

White Paper #2: Next Steps in Evolution of ONEWSU System (1/26/2021)

Over the past 18 months, Washington State University (WSU) has put in place a strategic plan for the WSU System and structured a strong active planning environment for the university. This work has placed WSU at a crossroads for how to continue to evolve and operate as a system.

Though there are many pathways forward, two primary options emerge. The first option would largely keep the current leadership structure in place, with the system roles largely house on the Pullman campus. This has worked reasonably well for the past 30 years. However, it does not provide the flexibility for substantial growth outside of the Pullman campus. It also presents with organizational inefficiencies embedded in the sometimes overly complicated matrix organization.

The second option would be to strengthen the original intent of creating the WSU System and build a foundation for future growth that explicitly recognizes the strong bond between communities in Washington and the WSU campuses that service those communities. This pathway would focus on more self-governance and delegated authority for WSU campuses, while optimizing many operations at the system level. Doing so would allow WSU to better serves its students and constituencies, while at the same time ensuring quality, communication, and coordination at the system level. This option better prepares WSU for post-COVID growth and opportunity.

Through the system strategic planning process, a set of principles were adopted as part of the process to define how the WSU system operates. Many of these [principles](#) have been espoused at WSU for many years and are a reflection of perceptions of desire for a strong WSU system: ONEWSU degree, ONEWSU faculty, ONEWSU commitment to shared accountability, operational excellence, fiscal stewardship, data informed decision-making, and community partnerships. Building and maintaining a strong system requires that each campus in the system is strong, with clear articulated delegated authority and a strong set of system level administration and support services.

Evolution of Core Principles

To continue to move forward with system planning, three of our existing ONEWSU operating principles need to be expanded for system growth and optimization.

ONEWSU Level of Operational Excellence

Since its inception, WSU has set itself apart from many of our peer institutions through its commitment to serve the public good and educating the next generation of problem solvers, innovators, and leaders. The university's efforts have always been grounded in the creation of practical solutions that benefit the greatest number of people. The vision for ONEWSU carries this wholeheartedly. To create systemwide operational excellence, it is critical to articulate

which functions and processes should be managed at system level, and which are better suited in localized, campus control, and to build a system structure that supports the integrations of all of this work. Throughout this process, WSU will continue to grow the interconnected nature of its campuses and teaching, research, and extension centers, while celebrating that which makes each location--and the community it serves--distinct. The ONEWSU Operating Excellence principle must reflect both the need for “centralized” and “decentralized” functions, with an emphasis on clear accountability and responsibility.

ONEWSU Faculty

Our ONEWSU faculty principle must empower each campus to assume primary responsibility for hiring, supporting, and mentoring faculty members to meet the unique needs of each campus location. This means broadening the “one faculty” core statement. Each campus has different student bodies, degree programs, resources to support faculty scholarship, teaching loads, and access to graduate students and post-doctoral researchers. More individual campus autonomy with respect to faculty allows each location to optimize their needs, and most importantly, ensure faculty success in supporting the unique mission of each campus and the system as a whole. A more decentralized faculty structure could look like the following:

- Personnel actions for faculty would emanate from the faculty member’s home campus, with tenure and promotion guidelines codified by each campus. Final approval would be from the WSU system chief academic officer, but in the context of the guidelines and recommendations of the home campus.
- Faculty members would coordinate and collaborate with colleagues across the WSU system and across disciplines – but would not formally be members of the same system “department or school.” Instead, there would be local program directors reporting to the VCAA for each campus.
- New academic programs could be housed anywhere within the WSU system, with special consideration to demand and available resources at each location. Coordination and approval of academic plans would be the responsibility of the WSU system chief academic officer.
- Each campus would be responsible for putting in place a formalized faculty governance structure to ensure shared governance in academic decision-making takes place at all WSU locations.

For this to work effectively, it will require a strong chief academic officer for the WSU system. Just as the WSU President currently serves as the Chancellor of the Pullman campus, the Provost and Executive Vice President also serves as the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for WSU Pullman. These positions would also need to be split with specific duties as follows:

- *WSU System Provost and Executive Vice President* – serves as the chief academic officer for the system, works closely with the President to provide overall direction to the WSU system; responsible for all aspects of the system’s academic mission and leads its efforts in the pursuit of academic excellence; provides oversight and support for creation of new degree programs across the system, supervision and oversight of tenure and promotion processes.
- *Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (WSU Pullman)* – similar to the responsibilities of the VCAs at our other campus, the VCA for Pullman would be responsible for leading the academic mission of the Pullman campus, including supporting the strategic research priorities for the Pullman campus; oversight for faculty affairs, including hiring, personnel actions, tenure and promotion, and mentoring; working with other campus leaders to advance the campus’ commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Proposed Timeline

July 2019 – Appointment of first Vice President for Health Sciences

May 2020 – Final Roles and Responsibilities Working Group Report released

June 2020 – 5-year WSU System Strategic Plan approved by WSU Regents

October 2020 – Announcement of individual campus designations

January 2021 – Plan to appoint WSU Pullman Chancellor

March 2021 – Formation of campus and system-specific working groups, and engagement with university governance groups on the initial vision for the ONEWSU System Plan

June/July 2021 – Regents endorsement of plan for optimization for WSU System

Sept / October 2021--engagement of university governance groups around specific structure and function of WSU system, and changes to specific roles and responsibilities.

November 2021 – Regents hear updates on WSU System optimization plan

January 2022 – Appointment announced for WSU Pullman Chancellor.

July 2022 – New administrative system structure put in place; Chancellor for WSU Pullman starts.