January 4, 2018

Dear Governor Inslee and Members of the Legislature,

Western Washington University (WWU) is pleased to submit for your consideration a Feasibility Study Report for Expansion of WWU Educational Programs on the Kitsap and Olympic Peninsulas, conducted with one-time funding appropriated in the 2018 supplemental operating budget. To assist in this process WWU retained the services of MGT Consulting in May 2018 to document current and future higher educational and workforce needs, and assist in exploring the feasibility of several higher education options, including capital investment toward the creation of a four year campus, as well as expansion of current baccalaureate degree programs and successful 2+2 partnerships with local community and technical colleges, offering upper division courses toward the completion of four year degrees.

The MGT Consulting Group study validates many of the WWU assumptions and provides valuable data regarding the higher education needs and challenges on the Peninsulas. The market analysis portion of the feasibility study confirms several themes consistent with WWU’s experience on the Peninsulas:

1. There is significant interest and support from regional stakeholders for an expanded WWU presence, particularly in the Poulsbo area.
2. Both Olympic and Peninsula Colleges are strongly supportive of continued and expanded partnership with WWU.
3. While the current WWU service locations on the peninsulas are appropriate for the various population centers across the four-county area, there are unmet educational access needs in areas with relatively small populations where establishing a physical presence would be prohibitively expensive. Consequently, creative delivery solutions leveraging partnerships with local entities will need to be developed to serve these populations.
4. WWU expansion across the peninsulas will require a gradual build-up relative to program mix, enrollment targets, staffing levels, space needs, and capacity, as well as continued partnership with Olympic and Peninsula Colleges. The feasibility study recommends the development of an additional educational facility adjacent to the WWU University Center at Olympic College Poulsbo to accommodate future program and student growth.

Western Washington University is committed to growing its impact in our state. Our commitment, coupled with our strengths and existing Peninsulas investments, make us uniquely qualified to lead expanded higher education on the Peninsulas. As you know, WWU has offered baccalaureate and certificate programs on the Kitsap and Olympic Peninsulas for more than 20 years in Port Angeles and Bremerton in partnership with Peninsula and Olympic Colleges, and since 2013 at the WWU University Center at Olympic College Poulsbo—programs that are collectively referred to as “Western on the Peninsulas” programs. In fact, in 2018 the Washington State Legislature appropriated funding for WWU to establish a B.A. degree in Early Childhood Education as part of the Western on the Peninsulas.

Active Minds Changing Lives
While WWU is enthusiastic about this possibility, we believe significant work remains to be done in developing an intentional, fiscally sustainable, and contextually sensitive vision to better serve the residents on the peninsulas. Our belief is that this is not simply a matter of constructing new facilities, much less an entire campus, but requires integrated planning with regional partners to address systemic issues throughout the K-16 pipeline related to academic preparedness, aspirational awareness, and affordability. Of course, many prospective students for an expanded WWU presence on the peninsulas may be non-traditional, place bound, mid-career professionals seeking enhanced credentials short of a baccalaureate or master’s degree. Expanding educational programs to serve the place-bound and distributed population base will require a more comprehensive planning approach, including a partnership with the state to increase access to a more reliable and effective internet service.

The MGT final report was intended to inform WWU plans. We are committed to use the outcomes from the report to provide a more comprehensive assessment that integrates the education needs of the region and program growth aspirations with capacity and resources needs. To that end, WWU proposes to extend this feasibility study to include two additional elements, expanded stakeholder engagement and a more detailed resource analysis, to be completed by the end of September 2019.

The extended analysis would involve additional consultation with stakeholders on the peninsulas, to explore where systemic pipeline issues currently exist and how to best address them. It is also during this phase that we would examine possible program revisions, augmentations, and additions. The feasibility study provides helpful insight into what programs might be needed on the peninsulas, but we ourselves will need to apply an institutional capacity lens to determine how best to move forward in certain directions.

The speed and scale of an aspirational step forward for the Peninsulas is highly dependent on resources. WWU is currently engaged in an institutional resource modeling exercise, to quantify the funding required to advance the goals of Western's new strategic plan—advancing inclusive success, increasing Washington impact, and enhancing academic excellence. Running the data from the MGT study through this process over the next six months will help us develop a set of scenarios that more accurately model program growth and resources needed for thoughtful, long-term, multi-phase expansion of educational programs on the Peninsulas.

Thank you for your consideration of the enclosed materials, and our proposal for continued analysis of the feasibility of expansion on the peninsulas. We look forward to continued conversations with you as we develop a comprehensive strategy for addressing the postsecondary education needs in this region of the state. As always, we are grateful for your recognition of the powerful role that public higher education plays in the economic future of our State, and for your continuing support of Western Washington University. Please do not hesitate to contact me, or Western’s Director of Government Relations, Becca Kenna-Schenk, for additional information or discussion.

Sincerely,

Sabah Randhawa
President