensure a safe and productive environment for working and learning.

Due to the pandemic many co-curricular activities were suspended; however, Western provided funds to create a quality “virtual” experience wherever and whenever possible to support student success through educational programs, support services, and co-curricular activities.

- What type of pandemic-related planning is the institution doing for Academic Year 2021–22?

The President continues to meet weekly with the COVID-19 Task Force, first assembled in March 2020. This group sets policy and prepares planning documents for Western in regards to its continued negotiation with the COVID-19 virus.

For AY 2021-22, we recognize that the situation is very fluid; thus, planning could change quickly and we need to have the foresight and flexibility to adapt. Approximately 20% of classes in Fall 2021 semester are currently scheduled to be 100% online; a large percentage of the rest of the schedule will be delivered in a hybrid format. The current plan is to maintain COVID-19 classroom capacity limitations for Fall 2021, but to remove the restriction on having an hour between classes in a specific room. If vaccines are successful and the virus abates, then we will be able to soften current restrictions on student and faculty gatherings, residence hall activities, classroom size, and other areas of University life, in accordance with federal, state, and local guidance.