

## STANDARD I: MISSION AND GOALS

West Chester University's (WCU) self-study journey began with thoughtfully selecting a set of institutional priorities that were integral components of our institutional mission and goals. The priorities, listed below, indicate the aim to educate and develop students who not only learn and achieve, but do so within a diverse environment in which equity and inclusion are paramount, and in which the institution's strategic use of resources assures that our mission can be sustained into the future:

Institutional priorities that guide our self-study:

- Student Success and Learning
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- Financial Strength

These priorities seamlessly align with the proposed traits that graduates will possess after their time at WCU. Thus, this section is presented through the lens of the institutional priorities to indicate clearly how the achievement of Standard I criteria supports their fulfillment. We demonstrate that West Chester University's mission defines its purpose within the context of higher education, the students it serves, and what it intends to accomplish. Our stated goals are clearly linked to the mission, and they drive our efforts toward continuous improvement by specifying the ways that we fulfill our mission and measure our success as we do so. It has taken courage, in fact, to chart an ambitious path forward when the landscape of higher education is proving to be increasingly fraught, with decreasing investment in public university systems, rising levels of student debt, and demographic changes that leave some regions of the country oversupplied with colleges. In this context, our University, under the leadership of President Christopher Fiorentino, has been in a constant state of adaptation.

"In the last twenty months as your University President," he offered at his Fall 2018 welcome back address, "I've been struck time and time again by the can-do attitude and shared sense of purpose. . . West Chester University has been thriving as an institution. Our enrollment continues to grow; our reputation is stellar, but this is not a time to rest on our laurels. Rather, it's a time to seize control of our destiny with purposeful action. We must continue to do the things that have propelled us to where we are today and put us in this position of promise. We also must be bold and explore novel and innovative approaches to student success." President Fiorentino went on that morning to celebrate the work of a variety of Mission Makers on our campus – faculty and staff who "had the courage to get out of their comfort zones and take risks to advance this university and its mission." In the pages that follow, we will offer clear and compelling evidence that our mission is at the heart of everything we do at West Chester University.

### **Mission (Criterion 1, Requirements of Affiliation [ROA] 7, 10)**

West Chester University has a clearly defined mission, articulated in our 2017 [Mission Statement](#), and further defined in [Pathways to Student Success](#), our strategic plan. Both of these important drivers of our success were developed through shared governance processes that provided numerous opportunities for both internal and external stakeholders to participate. The resulting documents reflect a shared commitment to holistic student development and to fulfilling a public good.

**Current:** West Chester University is a community of educators that develops graduates to succeed

personally and professionally and contribute to the common good.

**Prior to 2017:** 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, alumni, and citizens of southeastern Pennsylvania.

The institution's prior strategic plan, *Building on Excellence*, was created during the tenure of President Greg Weisenstein. When President Christopher Fiorentino began as President, he was eager to create a mission that more clearly expressed the shared values of the community and to build a strategic plan that would assure that the institution was driven to fulfill that mission in its every action. He envisioned a mission statement that would reflect clearly and succinctly the University's purpose as a comprehensive regional university within a state system of higher education. This work began in Spring 2017 with a request for online feedback on a proposed new mission statement. Campus unions and other shared governance groups were invited to provide preliminary feedback, assuring that internal constituencies had a voice in the process.

With the first phase completed, two open forums were held to enable and encourage the broader campus community to discuss drafted versions; the campus community also had an opportunity to provide online feedback after these forums. This process assured that external constituencies also had a voice in the collaborative process. Taking this feedback into consideration, the President's Cabinet decided upon the final version of the new mission statement that was subsequently approved by the University's Council of Trustees in Fall 2017. The approval policy employed by the Council of Trustees will be explained more fully in responding to Standard VII. Upon approval, the new mission statement was announced to the University community and publicized on the University's website. In keeping with the President's original vision, the new mission is a single statement that can be remembered and communicated quite readily. The mission statement's brevity has strength in providing a concise definition of who we are as a University and a firm foundation for who we want to become.

Next, President Fiorentino charged his Cabinet with developing a new strategic plan that would drive West Chester University to fulfill its mission. As the institutional mission indicates, the primary aim is to educate and prepare students as lifelong learners who contribute positively within the community. The drive to continued learning that enhances the public good lead the university to develop [outcomes](#) that were broad enough to prepare students for success during their careers at West Chester University, but also tools to assure their success in the lives they would lead after. Thus, the University aims to develop graduates who can:

- Apply scientific reasoning and demonstrate quantitative and qualitative literacy
- Collaborate with others to solve problems and address societal needs
- Communicate effectively and participate in civic discourse
- Engage inclusively in a diverse society
- Understand the ethical implications of decisions and the world in which they live

A robust General Education curriculum assures that these learning outcomes are met, with assessments linked to each of the key components listed below:

- Effective Communication

- Critical Thinking
- Responding Thoughtfully to Diversity
- Civic Discourse
- Ethical Decision Making
- Global Awareness
- Community Engagement

Additional details about the alignment of these assessments with the strategic plan will be provided in response to Standard III, but we want to demonstrate here that the three institutional priorities that are driving our self-study process are integrally linked to the University's mission, and to the learning our students do through our curriculum.

### **Student Success and Learning (Criterion 2, 3)**

The University's mission, goals, and strategic plan serve as the foundation of its prioritizing and supporting student success and learning. Student success is paramount to the University's strategic plan, [Pathways to Student Success](#), evident in name. This ambitious plan provides specific benchmarks and measures to chart our path, and University resources are tied to their fulfillment. For example, Goal L1 (Learning 1) in the Learning area of the strategic plan calls us to "Create and enhance structured curricular and co-curricular environments for the free exchange of knowledge among students, faculty, and staff." This goal is to be measured by the achievement of two outcomes, each of which is linked to a variety of initiatives.

Other evidence of the importance of student success in the strategic plan includes a focus on learning, diversity and inclusion, community engagement, personal and professional development, and sustainability. For each area of the plan, specific goals, outcomes, and initiatives have been outlined that will focus our efforts to ensure that the plan is carried out, and thus that the mission is fulfilled.

### **A Continuum of Comprehensive Support Services**

In alignment with its institutional mission and strategic plan goals, the University has developed many resources and integrated them with existing services and programs to support the success of all students. The University is committed to supporting students' success throughout their time at the institution, from their first student experiences at Accepted Student Day and New Student Orientation through Commencement and beyond. Moreover, the University supports student success even before students enroll. For example, the University seeks opportunities for its community college partner students to complete their education at the University, creating degree-completion pathways, recognizing students' prior learning, and encouraging their building upon it. Additional examples of how the University intentionally supports the student experience in correlation with its mission are shared below; the overall effort will be outlined in more depth in response to Standard IV.

On Accepted Student Day, accepted students and their guests visit campus and hear from various departments/majors, attend topic-based sessions, and interact with current and other accepted students. Events, such as WCU Bound and Discover WCU, are geared toward accepted underrepresented minority (URM) students and provide information and on-campus experiences

for both URM students and their guests to assist in supporting students' success. Once students arrive on campus, a myriad of resources offer continuous support. Students can access all of these resources from the [Ram's Guide for Student Success](#), a guide which helps students locate and access relevant resources to support their experience, as well as through presentations in their [First Year Experience](#) classes.

Within the revised General Education curriculum, a First-Year Experience (FYE) course was created, in part, to foster the mission of the University. Through this experience, students receive an introduction to the liberal arts tradition and build important skills for thriving academically and socially. During this class, students begin their e-portfolio and continue to add documents to record their growth and development throughout their undergraduate education.

The Academic Success Program (ASP) is a leading example of the University's commitment to providing students access to an affordable, quality education. The ASP is a special admissions program for students who do not meet the University's current admissions criteria but show the potential to succeed in college. Students admitted to the ASP program attend a five-week summer session to help develop their reading, writing, and mathematics skills. Once they have successfully completed this program and are enrolled in the Fall semester, ASP students receive additional advising, tutoring, mentoring, and counseling support to facilitate their continued success.

To recognize and highlight the successes of individual University students who embody the institutional mission, President Fiorentino's [Success Starts Here](#) shares the University's cultivating leaders, thinkers, and doers to this end. Together, University faculty and staff work diligently to advance its shared mission of student success, with such examples as a non-traditional student who aces classes while juggling work and parenthood and a busy student-athlete who becomes expert in time management. Success Starts Here launched at the start of the Fall 2019 term to celebrate some of the many student success stories; the President continues to feature student success stories regularly, with suggested student profiles welcome from the University community.

### Teaching and Learning Toward Student Success

As a community of educators, the University continuously seeks ways to enhance employees' personal and professional development. In his 2019 Presidential Address, President Fiorentino initiated the WCU Mission Makers award, identifying campus community members who contribute to campus in ways emblematic of the institutional mission. For that first year, the leadership team for the First Year Experience was selected as Mission Makers for being an integral part of student success for students when they first arrive on campus.

One way in which the University develops future mission makers is through the [Committee for Excellence in Learning and Teaching](#) (CELT), which fosters collaborations among faculty and students to build a scholarly community around issues of learning and teaching. The University strongly values teaching, and the CELT provides opportunities to improve teaching in ways that directly impact students. Through workshops, brown bag lunches, and funding awards, the CELT supports faculty members in meeting their mission of promoting student success.

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (Criterion 2, 3)**

Diversity and inclusion are priority areas of the previous *Building on Excellence* and current

*Pathways to Student Success* strategic plans, and both plans have led to significant improvements, making clear that prioritizing this work is an effective tool to drive change.

In December 2010, the University unveiled The Greg and Sandra Weisenstein Veterans Center designed to create an intentional culture of understanding, acceptance, and success for Veterans, active military, and those who support them. Initially staffed by five graduate assistants, the Center hired its first full-time coordinator in 2014, providing services for priority registration, financial aid and scholarships, a lounge, and other resources for veteran students and their families. In addition, University alumna Eileen Glenn donated \$1 million to endow a part-time licensed, professional counselor dedicated to supporting the University's more than 300 veteran students. In 2019, the University created the Military Veterans Coordinating Committee to promote best practices across the University and ensure consistent and sustained support for veterans. The University has been named a College Consensus Top College for Veterans, a Military Advanced Education and Training Top Colleges and University, and a Military Friend School since 2014. The University recently advanced from a '19-20 Bronze Military Friendly School to a '20-21 Silver Military Friendly School.

In 2015, the University conducted a campus climate survey of the faculty, staff, and students. Results were presented and discussed in various forums, to include the President's Commission on the Status of Women and the Council for Diversity, Inclusion, and Academic Excellence. The University's Innovations in Diversity and Inclusion Grants program provides faculty and staff the opportunity to lead and institutionalize new initiatives, such as the Latino Communities Conference, which celebrated its eleventh year in 2019. Faculty engagement through implementation of the Equity Score Card initiative advanced student success of marginalized University communities, including underrepresented minority, first-generation college, and low-income students. Additionally, online and face-to-face ADA training over the last five years has advanced compliance and accommodations for the University's growing population of students with disabilities.

Campus community centers and initiatives, such as the Frederick Douglass Institute, Center for Women and Gender Equity, Dowdy Multicultural Center, and the Center for Trans and Queer Advocacy have elevated the University's inclusion efforts through partnerships, education, outreach and providing communal spaces. Beyond the curriculum's "Diverse Communities" course requirement, the University conducted a national search and hired a Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer in 2018 to further advance strategic efforts and implement best practices. Undergraduate students participated in a national campus racial climate survey in spring 2019; results were disseminated to the students, faculty, and staff through two campus open forums and dialogues. Moreover, the current strategic plan focuses on the development of cultural competence as a critical 21st century tool for the faculty, staff, and students and substantiates the University's commitment to Inclusive Excellence.

### **Financial Strength (Criterion 2, 3)**

The University has many systems in place that have served it well in maintaining financial stability through its planning, enrollment, and PASSHE System changes. It currently leads PASSHE in both enrollment and economic sustainability. The University works diligently with its Council of Trustees to remain an affordable option for Pennsylvanians while working to stay competitive with its growing reputation and appeal. The University has also lent financial and human resource

support from 2017-2019 to Cheney University, a neighboring PASSHE institution. Additionally, the University has invested heavily in PASSHE Center City to provide greater educational access in the City of Philadelphia.

The University has consistently made considerable financial investments and decisions focused upon student success and continues to do so. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the University refunded a portion of students' housing, meals, and other pandemic-related costs and enhanced our technology loaner program to assist students in having the equipment, technology, and associated support essential to help them succeed. Moreover, in partnership with and through the WCU Foundation, the University established the Student Emergency Aid Fund explicitly to help students impacted directly by the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, nearly \$300,000 has been raised to support WCU students who may be experiencing technology gaps that were previously filled through existing on-campus resources, unanticipated expenses due to reduced work hours, financial aid and tuition payment difficulties, and the new challenge of completing the course work remotely.

#### **Excellence in Action – Assessing the WCU Mission and Goals (Criteria 4)**

The President's Cabinet members and Strategic Plan Priority Team leaders conduct periodic reviews and assessments of mission and institutional goal fulfillment in conjunction and toward alignment with Strategic Plan review and assessment. To that end, Strategic Plan Priority Teams review and assess institutional goal achievement and progress continually and report out to the University community twice a year; the assessment of the institutional priorities will be discussed further in Standard V.

In an effort to engage the University in continuous improvement, a University 'Mission Day' was hosted in fall 2019 by the Provost Office and MSCHE Steering Committee. During this event, the faculty, staff, and students were invited to provide feedback and engage in thoughtful inquiry regarding the seven MSCHE Standards. Seven tables were placed around the room, and individuals were invited to visit the tables to learn more about each standard. The University's MSCHE Steering Committee members took the opportunity to ask participants questions pertaining to their lines of inquiry. Participants discussed the use of the phrase "community of educators," for example – a key phrase in the institutional mission was. Administrative leaders shared that this phrase came up frequently during the process of developing the new mission statement, and really resonated with constituent groups as they responded to drafts. This phrase signifies and promotes a sense of ownership of the educational enterprise as a whole; everyone is a stakeholder for providing the best education possible for the University's students.

In addition, external organizations have assessed the impact of WCU's mission and goals. The University created an institution-wide task force and conducted a self-study in application toward obtaining Community Engagement re-classification by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The University was successful in its application and received the 2020 Carnegie Community Engagement Classification for its notable, impactful service and leadership through community engagement; this designation extends to 2026.

#### **Conclusion**

The sincerity with which the University's institutional mission and goals serve as the foundation of its purpose, culture, and service is clear, shared, and steadfast. The institutional mission emanates

through its goals, strategic plan, and associated divisional and unit documents, but moreover, the mission informs, inspires, and ignites the University's leadership, faculty, staff, and students and genuinely engages our community of educators. The institutional priorities determined and addressed continue to be met consistent with this commitment to institutional mission. Through this self-study process, areas of strength became clear, and opportunities for improvement and innovation as well as strategies for continuous quality improvement will assuredly be embraced and further motivate thoughtful decision making, action, and leadership to that end. The University's institutional mission is represented in strong, succinct language; however, most importantly, it is indeed lived by its community of educators through sincere solidarity toward students' personal and professional development and their positive contributions to the community.

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