



February 2, 2023

Dr. Kirk Schulz, President
Dr. Elizabeth Chilton, Provost
Washington State University
P.O. Box 641046
Pullman, WA 99164-3629

Dear President Schulz and Provost Chilton:

As individuals with a deep understanding of the history of WSU and an unwavering commitment to its future, we are writing to voice concern and offer our services to you in a consultatory capacity.

Our intent in writing is not to provide criticism but to outline what we perceive as major challenges facing WSU. Our hope is that you will allow us to provide constructive and supportive perspectives on these issues and discuss recommendations with you. To do so effectively, we believe it would be helpful to begin by framing our concerns for you and requesting your views.

We hope you will accept our comments in the constructive spirit in which they are intended and trust that you will view our queries as reasonable coming from faculty devoted to the Cougar family and dedicated to creating an environment that supports students, staff, faculty, administration, and fosters success for all.

Below is a summary of what we perceive as the three major challenges facing WSU:

1. Declining enrollment

WSU has experienced deeply declining enrollments that are projected to continue for at least two more years, "bottoming out" at a cumulative 20% decline. Importantly, WSU appears to be the only PAC-12 university exhibiting a negative enrollment trend.¹

Questions:

1) What action is WSU taking to reverse the steep decline in enrollment?

¹ <https://pullmanradio.com/wsue-enrollment-declines-expected-to-continue-for-another-2-years-projection-calls-for-nearly-20-drop-since-pandemic-began/>

- 2) Can you provide insight about why WSU apparently is unique among the PAC-12 universities in this enrollment decline?

2. The impact of budget cuts on academic scholarship

Partly as a result of the steep enrollment declines, but likely compounded by other factors, operating budgets for academic programs have stagnated or atrophied. A 6% operating budget cut has just been announced, which follows on from substantial budget cuts that were imposed in the previous year. Additional funding cuts to academic programs appear likely. There is a concern that the effect of the latest budget reductions will be borne most heavily by career track faculty and support staff that have been vital to WSU. Losing these members of the WSU community is a double-edged sword: Reducing teaching and auxiliary support in academic units will transfer additional teaching and administrative responsibilities to tenure-track faculty, thereby diminishing their capacity for high quality research. An overarching concern is the priority placed on academic excellence and research capacity at WSU.

Questions:

- 1) Besides declining revenue due to enrollment changes, what are the specific reasons for cuts to academic units? Do they reflect changes in state allocations to WSU?
- 2) What actions are being taken or contemplated to halt the erosion in support for academic programs and research capacity, and is anything being done to minimize the effect of budget cuts on career-track faculty and support staff?
- 3) Has the appropriateness of budget allocations to non-academic operations and units been considered as a means of potentially lessening the severity of budget cuts to academic units?
- 4) What is the 10-year trend for operating funds allocated to academic units to support teaching, research, and outreach efforts?
- 5) What is the 10-year trend for tenure track versus career track faculty at WSU?
- 6) To what extent have administrative costs grown over the past 10 years and how do current administrative costs compare to other major universities of similar size?
- 7) How are administrative costs determined and tracked?

3. Our declining national reputation

WSU has experienced significant decline in national reputation based on publicly consumed national media rating sources, such as the USNWR. Since prospective students and their parents pay attention to such rankings, this trend cannot be dismissed as unimportant. The fact that WSU now ranks considerably below the University of Idaho is a major concern given that the reverse was true only a few years ago.

The rankings issue also applies to multiple world rankings published by other sources that some consider more scientifically credible. For example, WSU's NSF ranking in terms of total research expenditures has declined from 67th to 78th in the last six years. Examples of land-grant institutions that have now surpassed WSU include CSU, U of Missouri, and Oregon State.

Questions:

- 1) What is being done to understand the performance issues and metrics driving the decline in our national and world rankings?
- 2) Is WSU actively establishing institutional priorities to increase rankings and, if so, what is being done and what are the expected outcomes?

Sincerely,

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