

WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY PLAN FOR EXCELLENCE: AN UPDATE

JUNE 2007

Created and approved in 2001, the Plan for Excellence has guided West Chester University to new heights. Five years after its adoption, campus leaders requested that the Strategic Planning Resource Council – the committee charged with monitoring the progress of the Plan – conduct a review of the Plan and suggest changes. During the past year, the Council members performed this thorough assessment and sought University-wide input on potential modifications to the Plan’s goals. The Council’s findings included recommendations to add two new goals, clarify several others, and strengthen the Plan’s relationship to budgeting and assessment. But for the most part, they affirmed that the Plan remains sound and continues to serve the University well.

On behalf of the University community, The President’s Cabinet congratulates the Strategic Planning Resource Council for their outstanding work. Members of the Council include:

Co-Chairs:

MaryAnn Hammond, Assistant Dean of Students
Peter Loedel, Chair and Professor of Political Science

Members:

Kristen Albert, Assistant Professor of Music
Giovanni Casotti, Associate Professor of Biology
William Christman, Student Government Representative
Tom Clark, Director of Facilities Planning
Barbara Cooper, AFSCME President
Walter Cressler, Librarian
Stephanie Reid, Administrative Assistant, Undergraduate Studies
Lynn Spradlin, Professor of Counseling and Educational Psychology
Brent Thompson, Associate Professor of Nursing
Mary Pat Werley, Academic Affairs Budget Manager

WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA PLAN FOR EXCELLENCE – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

West Chester University's mission is to prepare students for success in all aspects of their lives, and to respond to the educational and cultural needs of southeastern Pennsylvania. To fulfill this mission, West Chester has created a strategic plan – *the Plan for Excellence* – that affirms the University's longstanding commitment to quality while embracing far-reaching changes in institutional actions and ambitions. Simply put, the *Plan for Excellence* is the roadmap WCU will use to become the nation's premier regional, comprehensive university.

West Chester University's Mission

West Chester University, a member of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, is a public, regional, comprehensive institution committed to providing access and offering high-quality undergraduate education, select post-baccalaureate and graduate programs, and a variety of educational and cultural resources for its students and alumni and the citizens of southeastern Pennsylvania.

VISION

To create the *Plan for Excellence*, West Chester University examined its heritage and accomplishments, assessed current conditions, studied the external environment, and invited its many stakeholders – trustees, students, faculty, staff, and the greater community – to consider the institution's future. Not surprisingly, this process generated an array of ideas and viewpoints. Such diversity is healthy for any organization, but particularly a place of learning. Yet, amid the variety of opportunities discussed, a clear vision of the University emerged. And it is satisfying to know that this vision begins with and flows from the institution's mission.

West Chester University's Vision

West Chester University will be a national model for excellence for public, regional, comprehensive universities and especially noted for:

- ◆ Undergraduate programs that actively engage students in connecting the life of the mind to the world in which they live and work
- ◆ Graduate and post-baccalaureate programs that respond to regional needs
- ◆ Graduates who are lifelong learners and possess the technical and applied skills essential to success now and in the future
- ◆ A commitment to access and serving the educational needs of a diverse student body
- ◆ Leadership as a community educational and cultural resource, and a partner in fostering the economic, social, and cultural vitality of southeastern Pennsylvania.

TRANSFORMATIONS OF MIND AND PURPOSE

West Chester University does many things very well. But its current successes are merely building blocks to a future that will expect more from its citizens and institutions. Advancing technology, increasing globalization, and rising expectations for productivity, service, and access will drive change like never before. Universities unable to adapt to these new realities are destined for mediocrity, or worse. Institutions capable of transformation will retain lasting value. The *Plan for Excellence* assures that WCU will thrive in this new environment.

Admittedly, transformation presents challenges. Nevertheless, the path to excellence will require the University community to think and act differently. In fact, the following transformations of attitude and action are the cornerstones of this plan:

Responsiveness – Enhance the University’s capacity to meet the educational and cultural needs of the region

Student Success – Make student success the institution’s defining characteristic

Diversity – Improve diversity, access, and equity, and foster a climate that nurtures a multicultural community of students, faculty, and staff

Human Capital – Invest in the skills and knowledge that faculty and staff needs to be outstanding teachers, scholars, innovators, and leaders

Resourcefulness – Diversify physical and fiscal resources, and increase the effectiveness of institutional management.

LINKING PLANNING WITH ACTION

In order to achieve the Plan for Excellence transformations, the Plan must guide all aspects of campus life. To accomplish this objective, the Plan is linked to four management principles and processes: budgeting, accountability, assessment, and continuous improvement. As a result, the University has established specific ties between its operational structures and implementation of the Plan’s priorities. And in some cases, new operating procedures and governance structures have been created to ensure that the Plan’s goals are reached.

For example, the Administrative Budget Committee – the University’s principal vehicle for recommending and monitoring resource allocations – has been charged with ensuring that budget priorities are driven by the Plan for Excellence. As a result, the Committee has instituted a process for assessing all resource requests based on their relationship to the Plan. Similarly, budget reductions or reallocations are governed by the priorities outlined in the Plan.

Also, individuals and groups have responsibility for achieving specific goals within the Plan. All members of the University community are expected to be contributing in their own unique ways to the Plan’s success and reporting their progress in bimonthly and annual reports which are shared with institutional leadership and committees.

In addition to assessment of student learning outcomes in academic programs, assessment of other University activities and processes is critical to the institution’s continuous improvement. Assessment is needed at both the micro (unit/activity) and macro (Plan) levels. This has been assured by several mechanisms, perhaps the most unique and primary being the Strategic Planning Resource Council. The Council, which is comprised of faculty, staff, and administrative representatives from across campus, is charged with the annual assessment of the Plan’s progress and recommends corrective measures, improvements, and changes to the President. The Council has campus-wide access to information, and its reports are critical to focusing the institution on aspects of the Plan that need work as well as opportunities to strength or add to the Plan.

By connecting key operational practices such as budgeting and evaluation to the Plan for Excellence, the University demonstrates its intent to make the Plan and its transformation the foundation upon which its actions are based.

In the pages ahead, you will read more about each transformation and the goals that flow from them. These priorities will guide the University’s decisions and activities for years to come, and ensure that WCU takes its place among America’s leading educational institutions.

**RESPONSIVENESS TRANSFORMATION:
Responding to the region's educational and cultural needs**

West Chester University is located at the center of the Commonwealth's most dynamic region, southeastern Pennsylvania. As a result of this economic and demographic vitality, the number of high school graduates in the area will jump by 11 percent over the next ten years. In addition, the need for employees in computer science, health care, the sciences, and teaching will skyrocket. And as the demand for more and better-trained workers continues to grow, so too will the need for retraining and advanced study programs for early- and mid-career professionals.

Amid these unprecedented opportunities, West Chester University will be a leader in offering outstanding and flexible academic programs that prepare students for careers, and to think critically, problem-solve, and communicate effectively. Through attentiveness to its changing environment and a commitment to excellence, West Chester University will provide academic experiences that are both timely and timeless.

The need for responsiveness extends beyond educational programs and employer expectations. WCU recognizes that cultural and service programs are also vital to the region's quality of life. Therefore, the University will sponsor cultural collaborations, outreach activities, and services that invigorate the performing and visual arts, enhance the campus' intellectual climate, and build relationships throughout Chester County and beyond. Community enrichment is essential to institutional effectiveness.

To enhance its responsiveness to regional needs, West Chester University will:

1. Offer responsive curricula and services and provide more pre- and post-baccalaureate professional growth opportunities including certificate programs that meet the changing needs of the region.
2. Accommodate the needs of diverse learners, such as students with disabilities, life circumstances (nontraditional), and language and cultural attributes, who may benefit from flexibility in the delivery of educational programs and services.
3. Continue alignment of academic and support programs with national accrediting, system, and state standards.
4. Continue the University's role as a center for the cultural arts in Chester County.
5. Continue to offer opportunities for connections with and among alumni/ae.
6. Integrate an international, global, and/or intercultural focus into teaching, research, learning, and service activities.
7. Encourage environmental awareness through training, curricula, and co-curricula programming, assess and reduce the ecological impact of the University, and promote research and service that foster regional and global sustainability.

**STUDENT SUCCESS TRANSFORMATION:
Making student success the University's defining characteristic**

How do you know that a university is doing a good job? Traditionally, quality has been measured by inputs, for example SAT scores, high school grade point averages, and institutional spending. Today, higher education's stakeholders – students, parents, alumni, and business and civic leaders – demand evidence that college adds value to graduates' lives.

In response, universities are rethinking their approach to the academic experience. Instead of building programs and services around the needs of providers (faculty and staff), attention is focusing on the needs of learners (students). This refreshing perspective has led WCU to explore new ways of sharing and accessing knowledge, delivering services, eliminating bureaucratic barriers, and encouraging the success of students with special needs.

These initiatives mark the beginning of a campus-wide effort to extend the student success model across the University. The following goals are essential to this transformation:

1. Enhance curricula and instructional modes that actively engage learners in connecting theory with practice and demonstrate improvement in learning.
2. Achieve greater student involvement with academic life, campus life, and integration of academic and co-curricular programs.
3. Improve the general education curriculum's focus on developing skills and knowledge.
4. Integrate assessment of student success in all curricular and co-curricular programs and services.
5. Strengthen academic and career advisement, faculty resources for academic advising, and student awareness of their roles and responsibilities in the advising process.
6. Improve retention, graduation, and time-to-degree rates by assisting students during key transitional periods in their academic careers.
7. Identify and promote programs shown to increase graduation rates of students from underrepresented groups.

**DIVERSITY TRANSFORMATION:
Benefiting from the strength of differences**

Higher education is especially influential when it offers students the opportunity to explore the unfamiliar. However, intellectual experimentation – the search for new knowledge and insights – is difficult to foster when the learning environment lacks variety. Students become better thinkers when they encounter a wide range of cultures, viewpoints, and experiences. Such exposure cultivates students’ appreciation for community building, complex ideas, and the consequences that result from choices. In essence, a campus that welcomes diverse cultures and beliefs nurtures creativity and a “renaissance” for each learner. Furthermore, it prepares students to live and work in a world that is increasingly interconnected and pluralistic.

Beyond the academic and professional benefits, diversity is a response to intolerance. A free and just society – one that values the search for truth and knowledge – is crippled by all forms of prejudice. Through its mission, WCU is challenged to contribute to a more inclusive society by responding to ignorance and fear with learning and dialogue, and by opening the doors of higher education to those who are underrepresented in its ranks.

To encourage diversity, the University will embrace the following goals:

1. Continue to develop effective strategies for recruiting and retaining a diverse community of students, staff, faculty, and administrators.
2. Identify and reduce barriers to access and equity, and promote a campus climate supportive of diversity.
3. Continue to ensure that academic curricula and institutional programs reflect the University’s commitment to diversity and equity.
4. Foster an institutional climate that ensures a campus environment supportive of diversity, civility, and inclusiveness.

HUMAN CAPITAL TRANSFORMATION: Investing in creativity, renewal, and leadership

Despite the explosion of learning tools and technology, higher education remains a human enterprise. As a result, WCU recognizes employees' exploration of professional growth opportunities and the development of their knowledge and skills as critical to institutional success. The Human Capital Transformation encourages and supports University employees to explore their interests and actualize their strengths to enhance job satisfaction, creativity, and the quality of work and work environments.

For faculty and students, WCU has always valued personal contact between teachers and learners. Yet, the demand for flexible access and measurable learning outcomes is leading faculty to explore and introduce new models of teaching effectiveness. Research must also involve students in ways that contribute to academic excellence and the quality of classroom experiences. Thus, a commitment to professional development, instructional resources, and faculty scholarship is required.

Staff must also learn to do things differently. Administrative systems that worked 20 years ago no longer meet the needs of today, let alone tomorrow. Left unchecked, these outdated management practices reduce institutional competitiveness. West Chester University must prepare staff to make the best use of technological advances, innovative business processes, and customer service improvements. Regular investments in training, as well as new mechanisms for encouraging and rewarding risk-taking, creativity, and leadership, will be essential.

The following goals provide a framework for employee development activities that will be essential to the University's future success:

1. Encourage faculty members to evaluate and enhance their department teacher/scholar models.
2. Enhance and support the integration of department teacher/scholars models in department and University policies, practices, and planning to benefit faculty scholarship and/or teaching.
3. Enhance the implementation of and provide resources for new and continuing professional development activities to support departmental teacher/scholar model values, goals, and standards.
4. Enhance and provide support for interdisciplinary and alternative pedagogies, instructional technology, and variable course delivery systems.
5. Increase support for and institute use of the competency model to attract, develop, and retain employees.
6. Provide faculty, staff, and administrators with individual, collaborative, professional, and personal growth opportunities which promote learning, sharing perspective, and application of knowledge.

**RESOURCEFULNESS TRANSFORMATION:
Diversifying resources and improving management**

As the saying goes, “you shouldn’t put all your eggs in one basket.” Yet, public higher education has long depended on the state to meet its resource needs. Changing policy priorities make a singular reliance on Commonwealth funding unrealistic and a threat to institutional success. In just the past decade, the proportion of University operating costs covered by state funds has dropped from 63 percent to 43 percent. Similarly, capital projects require a substantial private-sector match. To achieve its vision, West Chester University must diversify its resource base through private and public grants and gifts, more creative financing, private-sector collaborations, and a significant expansion of the University’s endowment.

Beyond fiscal resources, WCU must overcome a critical facilities shortfall that limits flexibility and responsiveness to emerging needs. Among Pennsylvania’s public universities, WCU has the greatest space shortage. Renovations, new construction, and alternative delivery methods for instruction and services are among the solutions to this problem. However, most of these initiatives will require funding from sources other than the state.

Finally, administrative management is changing to keep pace with modern business practices. To accomplish this transformation, the University has adopted the principles of distributed leadership. This management model – which has generated impressive results in its initial applications – emphasizes collaborative decision-making, individual responsibility and authority, and the power of teamwork. Through distributed leadership, WCU will assess its operational practices, consider alternative service delivery models, eliminate or change practices that reduce agility, and introduce technology solutions.

To diversify its resources and improve management, West Chester University will:

1. Continue to use and assess distributive leadership practices across all levels of the University.
2. Implement systematic process-improvement initiatives that demonstrate efficient allocation and use of resources.
3. Eliminate unproductive bureaucratic practices and strengthen cross-divisional collaboration.
4. Diversify and add to the University’s financial resource base.
5. Base resource allocations on the University’s mission and priorities and create a campus culture in which individual and departmental priorities support university mission and goals.
6. Review, update, and continue to implement the Capital Facilities and Technology plans.