

Western Illinois University



Strategic Recruitment and Enrollment Plan
20 by 2027

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Executive Summary

The current strategic plan, *Higher Values in Higher Education, 2017-2027* (HVHE), calls for an annual environmental scan and continuous improvement to help ensure that a stable enrollment of 10,000 or greater is achieved by 2027.

At the time this plan was being authored, WIU had a total student enrollment of 9,441. It is unlikely that in 2017 the authors of the HVHE plan envisioned enrollment continuing to decrease. However, in Fall 2020 the University completed its 14th consecutive year of decline, and was at a total student enrollment of 7,490.

In March 2021, new WIU President Guiyou Huang charged a sixteen-member committee with doing the environmental scan called for in the Strategic Plan, an activity that appears to have been absent in any formal way since the Strategic Plan 2017-2027 was published.

As such, over the last two months this group reassessed anticipated enrollment levels through Fall 2027 in light of our current enrollment realities, and has now outlined a path to achieve enrollment targets grounded in data analysis, a study of likely scenarios, and a thorough evaluation of our likely and potential annual enrollment levels from this point on.

The committee consisted of:

Gary Swegan - Interim Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management, co-chair
Doug Freed - Director, Undergraduate Admissions and Enrollment Services - co-chair
Rocio Ayard Ochoa - Director, Multicultural Center
Dr. Victoria Baramidze - Chair, Department of Mathematics and Philosophy
Kassie Daly - Associate Director, Admissions and Director, Transfer Services
Renee Georges - University Budget Officer
Dr. Randy Glean - Executive Director, Global Studies
Dr. Jeff Hancks - Professor, Libraries
Kirsten Johnson - Assistant Director, Marketing & Communications, University Housing/Dining Services
Dr. Tammy Killian - Chair, Department of Theatre and Dance
Dr. Anthony McBride - Associate Professor, Law Enforcement and Justice Administration
Dr. Mark Mossman - Associate Provost and Associate Vice President, Academic Affairs
Dr. Padmaja Pillutla - Associate Professor, Accounting, Finance, Economics & Decision Sciences
Justin Schuch - Executive Director, Retention Initiatives
Krista Skien - Academic Advisor, Centennial Honors College **Bobbi Smith** - Director, Financial Aid

This group met nine times during March, April, and early May 2021. In the context of the environmental scan, the group was also charged by President Huang with identifying:

- Current enrollment and demographic realities
- Where we believe enrollment can be in 2027
- How to plan to achieve the targets

It is important to note again that university data, as well as state, regional, and national demographic projections, suggests flat enrollments during the coming years. Thus, the committee wants to be clear that the challenges for enrollment growth, let alone reaching a number like 10,000, are significant.

That stated, the committee focused on WIU's opportunities for growth, understanding that in many cases a direct investment of funding and organizational support will be required to achieve our targets. The committee focused on areas where a favorable return on this investment would seem most likely to establish achievable growth targets through Fall 2027.

While we concluded that the original enrollment level of 10,000 by 2027 (as again suggested in the HVHE plan) is NOT realistic, the committee did see a path to growth and stability. **We suggest that our plan be branded "20 x 27," an aspirational target of growing headcount enrollment 20% over current levels by 2027.** This brand will allow us to easily communicate our larger enrollment narrative to each of our campuses and to our entire WIU community. To be clear, the committee believes that growth to 9,000 students can be achieved and maintained, if the right conditions are in place and the appropriate resource allocation to these efforts is prioritized.

Through the implementation of this plan, WIU will seek to achieve the following headcount enrollments, targeting *approximately* 3% annual headcount increase from Fall 2022-Fall 2027:

Fall 2021 –	7,600
Fall 2022 –	7,825
Fall 2023 –	8,050
Fall 2024 –	8,300
Fall 2025 –	8,550
Fall 2026 –	8,800
Fall 2027 –	9,000

Economic Impact of Enrollment

Given the context of current state budgets, the operation and fiscal health of the University are both highly dependent upon student enrollment and enrollment-related revenue. The three R's that drive many elements of our University are Recruitment, Retention, and Revenue. Recruitment and

Retention drive much of our Revenue, making this plan particularly important to the future of WIU. Please note the following:

- Collectively, revenue directly attributable to enrollment accounts for 55% of the University's all funds budget.
- If auxiliary services are removed from the all funds budget, revenue directly derived from state appropriations + tuition + student fees accounts for approximately 67% of our overall budget
- Every 100 additional students represents approximately \$800,000 in gross revenue to WIU
- Similarly, every 1% increase in overall student retention represents approximately \$603,000 in gross revenue for our institution

We believe that the reality of these numbers positions our “20 by 27 Strategic Recruitment and Enrollment Plan” as the highest priority for the institution at this time. Put simply, we must succeed in increasing our total student enrollment by 2027.

Current Environmental Scan and Situational Assessment

Western Illinois University has been in a steady and significant enrollment decline, when comparing Fall semester to the previous Fall semester, and Spring semester to the previous Spring semester, since Fall 2006, **a span of fourteen consecutive years.**

In that time, overall headcount enrollment has fallen from 13,602 in Fall 2006, to 7,490 in Fall 2020, a decrease of 44.93%. Given the demographic “cliff” that the state of Illinois, and the entire midwestern region, will face in the coming years, growing enrollment will have to be done strategically, capitalizing on pockets of opportunity that have been identified, and investing in those opportunities. The state of Illinois, for example, will see a decrease of 22% in high school graduates from 2025-2037. Thus, the success of *any* enrollment plan will necessitate a robust performance from student populations not currently representing a significant portion of WIU enrollments, as of 2021. Simply maintaining traditional aged, full time, on campus enrollments going forward will be a challenge in and of itself. In order to grow, we will have to increase market share, and simultaneously develop new markets for students that we are not currently engaging in any significant way.

In this sense, our more comprehensive recruitment plan has to be built with a recognition that we have three campuses, and thus three potential sources of enrollment stability and growth. These campuses are: Macomb (residential), Quad Cities (branch), and Online/Off-Campus. Each of these campuses serve distinct student populations, and as it develops our recruitment strategy will be tailored to identify and then meet the needs of these distinct student populations. Please note that this is a sea change in approach, as previous recruitment planning, like the planning found in the

current Strategic Plan, was built primarily around a two campus model: the Macomb and the Quad Cities campuses. By reconceptualizing our campus model we will be able to quickly retool our comprehensive recruitment planning and more easily identify new student markets and better retention policies in the coming months and years.

Highlighted Student Markets

To achieve our enrollment goals, the following growth focuses have been identified to assist Western Illinois University in developing new markets, maintaining current initiatives, and enhancing our ability to grow into the coming years.

As we move through the next academic year, formal strategies and plans will be developed and implemented focusing on the following areas:

Black/African American Student Population

Expand and implement formal strategies to recruit and support African American students.

Responsibility: Admissions/Multicultural Center- Gwendolyn Brooks Cultural Center, Assistant to President on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and working group with faculty, retention, and student service, and student representatives

Timeline: Plan complete by August 2021; Implementation in Fall 21.

Dual Enrolled Student Population

Implement enhanced strategies to recruit and support Dual Enrolled students.

Responsibility: Administration, admissions, and working group composed of faculty and student services.

Timeline: Plan complete by August 2021; Implementation in Fall 21.

Graduate Student Population

Develop formal student profile and plan for graduate student recruitment and graduate degree option growth.

Responsibility: Working Group composed of administration, international admissions, and grad directors

Timeline: Plan complete by August 2021. Implementation begins Fall 2021

Homeschool Population

Review potential market of students being homeschooled and identify recruitment strategy.

Responsibility: Working group composed of administration, admissions, and Office of Distance Education & Support (ODES) representatives)

Timeline: Plan complete by December 2021. Implementation begins Spring 22.

Honors College Student Population

Expand and implement strategy for recruitment of Honors College students.

Responsibility: Working group composed of administration, faculty, and enrollment management representatives

Timeline: Plan complete by December 2021. Implementation begins Spring 22.

International Student Population

Support growth of the international student population and formalize plan.

Responsibility: working group composed of administration, faculty, and admissions representatives

Timeline: Plan complete by August 2021. Implementation begins Fall 21.

Latinx Student Population

Expand and implement formal strategies to recruit and support Latinx students.

Responsibility: Admissions/Multicultural Center- Casa Latina Cultural Center, Assistant to President on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and working group with faculty, retention, and student service, and student representatives.

Timeline: Plan complete by August 2021; Implementation in Fall 21.

LGBTQ+ Student Population

Implement formal strategies to recruit and support LGBTQ+ students.

Responsibility: Admissions/Multicultural Center- LGBT*QA Resource Center, Assistant to President on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and working group with faculty, retention, and student service, and student representatives

Timeline: Plan complete by August 2021; Implementation in Fall 21.

Military Student Population

Review entry options for military students and develop a formalized plan for recruitment. Develop accessible and incentivized online degree plan options for these students.

Responsibility: Current Military Task Force with admissions and ODES representatives *Timeline:* Plan complete by December 2021; Implementation in Spring 22

On-Campus Housing Population

Explore enhanced strategies to recruit and retain more students in on-campus housing.

Responsibility: Admissions/Residence Life, and working group with faculty, retention, and student service, and student representatives

Timeline: Plan complete by August 2021; Implementation in Fall 21.

Online Student Population

Develop and implement a formal plan for program offerings, recruitment, and support of online student population.

Responsibility: Working group from Provost's Office, Undergraduate Admissions, ODES, Retention Initiatives

Timeline: Plan complete by September 2021; Implementation in Fall 2021

Out-of-State Population

Develop and implement formal strategy for out-of-state students that supports all potential student populations.

Responsibility: Working group of Undergraduate and Graduate Admissions teams. *Timeline:* Complete by September 2021; Implement in Spring 2022

Post-Traditional Population

Review support and formal recruitment strategy for post-traditional aged students.

Responsibility: Provost's Office, Enrollment Management representatives
Timeline: Plan complete by September 2021; Implementation in Spring 22

Quad Cities Campus

In consultation with the current working group, align recruitment strategy with larger QC Strategic Position and Plan.

Responsibility: Working Group composed of administration, admissions, retention, and faculty
Timeline: Recruitment plan complete by August 2021; implemented in AY 21-22

REACH Student Population

Review admissions procedures for REACH students and determine the relationship between the recruitment of REACH students and the retention of REACH students.

Responsibility: Working group composed of advisors, admissions, and administration *Timeline:* Review complete by August 2021

Re-Entry Plan Population

Develop formal strategy for students who are within one semester of completing their degree but are not currently enrolled and implement coordinated, specific outreach to students who have withdrawn from WIU in good standing and/or have indicated their interest to return.

Responsibility: Working group from Office of Registrar, Undergraduate Admissions, Retention Initiatives
Timeline: Plan complete by September 21; Implemented by December 21

Retention Efforts

Develop and implement university-wide student retention strategies.

Responsibility: University Retention Initiative Team *Timeline:* Spring 2021

Summer Session Population

Review support, marketing and potential for summer session.

Responsibility: Provost's Office, EM representatives
Timeline: Plan complete by September 2021; Implementation in Spring 22

Transfer Student Population

Expand and implement formal strategies to recruit and provide experiences, options and support for transfer students.

Responsibility: Working group composed of Provost's Office, Registrar, Chair Representatives, Admissions Representatives

Timeline: Plan complete by August 21; Implementation Fall 21.

Undocumented Student Population

Formalize institutional stance and support for undocumented students.

Responsibility: Working Group Identified

Timeline: Plan complete by September 2021; Implementation Spring 22

Assessing Future Enrollment Success

Western Illinois University has outstanding enrollment data available to assess our progress with this recruitment and enrollment plan. The Office of Institutional Research and Planning, along with Undergraduate Admissions, University Registrar, the Office of Assessment, Accreditation, and Strategic Planning (AASP), and the Office of Administrative Information Management Systems (AIMS) provide ample reporting on all data elements required for thorough assessment of this plan.

No new reporting mechanisms will be required, as we already collect and report on the data elements that will be required from this plan. We will actively increase collaboration between the divisions of academic affairs, student success, and enrollment management.

The success of this plan in the coming years will be measured by whether we are hitting interval targets required to get to a headcount enrollment of 9,000 by Fall 2027.

Next Steps

Our expectation is that the working groups noted above will be developed in the coming weeks to begin their work during the summer. Our goal is to maintain the timelines also noted above. That being said, we recognize that a new administrative team is being assembled, including a new Vice President for Enrollment Management (VPEM) coming to campus later in the summer. That new team, and specifically the new VPEM, should have the latitude to have input into the final development of these plans.

Conclusion

It became evident by the time we were midway through our work together over these past nine weeks that arriving at a fully developed plan was going to be beyond the scope of what this committee could achieve in a fairly condensed time frame. We concluded that our work represented the *first step* in a critical process of continuous enrollment strategic planning, which needs to be tied to the HVHE Plan. With a newly selected Vice President for Enrollment Management (VPEM) coming to WIU later this summer, who no doubt will expect to be a part of the process, planning, strategy, resource allocations, and execution going forward, this seemed to be a sensible approach.

Our primary initial charge, as we understood it, was to determine the viability of the original enrollment goal of 10,000 or more by 2027. With this document we have met this charge.

We have also established a clear set of enrollment targets and, through the identification of growth focuses or areas, a general guide to achieve these targets.

Further, in our work of the last two months we hope we have also, in effect, established a permanent Strategic Enrollment Management Committee to complete and implement this plan, under the leadership of the new VPEM. In other words, our group has asked the right questions and outlined the correct answers. We now know how to answer the “how will we get there?” questions. The next step in this process is to implement the answers we have here and move in the direction to which we point.

When taking this step, there will be more discussion and work, led by the soon-to-be revamped administrative team, which will lead to the significant decisions regarding what we will invest in, and how those investments will best be deployed.

Finally, we would like to say that our group represented all divisions, and colleges, of Western Illinois University. The sentiment, tone and tenor of our group interactions were largely very optimistic about the potential for the future of Western Illinois University, while recognizing the multitude of challenges we face, and decisions that will need to be prioritized, to allow our targets to be realized.

CHAPTER 2 FALL 2021

The new Vice President for Enrollment Management arrived on campus on August 1, 2021 and started to build on this work immediately. In addition to creating workgroups to focus on some of the target populations in the recruitment plan she is implementing some new strategies to improve overall effectiveness.

New Strategies include:

- Population specific recruitment focus
- Goal Setting/Tracking
- Sales Training
- Effective Collaboration with Academic Areas
- Marketing Programs of Distinction
- Strategic Lead Generation
- Making WIU Transfer Friendly
- Building out the Communication Flow
- Re-Imagining the Campus Visit Experience

Population Specific Recruitment Focus
(Content coming soon)

In addition to population focused work the UG Admissions Team is: working to implement stronger goal setting and tracking, becoming the front sales arm of the campus, collaborating across campus, bringing sophistication to our lead generation methods, improving the transfer student experience, increasing our communication with prospects and improving the campus visit experience.

Goal Setting/Tracking

Last spring the recruitment planning group set a goal of increasing new student enrollment by at least 3% each year from 2020 to 2027 in order to achieve the 20% enrollment increase by 2027. Increasing new entering student enrollment goals by at least 3% each year from 2020 to 2027 consists of the following goals;

	NEF Goal	NEF Actual	NET Goal	NET Actual	NEG Goal	NEG Actual
Fall 2020		1064		721		568
Fall 2021	1095	920	742	648	585	778
Fall 2022	1130		764		602	
Fall 2023	1160		808		620	
Fall 2024	1195		832		638	
Fall 2025	1230		857		657	
Fall 2026	1267		883		677	
Fall 2027	1305		910		700	

Fall 2021 actual UG enrollment was 15% short of goal so for Fall 2022 we will be working to increase every funnel stage by 18 % over Fall 21.

Territory Goal breakdown is:

Fall 22 UG NEF Enrollment goal from the territories-

- Chicago North and West- 02- 151
- Chicago South and SW Suburbs -11- 140
- Chicago South Suburbs- 13- 217
- Chicago Collar – 27- 110
- West Central Illinois- 04/05- 106
- East Central Illinois-06- 113
- Southeast Illinois- 07- 7
- St Louis/Southern Illinois- 10/17- 27
- QC and North Iowa/Illinois 15/23- 140
- Total 1011
- Other sources of NEF 119

NET Territory Goal Breakdown

- QC and 4 year Transfer- 321
- Illinois North 214
- Illinois South 229

Recovering Lost Marketshare:

Nationally, but specifically in the upper Midwest, demographics have declined. The number of graduating HS seniors has been steadily declining since approximately 2008 and will continue to decline for the next several years. Due to the demographic decline competition for students is fierce. We are losing more students to our competition than we are to demographic decline. We must develop an understanding of our historic market share and our current market share by region and by HS/CC. We will be implementing specific tactics to recover lost marketshare from our competitors by clearly articulating our value proposition, increasing our communication, improving our digital presence and strategically targeting regions where we have lost marketshare. We will hone and develop school specific strategies where we have lost the most marketshare.

Goal Tracking:

For each territory funnel goals have been identified. We also know benchmarks within the recruitment cycle that we need to meet monthly.

Include the funnel for each territory and the timeline for each funnel? What percent of admits by the end of October? End of November? End of December? End of January? End of February?

	Prospects	Applicants	Admits	Enrolled
Chicago North and West	16404	2001	1349	151
Chicago South and Southwest	17211	1306	859	140
Chicago South	9066	2421	1432	217
Chicago Collar	17224	900	655	110
East Central IL	8093	649	483	113
West Central IL	2432	415	329	106

SE IL	7348	72	49	7
St Louis and Southern	5438	276	198	27
QC and North IA and IL	6596	608	447	140
Other			204	

Fall 22 NEF Monthly Admit Goals:

Sept 30- 480
 Oct 30- 1741
 Nov 30- 3063
 Dec 30 – 3960
 Jan 30- 4444
 Feb 28- 4984
 March 30- 5344
 April 30- 5585
 May 30- 5825
 Aug 30- 6005

NEF Monthly Admit Goals by Territory

	Fall 2022 Admit Goal	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Chicago N and W	1349	107	390	688	889	1,003	1,120	1,177	1,234	1,301
W Central Illinois	329	26	95	168	217	245	273	287	301	317
E Central Illinois	483	38	140	246	318	359	401	422	442	466
SE Illinois	49	4	14	25	32	36	41	43	45	47
Out of State	343	27	99	175	226	255	285	299	314	331
St Louis and Southern	198	16	57	101	130	147	164	173	181	191
Chicago S and SW	859	68	248	438	566	638	713	750	785	829
Chicago S Suburb	1432	114	414	730	943	1,064	1,189	1,250	1,309	1,381
QC and N - Ill and IA	447	36	129	228	294	332	371	390	409	431
Chicago Collar	655	52	189	334	431	487	544	572	599	632

NET Monthly Admit Goals

	Fall 2022 Admit Goal	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July
QC and 4-year Transfer	468	12	39	68	89	131	192	230	274	325	368	422
Illinois North	317	8	27	46	60	89	130	156	186	220	249	286
Illinois South	342	9	29	50	65	96	140	168	201	238	269	309

Sales Training:

In partnership with the academic departments and other programs across campus the Admissions team will develop a shared list of features and benefits of our academic and non-academic programs to ensure that we are knowledgeable enough to successfully implement relationship based sales techniques. Presentations, elevator pitches, tour talking points and other messaging will be reviewed and improved to our best foot forward.

Effective Collaboration across campus- specifically in academic areas:

Learn from the academic areas what they are doing to recruit students and implement best practice across campus. Partner effectively to ensure optimal ROI of all recruitment efforts across campus no matter who is driving them or how they are being funded.

Prioritizing investment in marketing programs of distinction:

Admissions and Marketing will identify strategic programs for a small marketing investments that will have the largest impact on our enrollment.

Strategic Lead Generation:

We will explore the use of predictive analytics to strategically generate our leads. We will improve ROI of our name buy strategy. Historically WIU has purchased names across IL that fit our academic profile and are either rising seniors or current seniors. We must develop and implement a communication plan that can effectively nurture students from 9th or 10th grade through enrollment at WIU. We must expand our leads by starting the recruitment process with younger audiences than we currently do- ie. Purchasing names of 9th and 10th graders. We must also strategically consider opportunities to break into new markets such as out of state areas.

Becoming Transfer Friendly

Evaluating our transfer student experience and addressing barriers to transfer such as requiring syllabi from students to determine course equivalencies

Building out the Communication Flow

We will increase the frequency and improving the quality of our communication. We have increased the frequency of communication with current HS seniors in recent years, but we have not achieved an ideal frequency and relevancy at this time. We will continue to increase the frequency of our communication as well as the relevancy of our messaging. We also need to create a communication flow for 9th, 10th, and 11th graders.

Improving the Campus Visit Experience

Starting with our large campus visit experiences we are working to improve the student experience with intentional efforts to ensure that students feel like they belong at WIU and take the next steps in process during their visit. We are reimagining our entire student visit experience- we are raising the bar for Ambassadors, we are doing a competitor analysis, rethinking the student experience to ensure a very strong campus visit experience. We are setting and tracking conversions goals for campus visits.

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