

**Western Illinois University  
Institutional Distinctiveness Committee**

**Final Report**

**May 27, 2021**

**Revised/Updated**

**September 26, 2021**

## **Introduction**

Using the University's Strategic Plan, *Higher Values in Higher Education, 2017-2027*, as a basis, this report details the characteristics that make Western Illinois University a distinct institution of higher learning. Before moving forward to highlight the programs, people, and places that lead to Western's excellence and unique distinction as a school, it is imperative to recognize that the foundation of these qualities is found primarily in the institution's long, historic purpose—that is, to educate students who lack access to higher education, and thus access to equity and transformative personal and financial success.

For 122 years, Western's core mission has been to provide educational opportunities to underserved populations (first generation, lower socio-economic status, etc.), and this mission continues today. Almost 40% of Western's current student population is first generation students from underserved populations. We will note here that this distinction now aligns well with the wider IBHE Strategic Plan, specifically in regards to statewide equity and degree completion targets for the public higher education institutions.

Western's great distinction is that it provides the most for those who have the least. Beyond the outstanding academic degree programs that provide a path to economic stability and mobility, Western has solid support programs in place to ensure that its students, from all backgrounds, succeed. A number of these programs are listed in this report, and include financial support, mental health support, other kinds of social support, and career placement support.

Put simply, for our students and their families, and for over 120 years, Western Illinois University has been and will always be the University of Social Equity, the University of Transformative Learning, and the University of Great Opportunity.

## **Institutional Distinctiveness Committee**

Darcie Shinberger, University Communication (Chair)

Brad Bainter, WIU Foundation

William T (Billy) Clow, Deans Council

Doug Freed, Admissions

William Fabyan, WIU-QC SGA & Int'l Student

Nicky Friedrichsen, Civil Service Employees Council

Noe Jurado, Multicultural Center

Tammy Killian, Chairs Council

Jessica Lambert, University Marketing

Alisha Looney, University Marketing

Jeanette Malafa, Government Relations/parent of a WIU freshman

Patrick McGinty, UPI (alternate)

David Miller, WIU Foundation Executive Board

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John Sanders, Alumni Council; J

Justin Schuch, Executive Director of Retention Initiatives, Council of Administrative Personnel

Bill Thompson, UPI

Kinsey Tiemann, SGA.

*\*A special thank you to Susan Schoonover, marketing assistant/Foundation office manager, for being a part of this committee and taking diligent notes.*

# **PART ONE: PROGRAMMING**

## **Academic Programs of Distinction\***

Our academic programs are linked directly to the core values articulated in our strategic plan: Academic Excellence, Educational Opportunity, Personal Growth, & Social Responsibility.

The following outline lists specific characteristics for each of the academic programs we find particularly distinctive.

### **Agriculture**

- The WIU Ag Education program has established the highest candidate placement rate – 79% - among all Illinois public institutions offering an Agricultural Education degree program.
- WIU's Allison Organic Farm, provides agriculture students conventional and organic production methods in row crop production.
- WIU is the only public institution in Illinois to offer courses in Urban Forestry.
- WIU's agriculture degree program provides a comprehensive focus on the field, with students taking courses in all of the major agricultural areas/topics.
- WIU's new "Cannabis Production" minor within agriculture began in Fall 2020. The new course within the program, "Cannabis Biology and Production," as well as the minor itself, assists with developing employees for the Illinois' growing industry in cannabis production.
- With a focus on undergraduate education, WIU agriculture majors and minors have the opportunity to work on international, national and state grant-funded research projects and get hands-on learning experiences in WIU's agriculture field labs and farms.
- Competitive teams (Livestock Judging, weeds and agronomy competitions), and the largest student-run Ag Mech Show in the nation.
- The program features student-run businesses such as Leatherneck Meats, and federally-funded major grant research, such as Pennycress Research.
- Among our peers (U of IL excluded), three other IL publics offer ag degree: ISU, SIUE, SIUC

### **Cyber Security**

- Cyber Security has a pilot program with CipherTrace, a company that works in cryptocurrency intelligence and blockchain analysis. The "CipherTrace Defenders League" allows students to receive training and certification (CipherTrace Certified Examiner/CTCE), valued at \$1,000. Following certification, students will work actual cases of cryptocurrency fraud, etc.
- While CipherTrace is looking to grow the number of educational partners in the program, there are currently no other Illinois publics participating in this program. Information currently available would put WIU as their fourth partner school, third in the US, with the other schools in the UK, California and New York.
- WIU's program is pursuing the Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense Education (CAE-CD or CAE-CDE). Designation phase: Spring 2022. Requirements include establishing a cybersecurity institute and online presence – will set apart from some (not all) IL publics (note: ISU, UIUC and UIS have CAE-CD designation).
- Among our peers (U of IL excluded) WIU one of only two IL publics to offer a degree in CS (the other is SIUE)

## **Emergency Management (within School of LEJA)**

- WIU's re-designed Emergency Management curriculum is the only program within the state credentialed by the Illinois Board of Higher Education, and has a fully operational Emergency Operations Center (EOC) on site. WIU is the only program in the nation that meets the standards set by FEMA.

## **Health Sciences-Related Programs (Nursing, etc).**

- To prepare students for high-demand careers, WIU has quality health-related programs in place, including nursing, emergency management (see above), health sciences/management. The online RN to BSN program of Western Illinois University's School of Nursing has been named one of the top 25 best programs in the nation for 2022, and for 100 percent of its 30 Spring 2021 graduates passed their National Council Licensure Exam (NCLEX-RN) examination on the first attempt. WIU's post licensure BSN degree program is accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) and is designed to provide options to working nurses.

## **Law Enforcement & Justice Administration**

- Our LEJA program is the fourth largest program in U.S.; it is internationally-recognized.
- WIU program is 46.3% female [(2019): 12.8% of full-time LE officers were female and females represented 27.2% of all LE employees].
- 45.5% students in WIU's program identify as an underrepresented racial minority (compared with the national statistics of 12.4% African American/Black and 11.7% Latinx).
- The School of LEJA has placed students at over 3,500 agencies, businesses, organizations, and firms, public and private, with education and internship placements leading to employment opportunities with the FBI, Secret Service, police departments, corrections and corporations across the country and world.
- The program features a state-of-the-art crime lab and a fully functioning Emergency Operations Center to demonstrate the latest technology and evidenced based practices.
- Curriculum updated regularly to include the latest legislative enactments, court decisions, and public policy changes. Two new programs will debut in 2021-22 that focus on policing in the 21st century, and provide new diversity-related courses, implicit bias training, community-oriented policing and de-escalation in policing.
- The program features an internationally recognized curriculum, including options in fire administration and fire science, homeland security and security administration.
- Ranked one of the top programs on Study.com's Best Online Criminal Justice Degree Programs; 2020 Best Online Bachelor's Law Enforcement Degrees: #1; 2020 Most Affordable Online Bachelor's Fire Science Degrees: #6
- WIU is the only IL public to offer the LEJA comprehensive degree (U of IL is the other institution).

## **Sports Broadcasting**

- The program provides immediate training on equipment through unique applied curriculum.
- The program features outstanding internship programs, excellent placement for graduates, and award-winning program.
- Undergraduate students majoring in Sports Broadcasting can earn a B.A. in Sports Broadcasting and an M.S. in Sport Management in five years (4+1 program)
- Broad spectrum of experiences in radio, television, podcast, digital media.....
- Sports Broadcasting students have the opportunity to announce WIU Athletic events and work on the production crew on ESPN3 Sports.
- WIU Sports Broadcasting and NEWS3 are national award-winning programs.
- Among our peers (U of IL excluded), ONLY program in the state.

## **Teacher Education**

- The Great River Teacher Corps (GRTC) meets the need for more rural teachers by offering teacher education scholarships to students who will in turn work in west central Illinois schools.
- In addition to such programs as the GRTC, Western is the only four-year public university in the state to recently receive \$1.3 million in grant funding from the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) to strengthen and diversify the early childhood workforce. The grant is being used to address the shortage and grow the qualified pool of early childhood educators for the rural McDonough County region.
- WIU's graduate reading program is entirely online.
- School Psychology graduates have a 100 percent job placement rate. In existence since 1968, WIU was one of the earliest school psychology programs approved by the Illinois State Board of Education. The program also has a long history of 100% of our graduates passing the national examination (PRAXIS) for the purpose of becoming certified and licensed.

## **School of Music**

- The School of Music is the largest music program in the region.
- It is an audition only program.
- It features award-winning programs in music education, music business, and music therapy

## **Summer Archaeological Field School**

- The Archaeological Field School at WIU, the only open enrollment summer field school in the region, and one of only a handful of active summer archaeological field schools enrolls students (B.A. through Ph.D.) from across the United States.
- The summer excavation site, exclusive to WIU, explores ancient residential and community structures at the world-renowned Orendorf pre-contact Mississippian village.

## **Distinctive Characteristics of Current Signature Academic Programs**

### **Accounting**

- WIU's accountancy program is one of the first in the region to realign its curriculum in accordance with the CPA Evolution (CPA exam).
- A strong history of excellent CPA pass rates. There have been several years in which WIU students have had the highest pass rates in the region.
- WIU's Chapter of NABA (National Association of Black Accountants) was one of the first schools in the country to pilot the "CPA Project" that specifically works to decrease the underrepresentation of minorities who sit for the CPA exam.
- The WIU School of Accounting, Finance, Economics, & Decision Sciences employs a faculty member who holds one of the records for the highest CPA test score and is a top presenter for CMA preparation.
- WIU-Macomb Chapter of Beta Alpha Psi received Superior Chapter status for 31 consecutive years.
- Dual accreditation by AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business).

### **Biology**

- Offers the only program at a public institution in Illinois with access to the Mississippi River and surrounding terrain through the Alice L. Kibbe Life Science Station and Nahant Marsh.
- Hands-on laboratory experiences such as monitoring crayfish for side effects from OTC medications; food DNA extraction to research genetic engineering; DNA fingerprinting; working with wild (captive) animals at an area zoo, and more.
- Extensive undergraduate research opportunities through RISE (Research Inspiring Student Excellence).
- Collaborative linkages with agencies such as the United States Geological Survey, the National Science Foundation, and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

### **Engineering**

- The only engineering program at a public institution in western region of Illinois.
- Accredited by ABET-EAC (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology - Engineering Accreditation Commission).
- #7 on the 15 best list of "Best Affordable Mechanical Engineering Degree Programs" - Affordable Schools, 2019

### **Forensic Chemistry**

- WIU is one of one nine Forensic Chemistry institutions in the country that offers a specific B.S. degree in forensic chemistry, and majors participate in an internship at a state crime lab and/or conduct research with a forensic faculty member. Forensic chemistry faculty members investigate explosive residues, gunshot residues, fire accelerants, food toxins, drug testing, DNA analysis, and more.
- WIU Forensic Chemistry graduates are often employed in state and federal crime labs, including the FBI, as well as private consulting companies, and over 95 percent of Forensic Chemistry graduates secure employment in their field within six months of graduation, and most have a job waiting upon graduation.

## **Musical Theatre**

- The first BFA in musical theatre in Illinois at a public institution, and one of the few select programs offered at an Illinois public institution.
- Comprehensive three-prong musical theatre professional training program including individualized training in voice, acting, and dance.
- Excellent placement of graduates in regional theatres across the nation, in the major markets of Chicago and New York, as well as on top cruise lines.
- A NAST (National Association of Schools of Theatre) Accredited Program.
- Audition-only BFA Program
- Multiple award-winning national musical theatre awards(Kennedy Center/American College Theatre Festival (KC/ACTF))

## **RPTA**

- One of the few programs in the nation that offers five specific options in the leisure industries.
- Fourth longest-running accredited program in the nation (accredited by the Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism and Related Professions (COAPRT) and the Wilderness Education Association (WEA)).
- Opportunities for hands-on, real world training through coursework, field trips, and internships
- Cooperative relationships with nearly 500 organizations throughout Illinois and the nation.
- Horn Field Campus, a 92 acre, experiential campus for outdoor education and facilitation
- Experiential expedition in outdoor education and leadership.

## **Supply Chain Management**

- One of only three degree programs in Illinois within a college of business accredited by AACSB.
- One of the few degree programs that have semester-long courses in supply chain negotiations, inventory strategies, and risk management.
- Every SCM major has the opportunity to sit for exam for "Certified Associate in Project Management" (CAPM) by the Project Management Institute. (COMING SOON)
- Graduates are specifically requested by Archer Daniels Midland, John Deere, Dot Foods and many other industry partners nationwide, with placement rates upon graduation range from 92% to 100% (varies by semester).

## **\* REVISE/UPDATE PROGRAMS OF DISTINCTION LIST**

- TOP five programs of distinction (programs with potential – those already attracting #s of students, e.g. LEJA; health-related programs). What programs have the MOST potential to set WIU apart from its peers.

- Five additional, sub-programs of distinction (add'l programs to draw students to WIU because of unique characteristics)

- Can we make our General Education curriculum more distinctive to set WIU's program apart from others.

## **New and Developing Minors to Serve New Student Needs**

The following are examples of new minor programs developed or could be developed to meet current student needs. Again, these programs ultimately lead to the distinction of Western—a University that is student-centered and develops programming to meet the needs of those students: Cannabis & Culture; Cannabis Production; Social Media; Stage Combat (one of three programs in the world).

Suggested new minors: Green Economics, Green Energy (being developed by the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs); Foreign Languages: Chinese, Farsi.

## **Additional Programs and Assets Distinct to Western**

Western has a number of additional distinctive assets that should be noted in this report. Below is a list of additional locations, our branch campus, our online campus, and a number real estate holdings, all of which lead to an increase in the value of the education delivered at Western and the accessibility of the education to the region and the students we serve. Like the academic programs listed above, these assets support the core values of the institution and are directly linked to the needs of our students.

**Branch Campus.** Western's multi-building, 20-acre branch campus in Moline, IL, houses academic programs in the colleges of Arts and Sciences, Business and Technology (including WIU's School of Engineering), Education and Human Services, and Fine Arts and Communication, as well as the US Bank Writing Center, testing center, academic advising, and multiple student services. WIU-QC is home to WQPT Public Television. The multipurpose library at the WIU-QC campus also houses the Jeff Leibovitz Holocaust Collection. Significantly, WIU-QC is the only four-year public university in the Quad Cities.

**Degree Delivery at Additional Locations:** To increase access to higher education, and, thus, an increase in wider social equity and economic development, Western has developed an impressive variety of additional locations for course delivery, including the Springfield Police Academy, Peoria Manual High School, and others.

**The Center for Performing Arts:** When constructed, the Center for the Performing Arts on the WIU-Macomb campus will support the academic mission and programs in the College of Fine Arts and Communication and serve as the cultural epicenter for the western and central Illinois region. The center will include an approximately 900-seat proscenium theatre auditorium and a 150-seat flexible studio theatre. 900-seat proscenium theatre and a 150-seat flexible studio theatre. There also will be dance, jazz, percussion and theatre rehearsal studios and classrooms to facilitate the academic mission of the building, which complements numerous academic programs; dressing rooms adjacent to the theatres; professional and technical support spaces; a box office; administration offices and a loading dock that will accommodate semis and buses for professional touring companies and orchestras.

**Horn Field Campus:** Horn Field Campus (HFC), located just one mile south of Macomb, is a unit of Western Illinois University's College of Education and Human Services administered by the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Administration (RPTA). The 92-acre field campus includes woodlands, prairie and several miles of nature trails. The purpose of HFC is to facilitate environmental responsibility and human development.

**Mississippi River-Adjacent Property:** This property is utilized by the Ph.D. program in Environmental Studies, by RPTA, by Biology, etc.

**Kibbe Life Sciences Station:** The WIU field station, comprised of 222 acres adjacent to the Mississippi in Hancock County, promotes teaching and research in field biology and ecology. The Illinois Department

of Natural Resources owns 1,458 acres adjacent to the Kibbe Station. The total 1,680 acres comprise the Kibbe Macro (KM) site. The Department of Biological Sciences at Western Illinois University began conducting summer classes in 1966, and has held summer sessions at the site ever since. The site represents the largest piece of continuous landscape in the area. The area is a major wintering site for one of the largest concentrations of bald eagles in North America. The nature preserve, which is home to a diversity of plant and animal species, provides students with hands-on experience in field research, as well as offering the general public an opportunity to commune with nature.

**Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs:** The Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs (IIRA) builds the capacity of community leaders and policymakers by providing technical support, applied research, policy evaluation, and training across the state. IIRA is a clearinghouse for information on rural issues, coordinates rural research, and works with state agencies on issues of importance to rural communities. IIRA offers a set of integrated programs in community and economic development, housing, health, education, transportation, and public administration, focusing specifically on the changing needs of rural communities. These programs address common concerns among rural communities such as identifying economic development opportunities; attracting, retaining, and creating businesses; strengthening transportation services; enhancing the quality of education; increasing revenues; ensuring access to quality health care; and improving quality of life.

**Multicultural Center:** The student-funded center, which opened in August 2009, is the first building on the WIU-Macomb campus to be built under green standards, and is the first WIU facility to receive LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Silver Certification. The Center houses the Women's Center, the LGBT\*A Resource Center, Casa Latina Cultural Center and the Gwendolyn Brooks Cultural Center. The Center housing these entities enables all four centers to enhance their provision of educational, social and cultural programs and resources that help focus the campus community's awareness and appreciation of ethnic and gender diversity.

**Off-Campus, Online Programming:** Western is committed to increasing its online programming as the institution believes that this is another avenue for our region to increase higher education attainment and thus the core values of our institution.

**School of Agriculture:** The School of Agriculture has numerous property holdings that allow Western to increase educational opportunities for our students. These holdings include:

- 300 acres in Macomb owned by WIU
- 40 acres pasture of University property
- 77 acres leased (Allison organic farm)
- Greenhouse facilities

**The WIU Arlington & Arlene Seymour Center for Rural Education, Advocacy, Policy and Research:** This is the first center of its kind in Illinois and one of a few in the United States – is the state's rural education center. When fully funded, the Center will offer partial and full tuition and fee scholarships to incoming students who wish to pursue careers in teaching K-12 and agree to stay in WIU's 16-country service region to teach following graduation. The mission of the Seymour Center for Rural Education is to provide continuing support for the needs of rural educators in Illinois as well as at the state and national levels.

## **Student Support Programs and Faculty Resources**

In adhering with our strategic planning documents, Western has numerous support focuses, student support services, and faculty focuses that are distinct and admirable.

As a regional mid-sized public university, WIU has the ability to put personalized programs in place to meet the needs of its students: success-related programs (e.g., tutoring); extracurricular programs (e.g. clubs/activities); financial incentives (e.g., scholarships) and more.

### **Commitment to Access & Affordability**

- As 40% of our students are first generation students, it is clear that we are leader in high education institutions when it comes to providing access to higher education.
- In terms of affordability, our Cost Guarantee Program locks in all tuition costs for UG students. Only IL public to include room and meal plan locked in.
- 80% of Western students receive Pell/MAP Grant funding

### **Support for WIU Students & the University Community**

- MCC/Resources to Support Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (SR, PG, EO)
- Commitment to Social Justice Matters/Issues (SR, PG, EO)
- Availability of childcare on campus (Horrabin & Head Start)
- Military friendly campus/resources. WIU is the only Illinois four-year public institution to obtain a top designation as a Military Friendly school. WIU is the only Illinois public in the top 50 of the "Best for Vets" colleges, and one of only two Illinois publics in the list of four-year schools.
- BGS degree program
- Leatherneck Care Program & Leatherneck Launch programs
- University-wide tutoring and academic support
- A robust First Year Experience Program that includes small class sizes and access to peer mentorship
- Living and Learning Communities
- Kinder Mondays through University Counseling Center to demonstrate support/people here for our University community members.
- More than 200 active clubs and organizations on campus that provide engagement and support for a wide variety of students with a range of interests from social to philanthropic to leadership to identity to academic focus and more. Attendance at athletic events, performance events, recreation center membership and more are provided free to students (as part of their fee structure).
- A residential university, with a two-year residency requirement. The comprehensive residence life program includes with peer mentors and professional staff in every building to support students and contribute to their personal growth and development, as well as an award-winning hall government program.
- WIU's College Student Personnel Program is a highly respected program nationwide, with graduates in professional positions across the country. The program also provides high quality graduate assistants in student success positions throughout WIU.
- Go West buses provides free public transportation for students (and area residents) across campus and throughout the city connecting students with services and resources in the community including shopping, social, train station, and entertainment venues.

## **PART TWO: ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS**

The following data illustrate the context within which Western exists. We include this information as a way to demonstrate Western's distinction as an institution of higher learning.

## **National Data/Information Discussed to Consider**

Top concerns of first year students (From EDgauge magazine (for higher education marketing) - Spring 2021)

- 42% of incoming students are more concerned about their mental well being
- 47% are more concerned about their academic preparedness
- 42% are more concerned about their financial future
- 57% feel stressed
- 55% feel isolated

*Western addresses each of these concerns through faculty and peer mentoring, the University Counseling Center, and various academic success resources (like Leatherneck Launch or the University Writing Center).*

## **The Carnegie Dartlet Fall 2021 High School Seniors**

- More than half of students said that scholarships and aid were a top college choice factor when asked to pick their top four criteria from an established list. This is nearly 10 percent higher than is typically seen in prospective student samples given this same list before COVID-19.
- The results supported the increased scholarship need
- Campus safety, especially among women.

*Western addresses these concerns through its accessibility to financial aid, its larger amount of scholarship information, cost guarantee programming, aid availability for qualified students (PELL/MAP disbursements at WIU), on campus employment, clear safety information.*

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## **The 2020 Perceptions of College Financing Report**

- Cost is the top reason students stop considering an institution.
- Fewer than half of high school juniors reported receiving information about financial aid from campuses.
- Nine out of 10 high school juniors expect they will need to take out loans to pay for college.
- Half of parents expect COVID-19 will cause the cost of college to increase.

*Western has clearly communicated scholarship information available (including rolling scholarships/automatic-no deadline scholarship), a cost guarantee program, significant aid availability for qualified students (PELL/MAP disbursements at WIU), and on campus employment opportunities.*

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## **Multicultural Information/Research**

- Generation Z is most multicultural to date.
- One in three consumers in America is multicultural. Multicultural audiences have combined spending power of \$3.9 trillion. {Cannot ignore/not create marketing messages tailored for multicultural communities}
- "Majority norms" or "traditional American values" are not universal. Don't represent the multicultural experience in the U.S. (nor at WIU). Recognizing diversity an asset.

*Western has a multicultural/diverse student body.*

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### **IRP New Freshmen Enrollment Data (2020)**

- Completed applications – 7,603; Accepted – 5,091; # Enrolled Fall 2020 – 1,064
  - 67% accepted, 20.9% enrolled
- Accepted, enrolled elsewhere (public): ISU – 237, NIU – 223, EIU – 125, UIUC – 110, UIC – 107\*
- Accepted, enrolled elsewhere (2 year): Chicago/Malcolm X – 69, DuPage – 51, Prairie State – 35, ICC – 34, William Rainey Harper – 30
- Accepted, enrolled elsewhere (private): Nat'l Lewis – 55, Bradley – 51, Aurora – 43, St Xavier – 41, Columbia (Chicago) – 35
- Accepted, enrolled elsewhere (out of state public): Indiana State -23, Univ of MO-Columbia – 22, Univ of IA – 21, Tenn State – 17, SEMO – 17

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### **WIU Brand Identity Report (May 2018)\***

Competition positioning:

- EIU – Welcoming university, small town that is down-to-earth, small class sizes, profs treat students like family
- ISU – Big campus w/ small campus feel, lots of clubs, lots of extracurriculars, great profs
- SIUC – Pretty campus surrounded by nature, professional feel, passionate faculty
- SIUE – Pretty campus, good profs, not much to do outside of academics, not strong on Greek life or sports
- IA State – Gorgeous, large campus, many things to do, career-focused, strong in engineering

WIU Survey Results:

- Students chose WIU because: close to home (repeated several times); scholarships, tuition and affordability; certain academic programs better here (LEJA mentioned most); location (rural).
- Interesting note: WIU is often a "second choice" (according to students surveyed in 2018), or they go elsewhere first, and end up at WIU their second or third year.
- 52% of students surveyed noted WIU is known for affordability (90% thought more affordable than other state institutions).
- 78% noted that WIU is more diverse (student body) than EIU, SIUC/E, NIU, UIS & U-IA  
***DISTINCTION: WIU REFLECTS THE NATION***

- 79% noted WIU is safer than its counterparts;
- 90% noted that WIU is easier to get into than its counterparts  
*DISTINCTION: ACCEPTED BASED ON POTENTIAL NOT TEST SCORES; WIU GIVES YOU THE CHANCE/TO PROVE YOURSELF/TO BE SUCCESSFUL; RESOURCES TO HELP STUDENTS SUCCEED, ETC.*

## **PART III: Next Steps**

### **Admissions/Program Ideas to Set WIU Apart from Peers**

- **Guaranteed Admission Program.** Guarantee admissions to students early in their high school careers (must meet benchmarks set by Admissions). Offer a scholarship incentive to supplement the guarantee of admission. Offer the guarantee program to school districts.
- **Parent Mentoring.** Current parents who work at WIU could also act as mentors to other parents. For example: UT Dallas (<https://oue.utdallas.edu/special-programs/freshman-mentor-program/>) has a program that may serve as a model for what WIU could implement. *Note: The WIU Theatre & Dance Department has parents of current theatre/dance students send letters to prospective students' parents.*
- **Application Fees.** Question posed by committee member: If cost is one of the top factors in college choice, why not get rid of the application fee? How many schools charge an application fee – by not charging an application fee for undergraduate students, this would set WIU apart. Note: All Illinois publics will begin using the Common App (per Gov./IBHE) this fall, and many are going test-optional (like WIU) – will waiving an app fee set WIU apart from others (can we do so w/ the Common App?).
- **Open Admissions.** Become an open admissions/enrollment institution. Illinois' only four-year open enrollment university.
- **Alumni Ambassadors.** Introduce a program where younger alumni ambassadors are available to pair with prospective students to answer questions/talk about WIU - based off of similar demographics/psychographics/majors/interests, etc.
- **Enhanced Campus Beautification.** We have a beautiful campus; however, enhancements are needed to showcase the natural beauty of our campus. Updated signage; better landscaping/exterior maintenance; etc.

### **Academic/Other Programs Ideas to Set WIU Apart from Peers**

- Re-envision the Honors Program with identifiable and dedicated faculty, a core curriculum, and guarantee of an enhanced capstone experience.
- Invest in the Living Learning Community (LLC) program and drastically increase community offerings connecting to classroom experiences with a goal of having the majority of first year students residing in an LLC.

- Highlight the uniqueness of our core institutional values. Reposition WIU as a leader in social justice, educational opportunity, student engagement and success.
- QC campus as THE dual enrollment campus for QC region.
- Streamline degree completion (from Retention Committee draft).
- Core values guide institutional practices, programs, etc.
- Mentoring/in depth advising and support programs.
  - Western First Year Experience (FYE) program provides support for first-generation students through their first year of college and beyond.
  - Office of Retention Initiatives (ORI) and the Student Development and Success Center (SDSC) have a number of student success programs in place to help students, including the Leatherneck Care Referral program, which gives students, families, faculty and staff, an opportunity to refer students and situations to staff for personal follow-up;
  - Additional resources and education for first-generation college students and families
  - Building Connections and other mentor programs; success initiatives; and early interventions.
- Highlight faculty: Innovative faculty research, their professional, international, local, regional, state-level forms of service, and their professional experiences and applications of their expertise.
  - Faculty classroom innovations and faculty mentoring.
  - Connect all that to the student experience at WIU.
  - Focus on the people here.

## **Conclusion**

Why would you want to come to Western?

On one level, we provide the distinct people, transformative programs, and easily identified places that match student needs. ***While WIU provides the skillsets for a career after graduation, Western also provides for a lifetime of learning and the skills to change the world.***

On another level, though, what Western provides most is accessibility—the right program, the right place, offered at the right time, all of which leads to access for our students.

What makes Western Illinois University distinct, more than anything else, is our commitment to our students and to the region we serve. This commitment defines who we are as an institution, and who we have been since 1902: provide a solid college education for all, particularly those who may lack access to higher education. We are a University that provides opportunities to help transform lives.