



April 6, 2016

Dear Colleagues:

Now that spring term has begun and we see evidence of spring throughout the Willamette Valley, I wanted to update you on two important projects that will help us forge a bright future for Western—the accreditation process and strategic planning. Both will help us define the university in the new, independent higher education system.

After months of hard work, the accreditation report for the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) was submitted in March. I want to extend my deepest thanks to all who assisted in the preparation of the report, particularly Cat McGrew for her leadership on the project. To view the report go to: http://www.wou.edu/provost/accreditation/year7-2016/Public/READING_VERSION_with_fixed_links_3-9-16.pdf.

The NWCCU team will be meeting many of us next week exploring various aspects of the accreditation standards. I know we will give them the same warm welcome you gave me a year ago when I first visited campus. At its core, the accreditation process focuses on continuous improvement and we should not be surprised if they identify specific recommendations for improvement. The team will provide a summary of their findings at an **all-campus meeting on Wednesday, April 13 at 9:30 am in the Calapooia Room, Werner University Center.**

The accreditation process is designed to assess the university's progress in meeting its goals and mission. As such, the team will be reviewing our processes as well as the evidence that supports mission fulfillment, especially as it relates to student achievement. I am confident that accreditation will be a springboard into our strategic planning process. In this sense, the NWCCU accreditation work is a comprehensive review of our strengths and weaknesses—key information we need as we define our future through the strategic planning process.

Going forward and by working together, our strategic planning process will enable the university to create its future. It will be an opportunity to build on past success and to determine new opportunities—a chance to re-imagine Western's future in the new order for higher education in Oregon. Western's DNA includes a strong commitment to student success, yet we have new challenges in fulfilling this goal as our student demographics will become increasingly complex.

For example, Western needs to develop flexible degree paths for residents of Oregon who are seeking to earn a college degree. Degree paths that enable students to earn an undergraduate degree as well as paths that are designed to meet the needs of those wishing to earn a graduate degree or certificate. Western's commitment to incorporating high-impact practices such as

Office of the President

April 6, 2016

undergraduate research, long term projects, internships, and practicums provide a measure of deep learning for our students. Through these efforts, students are encouraged to explore the practical and creative application of their studies under the guidance of faculty by engaging in professional-level research. As many of you know, some of our students present their work before state, regional, and national conferences.

As we begin the planning process, which will lead to adoption of a new strategic plan in early 2017, we will need to be mindful of the headwinds that face higher education and Western. For example, the opening of the OSU-Cascades campus and its goal of reaching enrollment of 5,000 students poses a new challenge as we recruit our freshman class. Financial headwinds include the process used to fund higher education and the related costs associated with the funding of PERS in light of the Oregon Supreme Court decision in April 2015.

The path ahead is also filled with possibilities and opportunity. A greater national focus on student outcomes is an advantage for Western since our community and traditions support developing deep connections with our students. From this base, we can expect to see our students persist and graduate with desired degrees and then move to the next chapter of their journey, be that graduate school or a desired career.

Spring in the Willamette Valley is astounding! It is a daily reminder that we can renew our commitment to academic excellence and student development which are cornerstones of Western's proud tradition and legacy. Western was founded before Oregon gained statehood and we have graduated thousands of students who are proud alumni, and we will continue graduate alumni far into the future.

I am excited about the opportunities that lie ahead and ask for your participation in the efforts to move Western from the best kept secret to the best known opportunity for higher education in Oregon. Like our mascot the Wolves, we need to come together, stay together and work together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rex Fuller".

Rex Fuller, President