WSU Vancouver Strategic Plan Update

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May 2015

Introduction

Washington State University developed its 2011-2016 Strategic Plan with involvement of faculty, staff, and students. An update on the progress towards the plan’s goals was disseminated in spring 2013. This year we have celebrated the 25th anniversary of the founding of our campus and planning for developing the 2016-2021 Strategic Plan is already underway. The purpose of this report is to share highlights of our accomplishments in the past two years and identify challenges we continue to address as our campus matures and grows.

Goal 1 (Student success): Provide high-quality undergraduate and graduate degree programs that prepare students for success in a global society

By the numbers. To meet the educational needs of Southwest Washington, the WSU Vancouver campus currently offers 20 bachelor’s degrees, as well as 9 master’s degrees and 3 doctoral degrees. An additional 14 WSU doctoral programs allow students to pursue most or all of their academic careers on the Vancouver campus.

During the fall 2014 term, the WSU Vancouver student body reached its largest size ever, at 3264 students. This included its largest-ever freshman class of 270 students. The year’s increase was the first to surpass pre-recession enrollment, which had declined during the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years. Along with lower enrollment, degrees granted at WSU Vancouver began contracting in the 2012-2013 school year and continued to decline during 2013-2014 (733 bachelor's degrees granted, 143 master's, and 5 Ph.D.s). The
maximum number of undergraduate degrees granted by the campus was 776, reached in 2011-2012. Detailed
metrics of education performance are available in the WSU Campus Profile.

Retention and graduation. Undergraduate retention and graduation rates at WSU Vancouver have remained
steadily high over the past five years. During that period, 59 percent of freshmen and 73 percent of transfers
graduated within six years. To better understand the obstacles facing those who do not graduate, the 2014-
2015 school year saw the creation of a new Student Success Council and the campus’s first retention and
graduation report. The report details seven indicators of increased risk of early withdrawal, including low
high school or transfer GPA, unmet financial need, freshman status, early transfer status, and part-time status.
Furthermore, students identifying from underrepresented minority groups and male students beginning as
freshmen graduate at lower rates than their peers. The importance of identifying these predictors extends
beyond understanding which populations are at risk. Significantly, five of these indicators represent
populations that have been on the rise in the recent past and are likely to continue increasing in the near
future. In light of these increases, retention rates that have remained steadily high are a sign of strong campus
infrastructure. However, forecasted continued growth among these increased risk populations signals a need
to carefully monitor student success and adjust to new demands. Primary responsibility for this task is
assigned to the Student Success Council, but this work will require involvement from the entire campus
community.

High-impact learning. The 2011-2016 WSU Vancouver Strategic Plan contains objectives geared toward
enriching student-learning experiences. In response to this, monitoring of degree requirements suggests 55
percent of undergraduates and 93 percent of master’s degree students in the most recent graduating class
engaged in experiential or community-based learning as part of earning their degree. Monitoring of
undergraduate involvement in research suggests a lower rate of participation at 5.5 percent, by course
registration. However, research participation has increased from just 4.0 percent in fall 2011, the first term it
was recorded.

As part of a university-wide focus on student learning objectives, faculty have taken part in an extensive effort
to align course curricula with university student-learning outcomes. This focus has resulted in 91.5 percent of
Vancouver undergraduate syllabi in the most recent term designed to dovetail with these outcomes, including
not only measurable goals but also explicit methods of assessment.

Structural planning. Over the course of the 2013-2014 school year, WSU Vancouver embarked on an extensive
academic planning process to chart a strategy for growing new programs. This process resulted in
preparations to offer master’s degrees in electrical engineering and mental health & human services, with new
bachelor’s degrees in entrepreneurship, computer engineering, software engineering, data science, operations
analysis & supply chain management, and environmental engineering. The rollout of these new programs will
be gradual, with the first opening enrollment next academic year and between 1 and 3 new programs
commencing every year until 2021.

More recently, the campus began a new effort in enrollment management planning in Spring 2015 to best
estimate how the student body will grow over the next decade. Over the next few months, campus
stakeholders will determine what student populations are likely to grow as well as how best to accommodate
them academically and structurally.

1 Not all undergraduate participation in faculty research is recognized through course registration. Complete
participation numbers are higher than those listed.
Goal 2 (Research): Advance research, scholarship, and creative activity with emphasis on our areas of distinctiveness: technology, environmental sustainability, and leadership.

Scholarship. In fall 2014, the WSU Vancouver research faculty grew to its largest-ever size, with 110 tenured/tenure-track faculty and 18 clinical faculty. These numbers have created a wide array of active research programs across academic disciplines. Furthermore, research productivity has increased in recent years. The average tenured/tenure-track faculty member published a three-year average of 1.7 peer-reviewed works in 2014, up from a three-year average of 1.1 in 2007. While comparing across disciplines and types of publication or exhibit is difficult, increases in productivity have been wide-spread. These have been especially marked by increasing productivity from the newest classes of assistant professors to join the campus within the past five years (see figure, above right).

Funding and support. Grant dollars awarded to WSU Vancouver faculty have remained flat since 2007, hovering around $4 million a year. Furthermore, the number of external grant submissions has stayed roughly static since 2011 (see figure, right). However, the static level of grant dollars should be interpreted in the context of low nationwide acceptance rates due to budget tightening at funding agencies in recent years.

Participation in internal support mechanisms has reached an all-time high. Vancouver faculty submitted 21 proposals for the campus mini-grant mechanism and 10 proposals to compete system-wide for WSU’s New Faculty Seed Grant (with acceptance to be determined by end of the term).

To help facilitate further research productivity and assist faculty with logistic and planning hurdles, the campus grant coordinator position was increased to full-time and staffed by an experienced coordinator as of December, 2014. Further efforts to support faculty research include the addition of a new WSU Vancouver External Mentoring Program beginning in fall 2014, aimed at fostering research career growth. The inaugural six participants and their mentors will receive funds to engage in collaborative activities.
Goal 3 (Diversity): Advance diversity

*A changing campus.* Student diversity at WSU Vancouver has increased rapidly in line with recent demographic shifts in Southwest Washington. Between 2007 and 2014, the percentage of students identifying as belonging to a minority group increased from 10.9 percent to 20.8 percent. The largest increases have occurred in the number of students identifying as two or more races/ethnicities or as Hispanic/Latino (see figure, right). Based upon demographic trends in the region and nation, the campus can expect pronounced shifts in racial/ethnic identification of the student body in the years to come.

*Retention and graduation.* Consistent with national educational trends, disparities exist in degree attainment between racial/ethnic groups at WSU Vancouver. Students from underrepresented minority groups (African American, Hispanic and Native American) were more likely to withdraw prematurely from WSU Vancouver than white or Asian students. The Student Success Council is exploring ways to address this achievement gap.

*Campus climate.* WSU Vancouver regularly surveys the student body to assess attitudes about diversity on campus. As of 2014, student perceptions of the diversity climate were generally high (rated an average of 3.9 out of 5, N=243). However, differences exist between racial/ethnic groups, with student assessment of the climate statistically lower for students identifying from minority groups than for students identifying as white. Furthermore, negative attitudes about the diversity climate were strongly correlated with attitudes about withdrawal from the university, especially for minority students. This finding emphasizes the intimate relationship between perception of diversity climate and student success.

*Structural Improvements.* To address the needs of a changing student body, the campus has instituted a number of recent improvements to diversity infrastructure. The past year has seen the opening of a new Student Diversity Center as a dedicated space for dialogue, community building, and student leadership and which
houses a full-time student advisor. The new Veteran’s Center provides support to the student Veteran community with assistance from both a Veterans Coordinator and a student VetCorp navigator. New diversity-supporting student programs include the Impact Volunteer Program in addition to several student-run clubs and organizations aimed at making WSU Vancouver a multi-faceted home reflecting the backgrounds of its students. Notably, funding for the campus Diversity Council was institutionalized and so is no longer dependent on one-time funding.

To increase outreach and recruitment in the many communities of Southwest Washington, WSU Vancouver continues to add targeted events such as the Noche de Familia, Native American Family Night, LGBTQ-friendly College Fair, and others.

Finally, to elevate the role of diversity and equity in campus decision making, the chancellor’s office added an advisor to the chancellor for equity, diversity and community engagement in 2014.

Conclusion

As this report demonstrates, the WSU Vancouver campus community has much to be proud of. Our 25th anniversary celebration has given us the opportunity to reflect on our past and envision our future. We are focused on the important issues and will continue our work as our community and the world around us presents new challenges and new possibilities.