

**DECISION PACKAGE TITLE: Western's Graduate Programs**

Although Western delivers high-quality Graduate education with strong student outcomes, years of declining enrollment and stagnant TA compensation levels have brought Western's Graduate programs to an inflection point. This Decision Package puts Western on a path to achieving the University's strategic goals for Graduate education while better serving the people of Washington State.

**Fiscal Detail: [BUDGET AND FINANCIAL PLANNING (BFP) WILL COMPLETE THIS SECTION BASED ON ACCOMPANYING COST & REVENUE TEMPLATE]**

	2021-22	2022-23	2021-23
<b>RESOURCES</b>			
Fund xxx, Net Tuition			
Fund 001, General Fund - State	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Total Resources</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>
<b>USES (EXPENDITURES)</b>			
Faculty	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Graduate Teaching Assistants	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Exempt	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Classified	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Hourly	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Salaries and Wages	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Employee Benefits	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Goods and Services	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Equipment	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>

**STAFFING FTE (B6)**

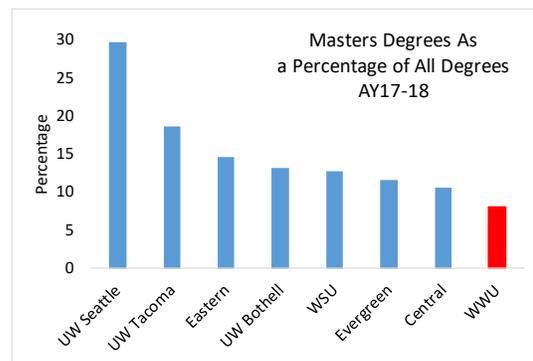
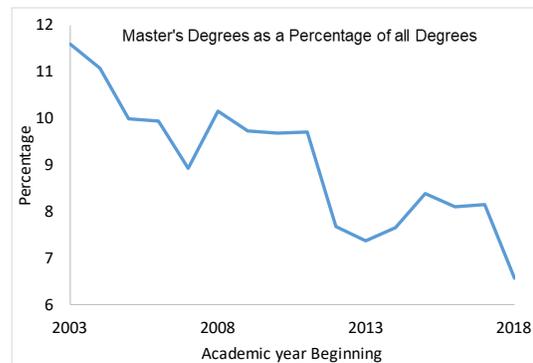
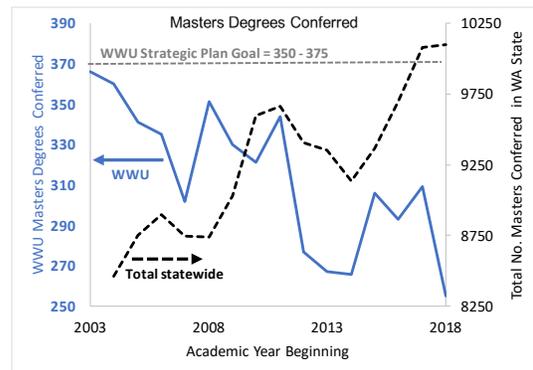
Faculty	0.00	0.00
Professional Staff	0.00	0.00
Classified Staff	0.00	0.00
Hourly	0.00	0.00
<b>Total FTE</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>

## Package Description

### The Current State of Western’s Graduate Programs

Western offers high-quality graduate programs with excellent student outcomes serving over 700 students enrolled in more than 30 degree offerings throughout Puget Sound: 95% of graduates are employed within six months or continuing their education, five-year degree completion rates consistently exceed 80%, and average time-to-degree is under 8 quarters and falling. About two-thirds of graduates find employment in Washington State. Admissions selectivity has also steadily risen over the last 10 years. The graduate student body is becoming more diverse, though diversity remains well below goals articulated in Western’s Strategic Plan.<sup>1</sup> Graduate students are supported by a network of advising and counseling services, the Graduate Research and Writing Studio in the Western Libraries, and regular community-building activities. Students are represented by a Graduate Student Advocacy Council and through student representatives on University committees. Non-salary financial support has been a focus of recent investment, through increased institutional contributions for TA health insurance and need-based tuition waivers. Graduate students are vital contributors to the intellectual life of the University and wider community and serve as instructors, mentors and role models for thousands of undergraduates each year.

In spite of this quality, Western’s graduate programs face some serious challenges. Over the last 15 years, enrollment has declined by an average of about -1.5% a year, while master’s degree production nationwide increased by +2.7% annually<sup>2</sup> and Western’s undergraduate population grew at an annual rate of about +1.6%. Graduate degree production is moving in the opposite direction from University Strategic Plan targets. Graduate degrees have fallen to a smaller percentage of Western degrees than at any point in decades, and are now the lowest among all public universities in Washington. Program closures have led to imbalances; for



All data from IPEDS. <https://ies.ed.gov/>

<sup>1</sup> The percentage of applicants, admitted and matriculated students self-reporting as persons of color are nearly equal, and have steadily risen from about 10% in 2009 to about 17% in 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Average annual change for public institutions during the period 2007-08 to 2017-18, Table C.24 from “Graduate Enrollment and Degrees: 2008 to 2018” Council of Graduate Schools.

[https://cgsnet.org/ckfinder/userfiles/files/CGS\\_GED18\\_Report\\_web.pdf](https://cgsnet.org/ckfinder/userfiles/files/CGS_GED18_Report_web.pdf)

example, only 1% of Western master's degrees are now awarded in the arts. Application numbers and yield are widely variable, with some highly selective programs receiving robust application pressure from a national pool, while others struggle to meet enrollment targets. More detailed analysis of enrollment data shows that, on average, long-running programs (those in existence for 20 or more years) went through a period of attrition in the mid-2000's, from which they have since held steady, without recovery. Also during this period, the rate of addition of students from new programs only just balanced the loss rate from program closures. New and experimental Graduate programs, often looked to as a driver of growth and innovation, made no net contribution to student headcount. Online and certificate programs have likewise contributed only modest growth, and overall enrollment at Western's Everett campus, South Sound and Peninsula locations has been approximately stagnant.

These trends are not inevitable, as the experience of other public 4-year universities in Washington State shows. At Central Washington University for example, Graduate degree production increased 35% over the last five years. Statewide, master's degree production grew by 8% over the same period. The issue is therefore not lack of demand for master's-level education; it is that students are increasingly choosing to enroll at other institutions.

In addition to enrollment, a second, related area of concern is support for Graduate Teaching Assistants. In the 10 years prior to AY19-20, TA stipends were increased only once, in 2014. Adjusted for inflation, TA stipends today are about the same as they were in 1990, a time when the competitive environment for Graduate programs was very different than it is now.

Low compensation of Graduate Teaching Assistants is problematic on many levels: it poses financial hardships for students, it makes it difficult to recruit and retain students in competitive fields, and it has led to concerns over fairness and equity as a result of applying different compensation levels within the University. These and other burdens are borne most painfully by students with families, and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Low stipends create a headwind impeding progress toward almost every other strategic goal of the Graduate School.

In summary, Western's Graduate programs are high-quality and student outcomes are strong. However, a growing set of challenges exists that if left unaddressed put Western's Graduate programs in peril, and along with them, vital aspects of the scholarly and academic life of the University. They also impact Western's ability to do its share to help meet the post-baccalaureate educational needs of Washingtonians. This Decision Package aims to put Western's Graduate programs on a path to achieve goals set forth in the University's strategic plan and better serve the people of Washington State.

In the following, we will make four requests:

1. Expanded tuition waiver authority enabling more effective enrollment management strategy;
2. A dedicated staff position and operating budget for program marketing and recruitment;
3. New base-funded TA positions supporting enrollment growth;
4. An increase in TA stipend levels over two biennia to reach more competitive and equitable levels.

**Putting Graduate Programs on a Path to Growth.**

To reverse the trends described above requires two actions: (1) supporting existing programs that seek to grow and diversify, and (2) lowering barriers to new program creation and innovation. A number of actions are already being taken in both areas, but four additional steps are necessary:

First, an increase is needed to the Graduate School tuition waiver budget to allow for implementation of a modern, competitive approach to enrollment management. The increase can occur administratively without direct budgetary impact, and without affecting the waiver budgets of other units.<sup>3</sup> The additional waiver authority will initially be used for two purposes: (1) to bundle partial waivers with admissions offers under specific circumstances for new student recruitment, and (2) to encourage faculty to include Graduate Research Assistant stipends in their external grant proposals. The latter enables more graduate students to be supported on external funding, at negligible opportunity cost, while at the same time helping drive the University's research enterprise. Properly managed, both mechanisms can be implemented in a manner that preserves average per-student net tuition revenue; the details of how this is accomplished are outside the scope of this Decision Package, but are quite standard, and based on strategies widely-used in undergraduate admissions. Currently, the Graduate School's discretionary waiver budget (i.e. the portion not tied to TA positions) totals only about 4% of gross Graduate tuition revenue. This is insufficient headroom to implement meaningful strategy. Prior to implementation, the Graduate School will present a comprehensive financial and enrollment analysis.

Second, the Graduate School needs to become more engaged in marketing and recruitment activities. Historically these functions have been left to departments to figure out and fund, with mixed results. Effective strategies require expertise and access to information and technology resources that individual departments lack. A 1 FTE staff specialist and marketing budget are therefore requested for this purpose. The position will work directly with departments to develop and implement tailored strategies. Such support is necessary if Western is to seriously undertake a campaign of growing Graduate enrollment and recruiting more diverse students.

Third, 20 additional base-funded TA positions (about a 10% increase) are needed to support growth of existing programs and help seed the creation of new ones. In some especially competitive fields, the number of TA positions allocated to a department serves as an effective cap on Graduate enrollment and additional positions translate directly into growth. More broadly, Western needs to look beyond its existing programs to develop innovative new ones. As noted above, the historical pace of new program generation is too slow (on average over the last 20 years, only one new program every two years, also equaling the program closure rate). A change in approach is therefore required. These new programs are likely to include a mix of traditional and new delivery formats, such as 4+1, 3+2, online, hybrid, and self-supporting programs, as well as new degrees at Western's Everett campus, South Sound, and Peninsulas sites. Seed support in the form of base-funded TA positions can help accelerate this process. And, of course, these TAs serve as instructors, mentors and role models to Western undergraduates.

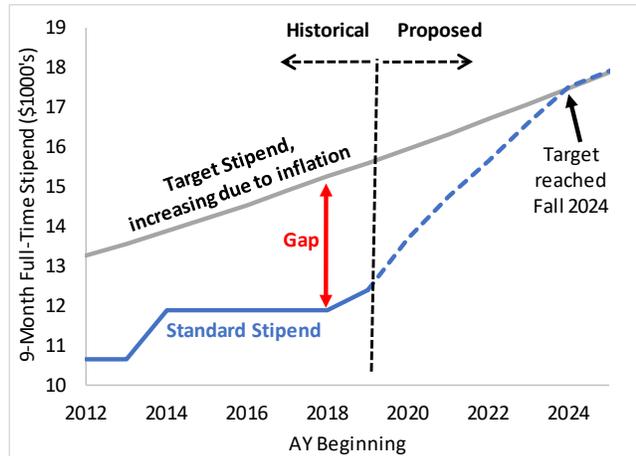
Fourth and finally, years of deferred increases to TA stipend levels have accumulated, creating a gap between the Graduate School target stipend of \$16,000 for a full-time 9-month appointment and actual stipend levels. The target stipend reflects a variety of factors including the local cost of

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<sup>3</sup> The Graduate tuition waiver budget would be increased by making expanded use of RCW [28B.15.910](#) and as such, would have no effect on other waiver budgets within the University. Currently, only partial use is made of the full authority allowed under the RCW. Although this is essentially an internal policy, rather than budgetary matter, it is included in this Package as an integral part of the overall strategy for Graduate program growth and diversification.

living and stipend levels at peer institutions and competitors. The gap between the target and actual stipends currently exceeds \$650k/yr and grows larger each year. Starting last year, Western began working to bridge the gap by dedicating \$100k/yr in new funding to increase TA stipend levels in both FY20 and FY21. The first increases took effect this year, and a second increase is budgeted for next year. Those investments represent important first-steps. Paradoxically, however, it turns out that when inflation is factored in, at the current rate of increase, even if continued each year indefinitely, stipends will never actually reach the target. Instead, after initially narrowing somewhat, the gap will begin to increase once again. The current trajectory is on the wrong path.

Therefore, four consecutive years of stipend increases are requested beginning in Fall 2021 at a total cost of \$210k/yr. In addition to these increases, for the academic year beginning Fall 2020, the Graduate School will dedicate an additional \$150k/yr in base funding from its own budget to the \$100k/yr already budgeted from institutional funds. Together, these investments will enable a collapse of the current two-tier rate system to a single tier in 1-2 years, achieving rate parity, and put Western on track to close the compensation gap by Fall 2024. These projections assume the addition of 20 new TA positions in AY22 as requested above.



*The standard TA stipend rate compared to the Graduate School target rate. Example illustrates the compounding effects of inflation and historically deferred compensation increases. Four consecutive years of increases by \$210k/yr are requested beginning in FY21 to close the gap by Fall 2024. Rate parity among all TA stipend categories is projected to be achieved in 1-2 years from now.*

### Summary.

In summary, Western’s Graduate programs, while high quality, face two significant challenges: declining enrollment and low TA stipend levels. This Decision Package proposes four steps to address them. Taken together these actions will help set Western on a path to achieving the University’s strategic goals for Graduate education while better serving the people of Washington State.

**a) *What specific performance outcomes does the agency expect?***

Anticipated performance outcomes expected to be achieved within two years include:

- An increase in the number of master's degrees awarded by Western through growth of existing programs and the introduction of new ones;
- A diversification of Graduate offerings, including more non-traditional delivery formats and more programs at Western's Everett campus, South Sound and Peninsulas locations, making post-baccalaureate education options more accessible to Washingtonians;
- An enhanced ability to recruit and retain high quality, diverse graduate students;
- An increase in the number of Graduate Research Assistantships funded by external grants;
- Adequate TA stipends allow Graduate students to better focus on their dual responsibilities as both students and TA's, leading to higher completion rates and shorter time to degree;
- Increased mentoring and instruction of undergraduate students by Graduate students, impacting undergraduate retention and success for continuing education beyond the undergraduate level;
- Reduced average student debt levels at graduation.

**b) *Performance measure detail.***

Each performance outcome in a) is measured against the respective numerical metric (e.g. degree production, demographic data, number of degree programs, student debt survey data, etc.) Additional important indicators include the volume and diversity of the applicants, retention and graduation rates, and time to degree relative to previous years.

**c) *Is this proposal an expansion or alteration of a current program or service? If so, provide detailed historical financial information for the prior two biennia.***

N/A

**d) *Is this decision package essential to implement a strategy identified in [Western's strategic plan](#)?***

Yes.

The Package addresses all three core themes in the 2018-25 Strategic Plan: advancing inclusive success, increasing Washington impact, and enhancing academic excellence.

It addresses Goal #1 of the Strategic Plan ("Western will provide a transformational education grounded in the liberal arts and sciences and based on innovative scholarship, research, and creative activity"), because Graduate students are vital contributors to research and scholarly programs. It addresses Goal #3 ("Western will foster a caring and supportive environment where all members are respected and treated fairly") and Goal #4 ("Western will pursue justice and equity in its policies, practices, and impacts") by eliminating inequities in TA stipend levels and treating all TAs, regardless of their program of study, equally and fairly. Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds will benefit most from the proposed changes.

It addresses the Strategic Plan Benchmark for Graduate education (to award 350-375 Graduate degrees per year by 2025) and the Benchmark for Research and Sponsored Programs Annual Revenue (to achieve \$15M-\$20M by 2025).

***e) How does this package relate and contribute to the [Governor's Results Washington goal areas and statewide priorities?](#)***

It addresses Goal 1.3.f by expanding access in STEM fields at both the Graduate level (directly, through increased Graduate student enrollment) and Undergraduate level (indirectly, through additional TA positions to relieve bottlenecks in critically oversubscribed introductory-level STEM courses).

It addresses Goal 1.3.g by increasing the number of online and hybrid Graduate offerings.

It addresses Goal 1.3.h by expanding access in STEM fields that rely on Graduate students for undergraduate instruction and to support world-class research programs.

***f) What are the other important connections or impacts related to this proposal?***

N/A

***g) What alternatives were explored by the agency, and why was this alternative chosen?***

N/A

***h) What are the consequences of not funding this package?***

A continued decline in Graduate degree production is very likely. Graduate programs will also continue to struggle to meet student diversity and other enrollment targets. There will be fewer post-baccalaureate opportunities available to the people of Washington State.

***i) What is the relationship, if any, to the state's capital budget? How does this proposal impact state facilities?***

Two new science buildings are expected to be constructed on the Bellingham campus over the next several years, significantly increasing the number of introductory-level undergraduate laboratory sections in Biology, Chemistry, Environmental Science, Marine and Coastal Science, and other fields. Additional Graduate TAs positions will be required to support many of these courses.

***j) What changes would be required to existing statutes, rules, or contracts, in order to implement the change?***

None.

***k) Does this Decision Package include funding for any IT-related costs, including hardware, software, (including cloud-based services), contracts or IT staff? If so, please identify.***

No.

***l) Expenditure and revenue calculations and assumptions.***

*m) Which costs and functions are one-time? Which are ongoing? What are the budget impacts in future biennia?*

Recurring:

Communications Consultant 3 (1.0 FTE): \$100,000

New TA positions (20 full-time): \$325,000

Increase in TA stipends: \$250,000 (including benefits on amount contributed by Graduate School)

Marketing budget: \$50,000

**Notes and References.**

# Use this tab to enter personnel budget

All Positions assumed to be permanent & recurring unless noted otherwise

Enter Proposed Annual salary, Headcount, and FTE

PLEASE INCLUDE BOTH HEADCOUNT AND FTE

POSITION TITLE	Full Time Average CUPA Salary (Divisional Budget Personnel to Provide CUPA)	STATE BIENNIAL BUDGET REQUEST YEAR 1 FY2021-22						STATE BIENNIAL BUDGET REQUEST YEAR 2 FY2022-23					
		Proposed Annual Salary	Headcount	FTE	Budgeted Salary	Benefits	TOTAL	Proposed Annual Salary	Headcount	FTE	Budgeted Salary	Benefits	TOTAL
<b>Faculty Salaries</b>													
<b>Faculty Salary and Benefit Total</b>		\$0	0	0.00	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
<b>Professional Salaries</b>													
<b>Exempt Professional Staff Salary and Benefit Total</b>		\$0	0	0.00	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
<b>Classified Salaries</b>													
Communications Consultant 3	\$70,632	\$74,933	1	1.00	\$74,933	\$27,604	\$102,537	\$77,181	1	\$1	\$77,181	\$28,082	\$105,263
<b>Classified Staff Salary and Benefit Total</b>		<b>\$74,933</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>\$74,933</b>	<b>\$27,604</b>	<b>\$102,537</b>	<b>\$77,181</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>\$1</b>	<b>\$77,181</b>	<b>\$28,082</b>	<b>\$105,263</b>
<b>Student Salaries</b>													
Note: Graduate Asst <u>1 HC = 20 hrs</u> per week per academic year. <u>.5 HC= 10 hrs</u> per week per academic year.													
Grad Asst/Student Employee		\$14,750	20	20.00	\$295,000	\$22,942	\$317,942	\$15,665	20	\$20	\$313,300	\$24,365	\$337,665
<b>Student Salary and Benefit Total</b>		<b>\$14,750</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20.00</b>	<b>\$295,000</b>	<b>\$22,942</b>	<b>\$317,942</b>	<b>\$15,665</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>\$20</b>	<b>\$313,300</b>	<b>\$24,365</b>	<b>\$337,665</b>
<b>Total Salary and Benefits - All Positions</b>		<b>\$89,683</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>21.00</b>	<b>\$369,933</b>	<b>\$50,546</b>	<b>\$420,479</b>	<b>\$92,846</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>\$21</b>	<b>\$390,481</b>	<b>\$52,448</b>	<b>\$442,929</b>

**WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY**  
**Graduate School**

**STUDENT FTE ( 1FTE =15 Student Credit Hours ) GENERATED FROM PROPOSAL** →

FY2021-22      FY2022-23  
**20**                      **0**

**STATE BIENNIAL BUDGET REQUEST YEAR 1**

**STATE BIENNIAL BUDGET REQUEST YEAR 2**

**Salary & Benefit Information Automatically Populated from Personnel Budget Tab**

**DO NOT ENTER SALARY & BENEFITS DATA HERE**

Faculty Salaries  
Professional Salaries  
Classified Salaries  
Student Salaries (Graduate Assistants, Hourly Student, etc)  
Benefits

FY2021-22					
Employee FTE	One Time Costs	Recurring Costs	Total Costs	Total Cost Per SFTE	
0.00		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	
0.00		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	
1.00		\$ 74,933	\$ 74,933	\$ 3,747	
20.00		\$ 295,000	\$ 295,000	\$ 14,750	
21.00		\$ 50,546	\$ 50,546	\$ 2,527	
<b>Total Salaries &amp; Benefits</b>		\$0	\$420,479	\$420,479	\$21,024

FY2022-23					
Employee FTE	One Time Costs	Recurring Costs	Total Costs	Total Cost Per SFTE	
0.00		\$ -	\$ -		
0.00		\$ -	\$ -		
1.00		\$ 77,181	\$ 77,181		
20.00		\$ 313,300	\$ 313,300		
21.00		\$ 52,448	\$ 52,448		
<b>Total Salaries &amp; Benefits</b>		\$0	\$442,929	\$442,929	\$0

**Enter "Goods and Services" here**

Supplies and Materials  
Professional Service Contracts (please detail below)  
Equipment and Personal Technology - including new faculty set-up costs \*  
Other Goods and Services (includes memberships, supplies, materials)

			\$ -	\$ -	
		\$ 250,000	\$ 250,000	\$ 12,500	
			\$ -	\$ -	
		\$ 50,000	\$ 50,000	\$ 2,500	
<b>Total Goods and Services</b>		\$0	\$300,000	\$300,000	\$15,000

			\$ -		
		\$ 250,000	\$ 250,000		
			\$ -		
		\$ 50,000	\$ 50,000		
<b>Total Goods and Services</b>		\$0	\$300,000	\$300,000	\$0

**Enter "Travel" here**

Lodging  
Automobile Rental  
Air Travel  
Ground Transportation  
Other travel costs

			\$ -	0
			\$ -	0
			\$ -	0
			\$ -	0
			\$ -	0
<b>Total Travel</b>		\$0	\$0	\$0

			\$ -	
			\$ -	
			\$ -	
			\$ -	
			\$ -	
<b>Total Travel</b>		\$0	\$0	\$0

<b>Total Expenditures (including Indirect Costs)</b>		<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$720,479</b>	<b>\$720,479</b>	<b>\$36,024</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$742,929</b>	<b>\$742,929</b>	<b>\$0</b>
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\* Set-up for new Faculty Positions should be included, ranging from \$7,500 to more than \$75,000, depending on discipline.