

WIU President Guiyou Huang
2022 Higher Education Appropriation Committees Testimony
March 16, 2022 & March 17, 2022

Thank you for this opportunity to present Western Illinois University's annual appropriation testimony. I am Guiyou Huang, Western's 12th President. I am joined by Billy Clow, Interim Provost; Shannon Sutton, Interim Vice President for Finance and Administration; Dr. Amber Schultz, Vice President of Enrollment Management; Angela Bonifas, Director of Institutional Research; Jeanette Malafa, Government Relations; and Renee Georges, University Budget Officer.

Western has a long, proud tradition of providing accessible, quality educational opportunities to the residents of Illinois at an affordable price. With its first mission of educating teachers in the west central region of Illinois, Western has grown to become a nationally recognized leader with many of our signature programs. Our Law Enforcement and Justice Administration program was recently ranked number one in the state of Illinois, is the fourth largest program in the nation and is helping to diversify our law enforcement community. Western's Emergency Management is the only program in the nation that meets the standards set by FEMA. We are only one of nine universities in the country to offer a Forensic Chemistry degree. Our Agriculture Program is leading the nation with research into a winter cover crop that can be converted into airplane fuel and provides students with individualized, hands-on in-the-field agricultural opportunities. Other programs include an outstanding Accounting Department, a new Cybersecurity program, a nursing program that offers both in-person and online options, an education department that is leading the way in developing early childhood curriculum and addressing the rural teacher shortage, award-winning Sports Broadcasting and Musical Theatre programs, a biology program with access to the Mississippi River, the fourth oldest Recreation Parks and Tourism Administration program in the nation, and a supply chain management program that feeds into some of Illinois' largest employers.

With locations in Macomb, Quad Cities, and online, Western gives our students the choice of multiple course delivery modalities. Our rolling admissions process allows students to register at the right time for them without the worry of missing deadlines. Likewise, our largest scholarship program, the Western Commitment Scholarship, is an automatic scholarship – students don't even have to apply! They find out what Western Commitment scholarship they will receive in their acceptance letter. With an average class size of 17 students, full-time faculty teaching 95% of our classes, and over 100 undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degree programs, students can receive their personalized education in a manner that is conducive to their needs.

Our Board of Trustees passed a \$18.6 million dollar increase for Western's FY23 budget request. As you can see in your handouts, we respectfully request these additional funds for student financial aid, employee compensation, retention efforts, diversity and equity initiatives, along with other important institutional priorities. Deferred maintenance is also included as ongoing maintenance is needed in order to keep these state-owned buildings in good working order. With an average age of 63 years for the buildings on our Macomb campus, our deferred maintenance backlog totals over \$500 million dollars. We also continue to advocate for the release of capital funds for the construction of our Center for Performing Arts and for our Illinois Innovation Network hubs. Western appreciates all of the previous support of the General Assembly. We have been, and will continue to be, good stewards of public funds. We appreciate and are grateful for both the Illinois Board of Higher Education and Governor Pritzker's budget recommendations to increase appropriations for the public universities by 5%, increase the MAP grant, and stabilize College Illinois.

Two programs that the General Assembly initiated for the public universities should be highlighted and applauded: The CommonApp has made it easier for Illinois students and families to apply for college by allowing them to apply to all participating schools in one step. We have increased applications and accepted students for our Fall 2022 class, with over half of our applications coming through the CommonApp. The AIM High program is keeping Illinois' best and brightest in Illinois! Since the program's inception, Western has awarded \$5.5 million dollars in Aim High scholarships. In the 21-22 academic year, \$2 million dollars has been awarded to 340 students with the average AIM High award of \$6,384. Students receiving Western's AIM High funds this year had a 97% retention rate from Fall '21 to Spring '22. Western is supplementing AIM High funding with a \$500,000 investment of institutional dollars because of the strong enrollment and retention rate of our AIM High recipients.

Over two decades ago, Western served as the model for the Illinois Truth in Tuition law and, today, we continue to be the only public university in the state that provides the guaranteed cost structure for not only tuition and fees, but also room and board for undergraduate students to help students and families budget accordingly.

In fiscal year 22, over 80% of our full-time undergraduate student body received financial assistance. Because of that, Western appreciates the State's continued support of the MAP grant program. Overall, 44% of all undergraduate students at Western received the MAP grant. Of those recipients, 35% identified as Black and 16% as Latinx. When just looking at our first-time, full-time undergraduate students in the 20-21 academic year, 95% of them were awarded financial aid. Combining this with our other scholarship programs, such as the Western Commitment, Leatherneck book awards, alumni legacy, and an automatic campus visitor scholarship, Western remains one of the most affordable public higher education options in our state.

In addition to financial resources, Western continues to prioritize student support services as our new freshmen class is composed of 39% first-generation students and over half identify as an underrepresented minority group. We have focused on early intervention initiatives and tracking efforts to identify students at risk of not retaining. A new interactive chatbot, EdSights, provides students with instant assistance and resource sharing 24/7, which allows for intentional outreach. Targeted outreach provides academic and social support for students, including peer to peer support networks. These new initiatives have assisted in increasing fall-to-spring retention for undergraduate students by one percentage point.

As the only public school in the U.S. with Congressional permission to use the nickname The Fighting Leathernecks, Western takes its commitment to its military and veteran students seriously. For 11 years running, Western has been selected as a "Best for Vets College" by Military Times magazine. Western is one of two Illinois public institutions in the top 25. In addition, Western has been designated as a "Military Friendly School." Our military students, both former and current, receive credit for military training and specialized military training and have excellent wrap-around services through our Veterans Resource Center. In addition, we partner with the Community College of the Air Force for its General Education Mobile and the Air University-Associate to Baccalaureate Completion Program. This allows Western to be of service and provide general education courses that meet CCAF requirements in an online format anytime and anywhere.

Western is also recognized as a "Best Midwestern University" by the *U.S. News and World Report* and a "Best Midwestern College" by the *Princeton Review*, and remains the economic engine for west central Illinois with an annual economic impact of approximately \$360 million in our 16-county service region.

Across the University, diversity and equity-minded policies and practices are integrated into our mission. Recently I have established an Anti-Racism Task Force composed of faculty, staff, students, and community members. I am also creating a new Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion which will be under my direct supervision. The Anti-Racism Task Force and the Office of Diversity, Equity and

Inclusion will move Western forward and support a community that promotes a culture of inclusion. Work will continue, including public dialogues, to discuss the challenges facing our minority populations and the opportunities to enhance the educational experience at Western.

We will also continue to work toward our goals of diversifying our faculty and staff. Western has reinstated the Rev. Dr. Vivian Diversity Teaching Scholars Program in honor of Rev. Dr. C.T. Vivian, a distinguished Western alumnus who made monumental contributions as a pivotal leader and activist in the Civil Rights movement. This program extends teaching opportunities to graduate students and academic professionals from diverse cultural backgrounds who are entering, or have just completed, the final year of a terminal degree or doctoral program. C.T. Vivian Scholars will teach courses, conduct research, and contribute to the University community. This program is designed to provide teaching experiences, mentoring and training, and potential tenure-track employment opportunities within Western for these scholars.

The Black Faculty and Staff Council was developed to support improving the quality of the black experience at Western. The President's Council on Community Engagement was also established to create positive and productive discourse focused on improving University-community relationships, with an emphasis on social justice and equity. Expanding beyond the university and the local community, Western's Purchasing Office has been working with vendors to increase the institution's BEP expenditures with minority-owned businesses. Western is committed to increasing our BEP spend.

Commitment to state workforce needs is also of high priority to Western. Western is addressing the shortage of nurses, while providing advanced educational opportunities. In our School of Nursing, which offers face-to-face and online courses, the largest student demographic group enrollment is black females representing 46% of our nursing program, and the second largest is white females representing 34% of the enrollment. Our students receive hands-on clinical training in healthcare facilities, and provide assistance at events, such as flu and COVID-19 vaccine clinics and health fairs. The specialty courses within the program have a rural/community component and also offer a Rural Health elective. In Spring 2021, all of the School of Nursing prelicensure graduates passed their National Council Licensure Exam (NCLEX). This is the second time in the past five years that the department achieved a 100 percent pass rate. Upon graduation, Western's nursing graduates have a 100% job placement rate.

Western is also leading the charge on reversing the statewide teacher shortage. From traditional educational licensure programs to our groundbreaking early childhood credentialing and licensure program, we have the right fit for everyone. Our early childhood program serves incumbent daycare workers in an online, module-style fashion that allows students to take class when it fits into their schedules. This was the first program of this type to be funded through a grant from the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development and the Federal Preschool Development Birth through Five Initiative. To showcase Western's commitment to help students who want or need to stay closer to home, Western and Highland Community College in Freeport signed an agreement last Spring that provides the opportunity for Freeport-area high school students to begin their degree path via dual credit, complete an Associate of Arts Degree at Highland, and then their Bachelor of Education from Western on Highland's campus.

Western has created, and privately funded, two other education opportunities for students: The Great River Teacher Corps and the Arlington & Arlene Seymour Center for Rural Education, Advocacy, Policy and Research. The Great River Teacher Corps is a scholarship program that recruits and develops teachers to work in schools in west central Illinois through partnerships with the Regional Offices of Education, district superintendents, and local communities in 22 counties. The Seymour Center – the first center of its kind in Illinois and one of a few in the United States -- will also offer scholarships to incoming students who wish to pursue careers in teaching K-12 and agree to stay in Western's 16-county

service region to teach following graduation. The Center will also research issues faced by rural students, their teachers, and their schools.

The Illinois Institute of Rural Affairs at Western helps administer Small Business Development Centers in both Macomb and the Quad Cities, along with a Procurement Technical Assistance Center and an International Trade Center. In 2021, the Institute served 121 communities, advised 339 clients, created or retained 234 jobs statewide and assisted with 16 business startups. Besides economic and community development, the Institute focuses outreach on business development and entrepreneurship, housing and health, value-added development, transportation, data and technical assistance, and information technology. The IIRA staffs the Rural Affairs Council for the Lieutenant Governor, sits on the Agricultural Equity and Food Insecurity Advisory Council, works on the Agricultural Inequity Research Project, and hosts the annual statewide Rural Economic Development Conference. Most recently, IIRA has been working closely with federal, state, and local entities to tackle the problem of rural grocery store closures by helping to create grocery store co-ops in several areas around Illinois, such as in Cairo.

My remarks would not be complete without the mention of how the university has dealt with COVID. Western continues to partner with County Public Health Departments and Emergency Services and Disaster Agencies to monitor Coronavirus. We have been successful in keeping students in the classroom with the efforts of the entire University community. Installation of HEPA air filters, enhanced cleaning protocols, socially distanced classrooms, on site quarantine and isolation, and distribution of facial coverings and hand sanitizer are some of the mitigation processes that have been utilized. Weekly on-site testing utilizing University of Illinois' Shield IL and vaccination clinics have also aided in the success of remaining on campus. Students are able to seek personal counseling services by licensed staff members of the University Counseling Center. Throughout the academic year, the UCC offers the Western community a wide array of education programs on such topics as depression, anxiety disorders, suicide intervention/prevention, healthy relationships, stress management and more. The UCC also provides free tele-health counseling resources during the academic year and also through the summer months. This ensures continuity of care over the summer months, thus improving mental health and bolstering students for the fall semester. Western fully supports both HB5424 and SB4055, which would appropriate more money for mental health services on campus.

In closing, we appreciate your support of Western Illinois University and all of Illinois higher education. We join with you to solve the challenges facing our State. And, we stand ready to educate Illinois' greatest asset, its students.