

### 3. Challenges and Opportunities

One of the institution's chief accomplishments, reflected in the section above, has been ensuring that assessment procedures are in place for both student learning and institutional effectiveness. This was both a challenge and an opportunity to significantly overhaul the way in which the University engages in assessment. In addition, as noted in the decennial self-study, declining state support, coupled with increased personnel costs mandated by collective bargaining agreements, continues to be a challenge for the institution. Furthermore, an aging infrastructure with limited opportunity to expand the institution's physical footprint through new buildings poses significant challenges to using enrollment growth as a way to replace decreasing state funding. Responding to these challenges, the University has continued to be successful in increasing enrollments strategically (within a constrained physical space) via off-site and distance education programs as well as selected main campus expansion. Despite significant geographic competition, and through the development of new academic programs, WCU has used its innovative planning and resource allocation strategies to sustain manageable growth and fiscal stability. This section describes these challenges and opportunities, consistent with Middle States' *Characteristics of Excellence*.

#### I. Ensuring Assessment Procedures Are In Place (Standards 4, 7, 11,14)

The institution has significantly increased its focus and commitment to assessment since the last decennial visit. Both human and financial resources have been added, and results of progress and success have been shared with the entire campus community. In addition, the ways in which programs have used assessment outcomes to inform programmatic and course-level changes have also been collected and shared. One reason for this improvement has been the ability to standardize reporting structures as well as the addition of technological resources.

##### *Excellence in Action (Closing the Loop): Assessment Processes*

The University has had access to the *TracDat* software system for several years, although until recently, it has been underused. Since then, and following the decennial self-study, additional financial resources were committed for training for administrators and faculty to better understand and leverage the system. Initially, the system was only used for student learning outcomes assessment. However, the institution is now using it for the reporting, monitoring, and evaluation of the institutional strategic plan as well. Using the system for the assessment of strategic plan objectives allows for a single interface and reporting structure as well as the ability to generate reports as needed for each area of the strategic plan to demonstrate accomplishments and areas of concern related to particular objectives. In addition to the strategic plan, all academic program majors and student support service areas now have assessment plans housed within the software platform to measure learning outcomes.

Since the last decennial report, the institution has strengthened its reporting of student learning assessment through the use of an institution-wide rubric.<sup>9</sup> The rubric is not used to evaluate program results related to outcomes but to ensure core elements of student learning assessment are included in each program's assessment plan. For the last three years, all program assessment plans were evaluated annually using the rubric. This has allowed for consistent communication across campus as

to the institutional expectations for student learning assessment. Programs are provided independent feedback to document strengths or suggest ways they can improve their ability to demonstrate student learning outcomes. Scores representing the quality of the plan's components are reported annually in the form of heat map charts for all constituents to see and are posted on the TLAC website.<sup>8</sup> Additionally the TLAC website contains more explicit information regarding the institutional expectation for student learning assessment and shares exemplary practices from across the institution following their annual reviews.<sup>10</sup>

The University has also strengthened its ability to measure and track progress towards institutional goals specified in the strategic plan. For the first time, in spring 2015, "Big Plan Days"<sup>10</sup> were held on campus for constituents to receive information about the accomplishments and future directions of the strategic plan. Using Theme Team tables to reflect each of the substantive areas of the strategic plan, *TracDat* reports were shared with attendees and documented the progress made in pursuit of strategic objectives. Attendees were able to comment on the documents, make suggestions for edits, as well as provide recommendations for ways to refine objectives for the following academic year based upon their interpretation of the results presented in the reports.

Each of these strategies has contributed to more organized and systematic assessment processes. As a result, the institution is better able to engage in campus-wide discussions and evaluation of assessment outcomes in ways that were not possible before the implementation of this comprehensive software-based approach. More information related to each of these areas will be discussed in section five below.

## II. Declining State Support And Financial Implications of the State System (Standards 2, 3, 4, 6)

Reduced public investment in higher education, including decreases in state funding, rising salary and benefit costs, and the PASSHE Board of Governors longstanding practice of holding tuition increases at or below inflation are major factors challenging resource planning at WCU. In addition, WCU's external governance structure is complex and impacts institutional flexibility. Even with those challenges, however, the university has developed and maintained a very strong financial position and has creatively addressed these challenges.

### *Governance Structure*

WCU's governance structure includes the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) and its Board of Governors (BOG), and the WCU Council of Trustees (COT). Internally, WCU is comprised of six divisions: Academic Affairs, Administration and Finance, Advancement, External Operations, Information Technology, and Student Affairs. The six divisional vice presidents report to the president and, along with the director of social equity and the chief of staff/executive deputy to the president, form the President's Cabinet.

*Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education:* In 1982, the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education was established with the passage of Act 188 which prescribes the association between the system office and the 14 member universities, as well as the responsibilities and operations of such campus leadership as the COT and president. The University's state budget allocation (including base and performance funding), tuition, and technology fees are all developed by the system office with

some campus input and presented to the BOG for approval. State funds are distributed to the System universities according to a BOG-approved formula. In addition to its budget authority, the State System creates and monitors operational policies and procedures and reviews and approves all academic programs prior to presentation to the BOG.

Being part of a State System also impacts the ability of the institution to ensure building projects are approved and/or completed in an efficient timeframe. It also limits the institution's ability to select vendors, contractors, and/or products for construction on campus because of requirements State statutes and regulations placed upon the Department of General Services (DGS), which must be used for all construction projects that involve any amount of state funding. DGS requires the institution to select the lowest bid for contractors, and selection of architects often is made without regard for the university's needs or preferences. Currently, the first architect for the construction of the Business and Public Affairs Center was dismissed, as was the first general contractor, both of which have resulted in significant delays and increased costs for this project over which the institution has little control.

*Board of Governors:* A 20-member Board of Governors (BOG) is responsible for planning and coordinating development and operation of Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education. The BOG establishes broad educational, fiscal, and personnel policies and oversees the efficient management of PASSHE. Among other tasks, the BOG appoints the chancellor and university presidents, approves new academic programs, sets tuition, and coordinates and approves the annual PASSHE operating budget. The BOG meetings occur quarterly and are attended by President Weisenstein and his Chief of Staff and Executive Deputy, as well as others. WCU's Council of Trustees (COT) must present decisions on property purchases and new academic programs to PASSHE for final approval.

Recently the BOG adopted a revised funding formula to allocate base appropriation funding from the State to the universities. The new funding formula redistributed approximately \$3.5 million (phased-in over a three-year period) from West Chester to other institutions. In the year prior to the revised funding formula, an ad hoc adjustment to the formula redeployed \$1.6 million from WCU to other System schools. These resource transfers affect the University's ability to serve students and the community, de-incentivize entrepreneurial behavior and do not address the real problems outlined in the 2012 Governor's Advisory Commission on Postsecondary Education Report (falling public investment and demographic changes that suggest Pennsylvania has too many universities.<sup>12</sup>) In response to the declining state support and constraints of the State System including the revised funding formula, two state legislators introduced the Transfer Institution Act into the Pennsylvania Senate in 2014. The legislation was to provide a mechanism for State System universities meeting certain qualifications to leave the System and become state-related. While the legislation was not approved, it did open a conversation between the State System, its member institutions, and the public regarding the challenges of declining state support, State System constraints, and over-regulation. Among the specific outcomes resulting from that dialogue were:

- Modification of the approval process for new academic programs to create more efficiency at the State System level. Specifically, the Chancellor of the State System has directed the

central office to complete its review and recommendation of new academic programs within 60 days.

- Legislation has been reintroduced to allow state-owned universities and employees of state-owned universities to enter into certain economic development agreements to commercialize intellectual property and general economic development opportunities. Currently system faculty and staff are subject to the limitations imposed by state regulations. The Senate unanimously approved the bill in October 2015 and the House is expected to do so shortly.
- The Board of Governors has approved greater flexibility for universities to use institutional funds to support scholarships and to pilot alternative tuition rates to attract special populations (e.g. out-of-state students) and encourage enrollment in high-need academic programs.

### *Addressing the Challenges*

Over the past five years there has been a consistent decline in the amount of state support provided to the University for both capital projects and operations. Presently only 21.5% of WCU's annual operating budget for Educational and General programs comes from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; including federal stimulus funds, over 31% came from the Commonwealth in 2011. The West Chester University Foundation has been a critical partner in helping the University bridge the fiscal gap caused by decreasing state funds. The West Chester University Foundation is an independent, nonprofit entity (501(c)3) that is affiliated with the University through a memorandum of understanding and related service contracts. The Foundation's primary purpose is to raise money to meet the needs identified by the University including operations, scholarships, endowment, equipment, and construction. The Foundation is also responsible for developing student housing on campus through its subsidiary, University Student Housing (USH). The Vice President for Advancement and Sponsored Research serves as the liaison between the University and the Foundation to assure the Foundation's fundraising and support activities remain focused on institutional priorities.

Gift income has grown markedly under the Foundation's leadership. The annual fund and capital campaigns provide the University and its colleges with external financial resources to build and renovate facilities as needed, purchase or invest in new equipment and technology, develop special programs and services to enrich student learning, sponsor art or cultural performances to benefit communities, provide scholarships and engage in other similar activities. Upon the release of West Chester's strategic plan three years ago, the University and Foundation launched the *Becoming More* campaign to raise \$50 million by June 30, 2017. As of May 2016, 85% of the \$50 million goal (\$42 million) has been raised and the campaign is on target to reach its goal by December 31, 2017. Campaign projects reflect the most important institutional needs as defined in the strategic plan including: the Business and Public Affairs Center, the Health Sciences Building expansion, facilities improvements and renovations, academic and administrative equipment, and endowments that support scholarship and campus operations.

In addition to fundraising, the Foundation serves the University through a variety of entrepreneurial activities to help achieve institutional and student success. In 2015 the Faculty and Student Research (FaStR) grant programs begin making awards. Up to \$75,000 is committed annually by this program to support the research and scholarly activities conducted by WCU faculty working with undergraduate and graduate students. The Foundation works closely with the Office of Research and

Sponsored Programs on this initiative. In addition, the Foundation provides a mechanism for faculty to pursue research and outreach activities that the University finds difficult to implement given state regulation. Examples include the Amazon Center for Education and Environmental Research in Peru, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Autism Resource Center, and the proposed field station in Rwanda to support WCU faculty and student research on primates. The Foundation also hosts the Troops to Teachers program, an initiative of the U.S. Defense Department, which prepares and places retired military in teaching positions in schools. And revenues generated by USH provide WCU with more than \$1 million annually in new unrestricted funds that support initiatives and help overcome reductions resulting from changes in the funding formulas. USH also provides funding for the annual Presidential Lecture Series which brings noted speakers to campus such as Bob Woodward, Dan Rather, Cokie Roberts, and Jane Pauley.

West Chester University's Alumni Association is a 501(c)3 organization affiliated with the University. Its mission is to increase alumni engagement with the University leading to financial support and advocacy. Serving more than 90,000 graduates, the Alumni Association and the Office of Alumni Relations sponsor an array of activities and events ranging from active social media communications to more than 100 annual events held both on campus and across the nation. The Association also offers alumni discount programs for goods and services and awards scholarships from the revenues generated by those programs. Since the adoption of the *Becoming More* fundraising campaign, the Alumni Relations Office has more than doubled its program offerings, established nearly a dozen new alumni chapters, and has increased web-based memberships (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Pinterest) by nearly 150 percent. These efforts have played a significant role in connecting alumni to their alma mater and encouraging philanthropy. To that end, the Alumni Association and WCU Foundation have developed a close working relationship to identify, cultivate, solicit and steward alumni donors. This includes the joint purchase of a new facility in 2014 to house both organizations and expand the space available for cultivating alumni involvement and support.

### III. Limited Space for Growth and An Aging Infrastructure (Standards 1, 2, 5, 11, 13):

One of the most significant challenges for the institution is space and an aging infrastructure. Implementation of the ten-year facilities plan continues on target by improving current facilities with minimal debt to the institution. However, there is little room for physical expansion of new facilities on the main campus to help meet the demands of increasing student enrollment. The University has been innovative in addressing these challenges through the creation of a new Cabinet-level position; Vice President of External Operations. This type of leadership position – which focuses on expanding the University's off-campus and distance programs – is the first within the State System and speaks to the institution's commitment to responding to challenges strategically. The External Operations Division has enabled the University to look for ways to turn potential growth into real growth while offering alternative paths to student access. Expanding educational delivery options, establishing strong connections with community partners, and creating ways to increase the diversity of WCU's student population all help to accomplish the goal of increased enrollments. External Operations has oversight for the following areas: Distance Education, the Graduate Center (including off-site educational programming), WCU in Philadelphia, the Center for Community Solutions, and Dual Enrollment Programs. Each of these areas has been instrumental over the last five years in allowing the institution to address this challenge and meet the mission and vision of the institution as

it pertains to providing access, offering high quality education, and partnering with other schools, government agencies, businesses, and non-profits

#### *Distance Education*

Over the last four years, the University has seen tremendous growth in the area of distance education. In FY 2014-2015 there were 530 distinct students who were new to WCU and enrolled in online courses (defined as those with online content between 80% to 100%) and there were a total of 7,395 total distance education student seats in classes. When compared to FY 2013-2014, distance education has increased by nearly 49% in total seats. While significant growth via distance education has been achieved, the institution has been conscious of ensuring resources are allocated to support this burgeoning area. Specific examples within the last several years include the increase in the number of instructional designers from one full-time individual to three and adding two online support specialists and one E-learning technology and training specialist. Online support specialists provide technical assistance during non-traditional times throughout the day because most online students and faculty engage in their courses outside of conventional business hours. An e-learning technology and training specialist provides additional assistance in direct support of continued growth within the online education marketplace. Such support includes assisting faculty in the integration of effective and attractive technology tools for courses as well as the development of a student training program to ensure learner readiness in an online environment.

#### *Graduate Center and Off-site Education Programming*

The Graduate Center (GC, formerly the Graduate Business Center), which opened in 2002, was the University's first institutionally-owned "additional location." The GC is located three miles north of campus and is a 47,000-square-foot building that provides a professional and convenient off-campus learning environment. The MBA, MPA, DPA, and Counseling programs, as well as the Southeastern Pennsylvania Autism Resource Center (SPARC) are all housed there. It also hosts an array of executive education and outreach activities.

The institution's Center City location offers quality, affordable educational opportunities that WCU is known for, along with accessibility and convenience that come with being in the heart of a major city. WCU in Philadelphia is located at the PASSHE Center City building. In 2013, WCU offered its first program, a graduate degree in special education and post baccalaureate certification. Today we offer six programs at the Center City location. These programs include both undergraduate (criminal justice, social work, and a degree completion for nursing) and graduate programs (communication studies, criminal justice, and social work). There are currently over 300 students at the Center City location, which has steadily increased from the initial cohort of 35 three years ago. This location has provided access to students who otherwise may have not had the opportunity for a WCU education. This location serves the needs of degree completers and/or adult learners who are balancing work and family obligations. Additionally, it is proving to be an important way to attract students from a variety of cultural backgrounds, as about 85% of WCU students at the Center City campus are underrepresented minorities. The institution is committed to providing resources to ensure success in this area. Specific examples of this include the hiring of a program counselor in Philadelphia to serve as a link between main campus departments and services. Other examples of support include ensuring students have access to a WCU psychologist, the creation of student advisory boards, onsite



writing tutors, and the offering of student success workshops within the areas of time management, study skills, and test taking.

#### *Dual Enrollment Programming*

Beginning in 2015-2016 West Chester University began offering dual enrollment to qualified high school juniors and seniors. Students who participate in the dual enrollment program simultaneously earn college credits through WCU and high school credits through their respective high schools. Courses are taught by WCU faculty and are held at the Graduate Center in West Chester. This opportunity allows students to have earlier access to WCU and helps alleviate space constraints at the West Chester campus.

### **IV. Enhancing student recruitment, admission, and retention (Standards 1, 2, 8, 9)**

WCU's strategic plan states:

*As a public University which promotes academic excellence and emphasizes global education, West Chester University is committed to providing educational and employment opportunities to previously excluded, disadvantaged, challenged, and marginalized populations. Therefore we will recruit, retain, and graduate diverse cohorts of students.*

The University is located in a crowded marketplace competing for students with over 100 higher education institutions within a 50-mile radius. While this may be a difficult obstacle for some institutions, the University has embraced this challenge by strategically enhancing its student recruitment, admission, and retention efforts over the past five years. This has been critical to the University's financial stability in the face of steadily declining state appropriations. In response to the enrollment goals outlined in the strategic plan, WCU has increased its investment in marketing from \$350,000 to \$1.7 million annually. Based on the enrollment goals established through the University's enrollment management process and approved by Cabinet— to increase out-of-state, graduate and off-campus enrollments – the Office of Communications creates targeted marketing plans that address those objectives. In addition, the Communications team has been charged with increasing general awareness (branding) of the University beyond WCU's traditional market (Greater Philadelphia) to other areas of the Mid-Atlantic region. Examples of tactics for each of the targeted populations as well as the general brand awareness effort include a station-domination marketing tactic in which there is a high concentration of WCU advertisements at several train stations throughout the Interstate 95 corridor including the Long Island Railroad, as well as the Baltimore Metro and Washington D.C. Union Station terminals. In addition to enlarging the institution's geographical focus, the University has deliberately expanded its reach using digital media outlets (Google Adwords, Facebook, Pandora, LinkedIn, and Spotify). Each of these tactics has also assisted in another key goal of the institution, which is the admission of underrepresented minority students (URMs).

In 2008 the University set a goal of increasing new degree-seeking URM enrollment 23% by the end of 2014. Figure 3.1 demonstrates the multicultural undergraduate and graduate headcounts for the last several years. In addition, undergraduate goals for URM students have been achieved on an annual basis. Specific funds and plans that have been undertaken in the last five years include Check

Us Out Day (which encourages multicultural students to attend information sessions on campus), targeting community colleges, and phone-a-thons for accepted URM students.

Figure 3.1: Multicultural Undergraduate and Graduate Headcount

Race/Ethnicity	Fall 2011	Fall 2012	Fall 2013	Fall 2014	Fall 2015
<b>Undergraduate Headcount</b>					
African American/Black	1,140	1,145	1,247	1,350	1,490
Native American/Alaskan Native	26	19	15	14	14
Asian	239	253	290	294	306
Latino	549	614	636	690	762
White	10,628	10,914	11,138	11,032	11,072
Non-Resident Alien	48	48	44	41	68
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	3	7	8	14	17
Two or More Races	164	226	322	363	409
Unknown Race or Ethnicity	37	75	13	51	88
NRA or Unknown	85	123	57	92	156
Underrepresented Minorities <sup>1</sup>	1,859	1,973	2,179	2,377	2,618
Non-URM (White/Asian)	10,890	11,205	11,477	11,380	11,452
Percent URM [URM/(URM+Non-URM)]	14.6%	15.0%	16.0%	17.3%	18.6%

Race/Ethnicity	Fall 2011	Fall 2012	Fall 2013	Fall 2014	Fall 2015
<b>Graduate Headcount</b>					
African American/Black	231	236	250	295	319
Native American/Alaskan Native	3	4	5	4	2
Asian	58	57	53	62	62
Latino	53	57	63	67	76
White	1,840	1,634	1,642	1,681	1,796
Non-Resident Alien	47	53	75	85	84
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1	1	1	3	-
Two or More Races	21	20	27	32	37
Unknown Race or Ethnicity	12	52	18	13	9
NRA or Unknown	59	105	93	98	93
Underrepresented Minorities <sup>1</sup>	306	314	339	394	428
Non-URM (White/Asian)	1,901	1,695	1,702	1,750	1,864
Percent URM [URM/(URM+Non-URM)]	13.9%	15.6%	16.6%	18.4%	18.7%

<sup>1</sup>The Education Trust 'Access to Success' definition of URM includes any student who self-identifies as Black, Hispanic, Native American, Hawaiian, or Multiracial when at least one of those race/ethnic categories is identified.

Non-URM includes any student who self-identifies as White, Asian, or Multiracial (White & Asian). Students with no race or ethnicity specified and international non-resident alien students are excluded from both the numerator and denominator in the Percent URM calculation.

<https://edtrust.org/issue/access/>

While the admission and recruitment of diverse and qualified students is very important, equally important is the retention and graduation of students. The institution's retention and graduation rates regularly exceeded the national norm over the last four years. Table 3 displays the four- and six-



year graduation rates of the institution using the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) report for 2014.

**Figure 3.2: Comparison of IPEDS Four and Six Year Graduation Rates**

Category	4 Yr. Grad. Rate F08 Cohort	6 Yr. Graduation Rate F14 Cohort	% Graduated within 6 Yrs. Black	% Graduated within 6 Yrs. Hispanic
<b>All US Degree Granting Institutions with Bachelor's or Higher (n=3069)</b>	33	47	38	45
<b>All M1's (n=390)</b>	33	51	39	45
<b>All Public, M1's (n=168)</b>	23	47	37	42
<b>All Public, M1's, Mid East DE DC MD NJ NY PA (n=39)</b>	32	55	45	49
<b>PASSHE (n=14)</b>	34	54	41	54
<b>West Chester University</b>	44	67	54	69

The University's ability to successfully retain students is the outcome of a suite of student support services. Upon admission to the institution, students are placed into one of four admission categories. Regularly admitted students have a combined SAT score of 1070 or greater. Students admitted under the Academic Development Program (ADP) include ACT 101 participants (students whose family incomes are below 150% of the national poverty level) and non-ACT 101 participants who are educationally disadvantaged, having both SAT scores and grade point averages below those of regular admission criteria. Students offered admission to the institution in a category other than regular admission are automatically connected with support services to ensure academic success.

ADP is housed within the Undergraduate Student Support Services (USSSS) unit, which includes the Learning Assistance and Resource Center, Pre-Major Advising, as well as the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities. ADP admits approximately 180 academically high-risk students (many of which are low income, first generation, and/or students of color) each summer for a bridge program prior to their full matriculation in the fall. Throughout their first year these students are provided academic support through academic advising, tutoring, mentoring, academic monitoring, and counseling. When compared to students who do not participate in the program, ADP students persist at higher-than-expected retention rates.

Students admitted in the special admission category have either SAT scores or grade point averages below those of the regular admission criteria and take a reduced (12-credit) course load during their first semester at WCU. Figures 3.3 and 3.4 display the five-year average rates for second semester fall retention and for fourth- and sixth-year graduation rates by admittance and transfer type.

**Figure 3.3: First time, Full Time, First Year Degree Seeking Students Retention and Graduation**

Category		2nd Fall Retention		4 Yr Graduation Rate		6 Yr Graduation Rate	
		N in F14 Cohort	% Retained to 2nd Fall	N in F11 Cohort	% Graduated Within 4 Yrs	N in F09 Cohort	% Graduated Within 6 Yrs
University	ALL	2344	87.9	2283	47.7	2241	70.7
Admissions Type	Regular	1968	88.7	1893	51.8	1847	73.1
	ADP - ACT101	68	80.9	55	21.8	54	48.1
	ADP - Non-Act101	112	83.9	104	17.3	109	66.1
	Special	196	84.2	231	34.3	231	59.3

Figure 3.4: Transfer Students Retention and Graduation

Category		2nd Fall Retention		2 Yr Graduation Rate		4 Yr Graduation Rate		6 Yr Graduation	
		N in F14 Cohort	% Retained to 2nd Fall	N in F13 Cohort	% Graduated Within 2 Yrs	N in F11 Cohort	% Graduated Within 4 Yrs	N in F09 Cohort	% Graduated Within 6 Yrs
University	ALL	1331	83.5	1350	17.5	1275	66.7	1179	70.6
Load	Full-time in 1st Fall	1171	85.5	1174	17.2	1138	67.8	1051	72.2
	Part-time in 1st Fall	160	68.8	176	19.3	137	57.7	128	57.0

Additionally, the University engages in continuous improvement efforts designed to ensure there is currency in student success and retention activities. In 2012 the University was one of 13 institutions in the State System to participate in the Center for Urban Education Equity Scorecard (ES) project. ES is a data-driven, organizational learning process designed to foster institutional change by identifying and eliminating racial disparities among college students. Consistent with the institutional mission of providing access and high-quality undergraduate education, the aim of this project was to identify structurally hidden and unintended inequalities leading to racial disproportions in the following: access to the University, retention, degree completion, and involvement in high impact activities, such as internship, honors, and undergraduate research. At the conclusion of this project, a total of 45 recommendations were made to administration. The recommendations are designed to close the racial equity gap in the areas of access, retention/completion, and excellence. To date 60% of the recommendations have been acted upon.<sup>11</sup> Over the last four years, the University has increased the number of URM students enrolled and increased and exceeded national retention rates for URM students. The University will continue to build upon excellence in this area by following through on remaining ES recommendations that have yet to be implemented.

Student success is at the core of every decision made at the University. *Building on Excellence* states, “West Chester University is dedicated to excellent academic programs while supporting an academic environment that ensures student success.” Over the last five years, the development of several programs has assisted in the retention and graduation rates for both URM students and the overall student population. Beginning in 2012-2013, the Office of Multicultural Affairs launched a mentoring program for first-year and transfer multicultural students. During its inaugural year, the program had 171 participants and currently serves nearly 249. The program’s purpose is to assist multicultural students in their transition to WCU by assigning them to both a peer mentor (an upper-class student) and a faculty/staff mentor who will provide guidance, information, and support during the initial year of enrollment. When comparing the retention rate of the mentoring group to all other multicultural

students who do not participate, the program boasts a 4% greater retention rate for the last three cohorts of participants. Because of early success with first year students, the program was expanded in 2015 to also include transfer multicultural students.

In 2013 the African American and Latino Male Student Retention Task Force was developed to help URM students overcome historically low graduation rates. The Brother to Brother program is the outcome of a task force recommendation. Launched in 2014, Brother to Brother, which is organized within the Learning Assistance and Resource Center (LARC), has created a council of ambassadors from campus organizations, holds special events, and reaches out to teen minority males in Philadelphia and nearby towns. Lastly, the Early Alert program within LARC is a proactive system of communication and collaboration of professors, program staff, academic advisors, and University students. The goals of this program are to promote academic success by identifying students having trouble with course material, provide students with timely support and direction in the use of campus resources, enhance communication with faculty, and help make the college transition more gratifying by providing a framework for academic success. Early Alert was expanded to all 100 and 200 level general education courses as a result of a strategic plan objective. Annually there are 1,100 early alerts that are sent to students, which serves as an initial outreach for them to meet with their advisor and/or sign up for tutoring at the LARC.

#### *Conclusion*

Ensuring meaningful responses to the challenges and opportunities developing since the decennial site visit has strengthened WCU. The University has pursued significant improvements to assessment processes, both at the level of student learning outcomes as well as institutional effectiveness. The University has also implemented specific strategies to combat the financial effects of declining state appropriations exacerbated by the BOG's practice of constraining tuition increases at or below the CPI. These strategies include strengthening the role of the Foundation and the Alumni Association as well as meeting strategic enrollment management targets. In response to limitations on physical space, the institution has developed alternate sites for program delivery as well as alternative modalities for delivering instruction (distance education) to support increased enrollments. Finally, the University has successfully achieved enrollment growth despite being located in a very competitive market by providing not only access to high quality public higher education, but also ensuring the success of students as measured by retention and timely graduation rates.