



CHAPTER 5

Undergraduate Access and Opportunity

UNDERSTANDING THE UNIVERSITY'S CORE CONSTITUENCIES

(Core Components 2a, 5a)

“Access to higher education among Wyoming students is sustained through a number of programs and people working statewide to ensure that all students, regardless of income or other barriers, have the opportunity to prepare for and enroll in college. While access can get you in the door, success is the key to becoming a college graduate.”

—Pilar Flores, Director,
Student Educational Opportunity

According to the 2008 *Measuring Up* report card prepared by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, Wyoming faces numerous challenges in educating its population. The good news is that Wyoming has a higher percentage than the national average of 18 to 24 year olds who have a high school credential. However, Wyoming ranks lower than average in the percentage of residents who have a bachelor's degree (23 percent compared to 29 percent), and the likelihood of enrolling in college by age 19 is only fair, according to the report. (5a)

In 2005, an inquiry initiated by former President Dubois provided some information about why Wyoming students are reluctant to attend college and why many are underprepared. This study revealed that many students were not taking rigorous high school coursework. Findings also revealed a lack of programs to support a smooth transition from high school to the university. Finally, the cost of higher education was identified as a significant challenge for Wyoming residents. (5a)

Parents, teachers, and mentors in local communities are key to fostering a culture of a well-educated citizenry. The University of Wyoming is a strong partner in efforts to create an educational system that meets the needs of the 21st century. In this chapter, we identify recent statewide and university initiatives that are helping to improve access to a four-year education. These initiatives fall into three categories: 1) partnerships for recruitment and college preparation, 2) improvements in student transitional experiences, and 3) changes in funding and tuition. (2a)

CONNECTING WITH FUTURE STUDENTS

(Core Component 5b)

Collaborative and strategic communications among all levels of education are beginning to make a difference in improving student preparation for college. With support of the Wyoming State Legislature and the Wyoming Department of Education, the university and its K-12 partners have launched several initiatives to better prepare students for postsecondary education. Several of these initiatives are briefly described in the following sections. (5b)

The Wyoming P-16 Education Council

(Core Components 4a, 5c)

The university led the formation in 2007 of the Wyoming P-16 Education Council, whose members—from all school levels and from the business and government sectors—have partnered to plan and implement programs for better transitions throughout the educational process. The council’s goal is to identify and address selected factors that limit successful attainment of high school and postsecondary education credentials. (4a) One of its first actions was to create and administer a State Scholars Initiative (SSI) grant, funded through the U.S. Department of Education and administered through the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), that promotes a core curriculum closely mirroring the Wyoming Hathaway Success Curriculum. In addition, the P-16 council has worked with secondary and postsecondary teachers across the state to develop information brochures on the right courses to take to prepare for college. The full-color pamphlets, which are distributed to every high school classroom and student in the state, include charts that compare high school and university courses in life sciences, mathematics, writing, world languages, and social studies. (5c) These course comparison charts provide high school students with a road map to college.

The Wyoming School-University Partnership

(Core Component 5a)

Established in 1986, the Wyoming School-University Partnership, a consortium under the umbrella of the National Network for Educational Renewal, fosters civic engagement and a democratic process with connections between all levels of educators. Through collaborative efforts, instructors from P-12 levels, community colleges, and the university meet regularly to address mutual issues related to the changing needs of students and their successful completion of the first two years in higher education. Current initiatives include cross-level programs in three areas critical to academic success: life sciences, math, and English. (5a)

GEAR UP

(Core Components 2b, 4a, 5a)

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) is a collaborative effort among educational levels from middle school through postsecondary. GEAR UP Wyoming is funded at 50 percent through a six-year grant awarded in 2005 by

the U.S. Department of Education totaling \$3.5 million annually, with an additional \$3.5 million provided by in-kind and scholarship contributions from Wyoming’s community colleges, the University of Wyoming, and the Wyoming Department of Education. The grant is managed by the university’s Student Educational Opportunity office with a grant management team that works with coordinators at Wyoming’s seven community colleges.

(2b) GEAR UP provides services to 2,000 low-income pre-college students throughout the state each year. Student services include career exploration, advice, and support to students taking a college preparation curriculum, ACT preparation, college exploration, application, and planning, and assistance with financial aid processes and procedures. (4a) GEAR UP also works with the Wyoming Department of Education in providing teacher training and school improvement initiatives. (5a)

Diversity-oriented recruiting

(Core Component 1b)

The diversity of the student body continues to be a challenge for the university. However, we are pleased to report that undergraduate minority enrollments have increased by 26 percent over the last 10 year period, outpacing overall enrollment growth of 14 percent for this time period. The university has made strides in increasing diversity through several recruitment efforts: creating programs aimed at bringing minority youth to campus, such as Minority Higher Education Days, promoting group visits to campus from schools with high minority populations, working with current minority students to communicate with prospective minority students, and increasing targeted marketing. Recently, the university has partnered with organizations such as New Futures to conduct college-for-a-day programs and has worked directly with middle and elementary schools to promote the college experience to younger students from schools with high minority and underserved student populations. As an example of this, the Help Yourself Academy was created in fall 2009 as a partnership between the Natrona County School District, Casper College, and the University of Wyoming Casper College Center. This program takes Title I eligible primary school children onto a college campus and connects them with university education students as mentors. Over time, it is anticipated that these efforts will help to create a college-going culture at these schools with a goal of building minority enrollments. (1b) The university has also identified the need to design specific recruitment strategies for regionally important Hispanic and American Indian populations. Finally, the university is committed to increasing its efforts to recruit international students.

FACILITATING THE TRANSITION TO THE UNIVERSITY

One of the outcomes of the collaborations described in the previous section is a growing understanding that students need multiple kinds and levels of support to make transitions as they move through the educational system. The university has initiated and strengthened several programs for two student groups: 1) first-time first-year students coming to the Laramie campus and 2) transfer students, especially those transferring from Wyoming community colleges.

Transitions for first-time first-year students

(Core Components 1d, 2c, 3c, 4b)

New student orientation has historically provided new students the opportunity to enroll early for their fall semester coursework. Because it also provides students and families with information about the University of Wyoming's academic community and the expectations for its new members, it is an important step to ensuring future academic success. New students who have been admitted to the university enroll for one of eight sessions that occur in late May and throughout June. In 2009, 87 percent of new students chose to attend one of these sessions. In the past three years, new student orientation has received high evaluation marks from both students and families. (2c)

Faculty and staff support new student orientation in a variety of ways. All six undergraduate colleges conduct advising sessions to help students create their fall class schedules. Many offices participate in a resource fair, and several university officials formally present information to students and families. Perhaps the most important participants in this program are the student peer orientation leaders who provide an enthusiastic and honest introduction to college life. (1d) Immediate feedback from participants in the first few sessions is frequently used to improve subsequent sessions, whether it is tweaking a presentation or adding additional sections of courses. Formal evaluation data are used annually to refine the program overall. (2c)

Until recently, other transition programs for new students occurred in the first few weeks of school, such as the Weeks of Welcome program. Because national data about first-year experiences indicate that students form their expectations about college community life and academics early in their first semester, the university has recognized the need to create programs that occur immediately before fall semester begins to help students integrate into university culture. The university now has two transition programs that begin or occur right before the semester's start: the Fall Outdoor Experience and the Summit Transitions Program.

Many who choose the University of Wyoming because of its proximity to the mountains discover Wyoming's outdoors before the start of the school year. The Fall Outdoor Experience, established in 2000, is designed to enrich the transition to the university by helping students make connections with the surrounding environment. Program leaders take an average of 80 new students each fall on hikes in the mountains, rock climbing, or cave exploring in southeast Wyoming. This program is a way for students to meet other students and to build leadership skills. To advance this concept, UP 3 includes an action item calling for the Division of Student Affairs to build outdoor experiences as an area of distinction in the co-curriculum. (3c)

The Summit Transitions Program is a natural evolution of the last decade of work with learning communities at the university. A collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs, the program was designed as an extended orientation occurring the weekend before classes start with the following goals: to expose new students to the academic

culture and its expectations; to build upon the students' personal strengths; to support student interaction with faculty outside of the formal classroom; to support new students through peer mentoring; to help students experience a symbolic transition to campus; and to help students learn more about the institution, community, and surrounding wilderness. The inaugural Summit Transitions Program in August 2009, called Summit 2009, required all new students to arrive on Thursday prior to the start of classes. After the presidential welcome and reception, students spent two days meeting in large and small groups led by peer mentors, faculty volunteers, guest speakers, and theatre students. This ambitious initiative, supported by significant institutional resources, will require multiple forms of longitudinal assessment to gauge its impact on student success. Early survey data from the nearly 80 faculty volunteers in Summit 2009 indicated that they had an increased awareness of the need to address academic transition issues in the first few weeks of their courses. (4b)

Transitions for community college transfer students

(Core Components 2c, 4a, 5a, 5b)

The university facilitates the transfer of Wyoming community college students through a number of efforts that focus on recruitment, academic preparation, and articulation of academic program courses and goals across institutions. For over a decade, the University of Wyoming has hosted a statewide academic vice president and academic deans' articulation conference. The university provost and associate provosts join with all seven community college chief academic officers. Recently, the chief student affairs officers from the university and the community colleges have also joined. The statewide common course numbering system, course transfer guide, statewide general education articulation agreement, and baccalaureate of applied science (BAS) degree are prominent outcomes of this collaboration. (5b)

The overarching goal of articulation between the university and community colleges is to create a connected educational experience for students as they move from one institution to the next. To address several continuing transition issues, a subgroup of the university's Enrollment Management Council undertook a thorough review of transfer processes with the intent to improve student transitions to the University of Wyoming. A number of recommendations are in various stages of implementation, including an improved transfer student orientation, a transfer student guide, advisor preparation, and course evaluation processes. While these efforts have been productive, there is need for continued attention to effective and efficient transfer practices. (2c)

In order to meet the growing number and variety of learners the university serves, the Outreach School operates regional centers located at every community college campus in Wyoming. Academic coordinators at each center recruit and advise students, promote the university and the Outreach School, and serve as a liaison between the college, community, and the university. In addition to the services at the regional centers, the Outreach School has added additional programs for site-bound, nontraditional students.

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The community colleges assist the University of Wyoming in recruiting transfer students by hosting university recruiters on the community college campuses every fall and at other times during the year. The university also hosts transfer student orientation sessions on campus that draw high participation from Wyoming community college students. University faculty also recruit by speaking to community college classes. (5a)

To enhance transfer student success, several university academic departments hold annual articulation meetings with academic personnel in community college departments to share freshman and sophomore course syllabi, program goals, and curricula so a shared vision for courses and associate and baccalaureate degree programs is developed. Articulation between community colleges and the University of Wyoming is also aided by the publication of the *Transfer Guide*. The success of this project is a testament to what can be accomplished in order to provide access to excellent higher education opportunities for the citizens of Wyoming. (4a) The user-friendly format of the *Transfer Guide* is possible because of the advances in cooperative relationships over the past 17 years between the faculties and administrations at the University of Wyoming and the Wyoming community colleges. Common names and numbers have been assigned to more than 600 equivalent courses statewide.

RESPONDING TO STUDENTS' FUNDING NEEDS

(Core Component 5a)

Financing higher education can be a source of stress for many college-bound students and their families. According to the U.S. Department of Education, state funding growth for higher education has fallen to its lowest level in over two decades. With increased tuition rates for higher education across the nation, survey data from the 2008 Profile of the American College Student suggests University of Wyoming students are cost conscious when it comes to selecting a university or college to attend. The University of Wyoming has made considerable strides in easing this anxiety by keeping higher education affordable while also maintaining quality. In August 2009, Forbes magazine recognized this achievement by naming the university as 17th on its list of “America’s Best Public Colleges” and fifth on its list of “America’s Best College Buys.”

The university’s resident tuition is lowest among all comparator institutions, including the western land-grant institutions, the Western Undergraduate Exchange institutions, and the U.S. public doctoral institutions. Resident tuition remained at \$94 per credit hour for 2009-2010. While categories of student tuition other than resident increased in 2009, those amounts are relatively low. Non-resident undergraduate students saw an increase of 5 percent for 2009-2010, with the hourly rate increasing from \$341 to \$358 for a total annual tuition cost of \$10,740. (5a) The following sections describe other significant factors that help to make a University of Wyoming education exceptionally affordable even with the recently approved increases in tuition and fees over the next five years.

The Hathaway Scholarship Program

(Core Components 2a, 2b)

In 2006, the Wyoming State Legislature established a \$400 million endowment, increased by another \$50 million in 2008, to fund the state's first college scholarship program, the Hathaway Scholarship. (2b) This endowment was then followed by an amendment to the state constitution that made the fund permanently inviolate. Eligibility for the scholarship requires that students complete the Hathaway Success Curriculum in high school. Upon admission to a community college or the University of Wyoming, eligible students are awarded a Hathaway merit scholarship based on their high school grades (or GED scores) and ACT scores. The Hathaway program consists of four scholarship categories, three of which are applicable at the University of Wyoming, as well as an added need-based component for eligible students. The merit scholarship awards range from \$1,600 to \$3,200 per year, while the need components range from a minimum of \$200 per year to covering all unmet need for the most academically qualified students. As shown in Table 5.1, in 2008-2009 \$5.8 million was distributed in Hathaway merit awards and \$734,000 was distributed in Hathaway need-based aid, for a total of \$6.5 million serving 2,325 students. In addition to the Hathaway scholarships, the university supplements these awards with over \$4 million in scholarships funded by the state, endowed scholarships from colleges and departments, and tuition discounts.

Preliminary analysis of this scholarship program suggests that more Wyoming high school students are choosing to enroll in college at either a Wyoming community college or at the university. Initial data also show that these students remain in college beyond the first year. The Wyoming P-16 Education Council is facilitating a longitudinal assessment with state funding to examine the program's impacts on completion rates at each level of education and on workforce placement and advancement. (2a)

Table 5.1. Hathaway Scholarship Recipients

Academic Year 2008-2009											
	Merit	+	Need	=	Hathaway Total	+	UW Scholarship Supplement	=	Total	# of Students	Average Award
Honors	\$3,231,183		\$441,160		\$3,672,343		\$3,176,373		\$6,848,716	1,035	\$6,617
					<i># receiving both merit and need</i>					137	
Performance	\$1,919,694		\$164,234		\$2,083,928		\$683,602		\$2,767,530	862	\$3,211
					<i># receiving both merit and need</i>					181	
Opportunity	\$614,126		\$128,111		\$742,237		\$192,006		\$934,243	428	\$2,183
					<i># receiving both merit and need</i>					118	
TOTAL	\$5,765,003		\$733,505		\$6,498,508		\$4,051,981		\$10,550,489	2,325	\$4,538
					<i># receiving both merit and need</i>					436	

Source: Student Financial Aid

Changing funding needs of students

(Core Components 1e, 2a, 2b)

In the last 10 years, several significant policy changes have affected tuition, fees, and financial aid. In 2003, the university changed its tuition model to bill by the credit hour rather than at a fixed rate once full-time status was reached. This approach distributes costs more equitably for full and part-time students. (1e) At the same time, a taskforce examined the distribution of mandatory fees to full and part-time students to ensure fair distribution. The changes in tuition and fee policies were not designed to generate additional revenue; rather they were designed to distribute costs of attendance and use of services more justly and, if possible, to curb course shopping.

The Hathaway Scholarship Program has also changed the way scholarship funds are awarded and distributed. Because these scholarships are fixed-dollar awards, the university committed to maintain Hathaway's purchasing power by not increasing resident undergraduate tuition for three years since implementation, between 2007 and 2009. This flat tuition rate was made possible through increased state appropriations to the university. Other expenses included in the cost of attendance, such as mandatory fees and room and board, did increase because these units are self-sustaining and do not receive state appropriations to offset increased expenses. (2b)

Although the university's tuition has remained exceptionally affordable, the overall cost of attendance has risen. Cost-of-attendance figures used for federal financial aid are in Table 5.2. Cost of attendance for resident students increased 60 percent from 1999-2000 to 2008-2009; for non-residents, it increased 53 percent. These increases correspond to average annual increases of approximately 5 percent per year for all students. (2a)

Table 5.2. Undergraduate Cost of Attendance (COA)

	Academic Years 1999-2000 versus 2008-2009									
	1999-2000				2008-2009				10 Year Change	
	Resident		Non-resident		Resident		Non-resident		Resident	Non-resident
	Cost	% COA	Cost	% COA	Cost	% COA	Cost	% COA	\$	\$
Tuition & Fees	\$2,416	25%	\$7,684	51%	\$3,621	23%	\$11,031	48%	\$1,205	\$3,347
Room & Board	\$4,446	46%	\$4,446	30%	\$7,707	49%	\$7,707	33%	\$3,261	\$3,261
Books & Supplies	\$660	7%	\$660	4%	\$1,200	8%	\$1,200	5%	\$540	\$540
Transportation	\$578	6%	\$580	4%	\$892	6%	\$892	4%	\$314	\$312
Personal Expenses	\$1,640	17%	\$1,640	11%	\$2,200	14%	\$2,200	10%	\$560	\$560
TOTAL	\$9,740		\$15,010		\$15,620		\$23,030		\$5,880	\$8,020

Source: Student Financial Aid and Office of Institutional Analysis

The university redesigned scholarship policies in fall 2006 to automate processes and to maximize the use of private resources as part of its aid packages to students. The two main goals of the redesign were to 1) assure continued university-controlled support to resident students at previous scholarship funding levels and 2) establish the Peak Scholarship program in an effort to attract more highly qualified non-resident students, building on the University of Wyoming's success in recruiting non-residents, especially from the neighboring state of Colorado. An econometric analysis helped to determine the amount needed to attract and retain Wyoming and non-resident students. As a result, the average resident financial aid package continues to cover about 30 percent of students' costs, despite a significant increase in the cost of attendance over the last 10 years.

There are three important considerations when analyzing the composition of financial aid during the last 10 years. First is the tremendous increase in the dollar amount of university-controlled scholarships. Privately endowed scholarship programs have increased approximately one-third to more than 1,100 endowed programs. University-controlled scholarships increased from \$16.1 million in 2000 to \$30 million in 2009. This increase does not include the \$4.1 million in Hathaway Scholarships, which further supports enrollment strategies. With the advent of the first class of Hathaway Scholarship recipients in fall 2006, the redesign of the scholarship programs allowed for the pool of funds for non-resident scholarships to increase more than three-fold. (2b)

The second significant change during this 10-year period is the increase in non-loan financial aid as a proportion of total financial aid awarded to University of Wyoming students. This decline in student loans as a proportion of total financial aid comes at a time when national statistics have seen a significant increase. In 2000, non-loan aid comprised 48 percent of the total, while in 2009, this percentage increased to 54 percent. Additionally, non-loan financial aid has outpaced the growth in cost of attendance. Non-loan aid awarded in 2000 was \$23.9 million and grew to \$47.1 million in 2009 for a 97 percent increase. This compares to undergraduate cost of attendance increases of 60 percent and 53 percent for resident and non-resident students, respectively.

A final observation is the decline in federal grants as a percentage of total financial aid. Federal grants comprised over 10 percent of total financial aid in 2000, but declined to slightly less than 8 percent of total aid in 2009. Part of the explanation may be that Federal Pell Grant eligibility has not kept up with inflation during the last 10 years. This decline could also be due to Wyoming's strong economy and reduced student need. Additionally, the much larger increase in scholarship awards has offset the more modest increase in federal grant awards.

While many of the trends in financial aid have been positive, cost of attendance remains a concern for the university. With tuition and fees comprising only a quarter of the total cost, developing strategies to mitigate increases in other areas will be important in the next several years. It does appear that the efforts to realign scholarship resources have been successful in attracting new students to the university. Like the Hathaway Scholarship, these efforts will need to be continually monitored and assessed to ensure the greatest impact on

recruiting and retaining students to the University of Wyoming in the future. In addition, the institution has yet to add significantly to the amount of financial aid specifically available to nontraditional students, for whom such programs as the Hathaway Scholarship are not available. Addressing this financial need has been identified as an institutional priority, both in terms of foundation priorities and state legislative support. (2a)

Revisiting decisions about tuition to address changing funding needs of the institution

(Core Component 2b)

The university has identified the need for tuition increases as a critical element of its budget planning effort for the next several years. (2b) Evidence supporting this need includes the following:

- State appropriations support for the university has been very strong in recent years when Wyoming’s economy has been thriving. However, in FY 2010, Wyoming experienced a significant decline in revenues, necessitating budget reductions for all state-supported institutions including the University of Wyoming. The outlook for state support for FY 2011 and FY 2012 is likely to be constrained as the state’s economic picture has gone from one of large surpluses to one in which revenues barely support flat appropriations.
- Current resident tuition levels are too low to offer immediate relief for revenue generation—especially in a single year.
- In 2009-2010, resident undergraduate tuition and fees ranked as follows:
 - » 13th out of 13 western land-grant institutions
 - » 25th out of 25 Western Undergraduate Exchange institutions
 - » 150th out of 150 public doctoral institutions in the U.S.

With these realities in mind, the Board of Trustees, with student support, recently approved President Buchanan’s plan for a FY 2011-2014 tuition increase. Recent changes to undergraduate financial aid from federal stimulus funds (such as increased Pell Grants and additional student loan opportunities) would mitigate the impact on students of the tuition increases. In addition, it is anticipated that American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding to the University of Wyoming in FY 2011 will enable the university to defer tuition increases until FY 2012. Communicating the institution’s tuition increase plans should allow students and families to better plan for future cost of attendance at the university.

CONCLUSION AND KEY FINDINGS

The University of Wyoming is concerned about increasing access and opportunity to students. However, many competing factors create challenges for the university: the goal of increasing the college-going rate in Wyoming at the same time there is a projected decrease in the number of high school graduates; ongoing concerns regarding the increasing cost of attendance; the goal of increasing diversity; and the imperative to increase academic quality. This increasing level of complexity with access-related issues may compel the university to design a more unified, holistic set of strategies in the near future. To aid in this effort, the following key findings have been identified:

- **The University of Wyoming must continue to support and assess the enrollment pipeline development programs.** It should continue its collaborative, state-wide efforts with GEAR UP, the Wyoming P-16 Education Council, the Wyoming School-University Partnership, and others related to preparation for college, retention, and completion of the baccalaureate degree. (UP 3 Action Items 11, 16 and 18)
 - **The university should continue and strengthen its partnerships with the state’s community colleges in order to further facilitate transfer from two-year institutions to the state’s only university.** At a minimum, this involves continuing the articulation process and maintaining current forums for discussion by the university and community colleges’ academic and student affairs leadership. (UP 3 Action Items 18 and 19)
 - **The university should involve its constituents among minority populations in evaluating recruitment strategies in its efforts to increase diversity.** Diversity of the student population continues to be an important priority. While the university has experienced an increase in ethnic minority students, it hopes to realize additional increases over time. (UP 3 Action Item 24)
 - **The Hathaway Scholarship Program expands access for Wyoming students; however, the impacts of the program are not fully understood and need to be assessed in collaboration with other statewide stakeholders.** The study being coordinated by the Wyoming P-16 Education Council and the Wyoming Department of Education is a start, but additional studies internal to the university need to be commissioned. (UP 3 Action Items 4 and 16)
 - **The university needs to continue reviewing its scholarship awarding policies in light of the Hathaway Scholarship Program to ensure that it effectively uses scholarship dollars to optimize student recruitment and retention.** Future investigation and analysis will be necessary to assess the needs of its constituents and the effectiveness of its scholarship programs. The need for increased aid is especially strong among nontraditional student populations. (UP 3 Action Items 4 and 5)
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