

# HIGHER VALUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION 2017-2027

Month, Day, 2022

## Preamble

*Western Illinois University was founded in 1899 as the Western Illinois State Normal School to address teacher preparation in the State's grammar schools. The faculty and students of Western were eager to meet this need, and the institution soon became known for its well-rounded, deeply committed graduates, a tradition that continues to this day.*

*As the years passed and the name was changed to Western Illinois State Teachers' College in 1921, and then to Western Illinois University in 1957, our mission continually broadened to include academic majors that prepared high school teachers; the state's earliest and most successful extension program; a multifaceted graduate school; a liberal arts program; and, eventually, distinguished colleges devoted to the Arts and Sciences, Business and Technology, Education and Human Services, Fine Arts and Communication, and Honors.*

*Through the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries we earned and maintained a reputation for expanding access to affordable, high-quality degree programs and fostering student involvement in University activities.*

*We are now a leading University with campuses in Macomb, the Quad Cities, and online. By virtue of our quality, opportunity, and affordability, we serve students from Illinois, across the nation, and around the world.*

*Together, we provide a transformative educational experience through the caring educator model. We empower students and graduates to become engaged and productive global citizens committed to making a difference in the diverse communities and professions they represent. Our alumni are leaders in their fields equipped with the knowledge, problemsolving skills, and community awareness necessary to address the professional, economic, and social issues of our time.*

*Through the*

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## Vision, Mission, and Values

### *Our Vision*

Western Illinois University aims to be the leading public regional university in providing educational quality, opportunity, and affordability.

### *Our Mission*

Western Illinois University empowers students, faculty, and staff to lead dynamic and diverse communities. We provide student-centered undergraduate and graduate programs characterized by innovative teaching, research, and service, grounded in multidisciplinary, regional, and global perspectives. We engage our students in educational opportunities guided by a professional and diverse faculty and staff in collaboration with alumni and community partners.

### *Our Values*

#### Academic Excellence

Central to our history is the commitment to teaching, to the individual learner, and to active involvement in the teaching-learning process. We are committed to providing a high-quality, challenging, and supportive learning environment that fosters critical thinking, engaged learning, research, and creativity in a challenging, supportive learning community.

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## Executive Summary

### *Our Plan*

As updated in June 2022, *Higher Values in Higher Education 2017-2027* defines Western Illinois University's vision for the next five years. It is based on results from empirical environmental scanning completed by the Social Responsibility Task Force, which was comprised of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members during academic year 2017-2018, as well as from a year-long, university-wide discussion, evaluation, and revision in 2021-22. The plan was developed by the Strategic Plan Revision Steering Committee in 2021-22.

This plan is a *call to action*

core value and as an essential element of Western's public service mission.

Western embraces individual uniqueness and a culture of inclusion that supports broad and specific diversity initiatives. Western belie

university-wide commitment to the use of Western Online and other course delivery technologies.  
Action 7: Enhance and deliver accessible academic programming within and across disciplines.

Goal 2: AdvTQ

# HIGHER VALUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION 2017-2027

## GOAL 1: ENRICH ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Western Illinois University will continue to recruit, retain, and support diverse, high-potential students, faculty, and staff. At its core, Western is defined by an activity that leads to a larger public good: our faculty and staff teach our learners, who then develop and grow as they move from our campuses into their professional, civic, and private lives.

We attract high-potential students, excellent faculty, and committed staff because we set, expect, and achieve high standards for the institution and one another. We strive for and are achieving national leadership in quality and in opportunity, and we empower students, faculty, and staff to lead dynamic and diverse communities.

To continue recruiting and retaining our students, faculty, and staff, we will provide supportive, inclusive, and intellectually rich classroom and campus environments where our Western community can thrive. We will continue to develop institutional policies and procedures that promote a culture that responds to student, faculty, and staff needs as we individually and collectively advance the vision, mission, and values of the University.

*Action 1: Focus on the individual learner, prioritize collaborative and peer learning, and increase support for student success and achievement.*

We continue to advance student success through the caring educator model. From the onset of their educational experience, learners at Western work closely with faculty and staff in their discipline and across the University.

During the next five years, we will continue this individual focus and its resulting excellence by doing the following:

- a) Support contractual agreements that place instruction as the highest priority of faculty
- b) Use Annual Reports and the Integrated Parallel Plans as a way to evaluate and subsequently enhance academic and support structures for students on all campuses.



learning, fundraising, and many other activities designed to advance the public good.

In order to continue to build stronger, more resilient, more dynamic communities, we will:

- a) Use the current University Community Engagement classification.
- b) Use university public service centers, the Auxiliary Facilities System (UHDH, University Union, and Campus Recreation), University Libraries, institutes, and broadcasting services to support community engagement.

*Action 6: Deliver user-centered information technology and implement a university-wide commitment to use Western Online and other course-delivery technologies*

We will provide user-centered information technology to support instruction, research and scholarly/creative activities, educational outreach, public service. University Technology provides a secure, reliable, and high-speed technological infrastructure; an efficient and effective operations environment; integrated information management solutions; and other high-quality, timely services to support to the University community.

Likewise, University Libraries identifies, collects, organizes, preserves, and provides access to information resources and services to support students, faculty, staff, and external patrons.

Both University Technology and University Libraries have liaison programs, committees, and other programs that support the needs of students, faculty, and staff. Both entities are committed to supporting a connected, modern educational environment.

As such, we will continue to prioritize a university-wide commitment to these forms of information technology, as well as an intentional plan to better use Western Online. In order to accomplish this last goal, we will:

- a) Continue to engage in IT Shared Governance and other means to increase communication, collaborative planning, and better use of technologies on our campuses.
- b) Provide user-centered library services and resources to support and meet the needs of students, faculty, staff, and community patrons.
- c) Develop accountability and more intentional practices in the use of Western Online and the services of the Office of Distance Education and Support.

*Action 7: Enhance and deliver innovative and accessible academic programming*

To continue to enhance and deliver innovative and accessible academic programming, we will:

- a) Continue to apply, at every level, heavy scrutiny to all new academic course or program proposals
- b) Promote innovation and creativity in developing new programs



- c) Align all new programing with high standards of accessibility and community needs

## GOAL 2: ADVANCE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

We define educational opportunity as providing a service to high-potential, diverse students with high-quality academic programs and learning communities. We have a strong academic portfolio and we will continue to deliver excellent educational opportunities to our immediate region and the surrounding communities.

### Action 1: Establish and implement institution-level equity plans and practices to close access, progression, completion, and attainment gaps

We will strive to provide greater access and opportunity to those learners who are historically underrepresented in higher education. We recognize that the first step in this work comes from planning and developing new practices and perspectives in our everyday culture.

To take this first step, we will:

- a) Align our planning with both the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) strategic plan, *A Thriving Illinois*, and the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) strategic plan, *EVOLVE*.
- b) Participate in the second cohort of the American Council of Education (ACE) project, The Learner Success Lab (LSL), which will allow us to develop specific, granular-level initiatives that will increase retention rates for those students in historically underrepresented groups
- c) Foster widespread university and community investment in these initiatives.

### Action 2: Focus on quality in every aspect of the institution, including the student's campus experience, classroom experience, and residential life experience.

We will emphasize our institutional quality as we move forward through the next five years. We will increase our market-share of high school graduates, international students, transfer students, and students looking to pursue graduate education. In order to do this, we will:

- a) Emphasize the quality, outcomes, and personal attention associated with Western Illinois University in marketing and public relations materials.
- b) Use program review and discipline-specific accreditation processes to assure and advance programmatic quality and viability
- c) Use co-curricular assessment and other annual reporting to focus on quality in residential life experiences.

### Action 3: Engage in educational outreach and recruitment activities targeted to populations historically underrepresented in higher education

We will increase the number of prospect



e)



Championship Series varsity intercollegiate athletics program. This includes funding commitments to support our athletic program at a level that allows student-athletes to be successful and competitive within our respective conferences and nationally

- g) Demonstrate strict adherence to NCAA operating principles related to governance and rules compliance, academic integrity, equity, and student-athlete welfare
- h) Host arts and selected athletic events in the Quad Cities to increase community engagement and



Western has a proud tradition in community and economic development. The Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs (IIRA), for example, was established in 1989 after a Task Force on the Future of Rural Illinois completed 25 public hearings. IIRA was chartered as a companion agency to the Governors Rural Affairs Council and charged with finding innovative solutions for rural issues that can be implemented in Illinois and providing technical assistance to policy makers. These efforts have focused on economic development, value-added rural development, health care, transportation and infrastructure, public management, housing strategies, and information technology.



## Summary and Conclusion

As members of the Western Illinois University community, we share in the goals of recruiting, retaining, and graduating students in a transformative educational experience where learners engage in the discovery, acquisition, and application of knowledge for personal enrichment and in preparation for future occupations and/or graduate and advanced studies. We do so in a manner that is inclusive and engaging; it is an educational environment built upon the foundation of our core values-- academic excellence, educational opportunity, personal growth and social responsibility.

We are nationally recognized for our leadership in quality, opportunity, affordability, community and economic development, and graduating more students than predicted based on academic preparation variables.

We empower students to become engaged and productive global citizens committed to making a difference in the diverse communities and professions that they represent. Our alumni are leaders in their fields equipped with knowledge, problem solving skills, and community awareness necessary to address the professional, economic, and social issues of our time.

We are a strong and resilient university. Our core values of academic excellence, educational opportunity, personal growth and social responsibility have and will continue. This will be evidenced by the successful attainment of the goals, priorities, and actions in this *Strategic Plan*.