

An aerial photograph of the Willamette University campus, featuring several large brick buildings, a central green lawn, and numerous trees. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter. The university's name and logo are centered in white.

**WILLAMETTE  UNIVERSITY**

**AY 2021-2022 Strategic Planning  
Phase I Summaries**

# Session I: Our Changing Student Population

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## Panelists:

- Abbas Hill, Dean of Students for Community Care and Inclusion
- William Mullen, Vice President for Enrollment Management
- Kelley Strawn, Assistant Provost for Institutional Research
- Shelby Radcliffe, Vice President for Advancement (Moderator)



# Session I Overview

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This first session explored the changing context of higher education—including in both undergraduate and graduate degree programs and across various academic disciplines. Panelists discussed how the number and type of students pursuing a postsecondary education are changing, what students expect from their educational experience, and what these trends might mean for Willamette's future.



# Takeaway #1: Our students represent a variety of backgrounds and lived experiences

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Changing Student Demographics, nationally:

- The number of college-going students has been steadily decreasing after a peak in 2012.
- Today's students represent a more diverse array of socioeconomic backgrounds, and most cannot afford the full cost of a college education.
- Community college enrollment has increased significantly in recent years, with many of these students seeking a path to a four-year degree.

WU-Specific Demographic Shifts ([for more detailed data, see WU's Factbook](#)):

- Willamette's specific demographic shifts include an increased proportion of Latina/o/x students, a significant population of first-generation and low-income students, and an overall decrease in undergraduate student enrollment.
- In recent years, the University has been less successful in enrolling regional students from outside of Oregon (students from California, Washington, Idaho, etc.).
- Willamette has also seen an increase in the number of adult learners and/or students who are financial contributors to their households.



## Takeaway #2: Students expect their institutions and higher education experience to reflect their values

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- Today's students are among the most racially/ethnically diverse generation of students, to date, and expect their college/university to reflect this diversity.
- Students come to smaller schools like Willamette seeking connection—to one another, to their faculty, and between their curriculum and the world around them.
- Students are increasingly interested in social justice and activism, and expect their college/university to be responsive and transparent around issues of equity.



## Takeaway #3: Students have new understandings of the function, format, and cost of higher education

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- Students increasingly seek clear and direct pathways from education to employment.
- Students understand experiential learning (internships, research opportunities, etc.) and other credentials (leadership roles, certificates, etc.) to be critical components of their education—and they expect their colleges to help provide or connect them to these opportunities.
- Many students are reluctant to take on *any* education-related debt.
- Students have experienced various teaching modalities during the pandemic, and more acutely understand the benefits and disadvantages of online, hybrid, and in-person learning.



# Session II: Willamette's Role in our Region and the World

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## Panelists:

- Örn Bodvarsson, Dean, Atkinson Graduate School of Management
- Kate Copeland, Dean, Pacific Northwest College of Art
- Ruth Feingold, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
- Brian Gallini, Dean, College of Law
- Carol Long, Provost and Senior Vice President (Moderator)



## Session II Overview

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In this session, deans from each of Willamette's four colleges explored how Willamette University can rise to meet the challenges of our time. The discussion covered topics such as changing regional and national labor markets, Willamette's role in preparing students to be both competitive job applicants and change-makers, and how the University might adapt our teaching practices to best support and prepare students for successful professional and civic lives.





# Takeaway #1: The labor market's needs are shifting

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- The labor market is shifting from resource-driven careers to service-driven ones—with the fastest-growing careers in fields such as healthcare, technology, data analytics, and education.
- Most careers require some sort of work experience—even for applicants with advanced degrees.
- Our students will likely have many careers over their lifetimes, and interdisciplinary skills will equip them for successfully navigating these transitions.
- To thrive in this labor market, all students should graduate with discipline-relevant skills in the following areas: leadership, analysis, interpretation, communication, and cultural competency.



## Takeaway #2: Willamette University should reflect the needs of our students and region

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In discussing how we meet the needs of our region, the deans laid out a series of values for the institution and its work:

- Members of our campus and stakeholders in our local communities should see themselves in the University and its work.
- Willamette needs to better articulate our place, relevance, and value—both to our students and to regional stakeholders and partners.
- We need to collaborate more effectively across the University—not only to improve our offerings for students, but also to demonstrate the connections among our curricula and programs.



# Takeaway #3: Our teaching modalities and pedagogies need to adjust to meet the needs of our students

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- We need to address students' desire to have an education that is also experiential, and to more explicitly help them connect what they learn in the classroom to the world around them.
- The University should rethink how and what we teach for an increasingly diverse population of students, including:
  - Educational offerings that are made available through a variety of modalities.
  - Courses and credentials that provide a variety of entry points, and that allow students to build an educational experience that meets their academic and professional goals.
  - Academic and co-curricular experiences that accommodate both residential learners as well as adult students and worker-learners.



# Session III: What Makes a Great University?

## Panelists:

- Sean O'Hollaren, Former SVP of Government and Public Affairs at NIKE, Inc. (retired) and Secretary of Willamette's Board of Trustees
- Skye Morét, Chair of MFA in Collaborative Design and MA in Design Systems
- Mac Powell, Senior VP of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and University
- Danny Santos, Former Associate Dean for Student Affairs and Administration at Willamette University College of Law (Moderator)



## Session III Overview

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The third and final session reflected upon the question, “What makes a great university?” Panelists discussed how higher education has changed over time, how institutions might adapt to better meet contemporary expectations around higher education, and how to achieve this work in an increasingly volatile higher education climate.



# Takeaway #1: Educational offerings should be more creative and responsive to student needs

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Reflecting upon our changing student demographics and the shifting needs of our region and the world, panelists posed a series of questions that are relevant for any 21st Century university:

- How might we more intentionally connect students with alumni or other stakeholders that represent a variety of educational and professional pathways?
- How do we ensure that all students leave Willamette with a global mindset that is relevant to their academic, personal, and/or professional goals?
- When thinking about modalities of learning:
  - How might we capitalize upon the physical components of a Willamette education (in-person instruction, outside-of-classroom engagement, etc.) to promote deeper learning, innovation, and creativity?
  - How might we consider University offerings that are neither fully digital nor fully brick-and-mortar—including combinations of these offerings—to our students' benefit?



## Takeaway #2: Universities should ensure alignment between their structures and their values

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Panelists discussed how universities might shift from our current paradigm—where institutional structures and curricula are based upon tradition—to one where external needs and organizational values inform our curricula and structures. Guiding questions for this process might include the following:

- As we teach our students to be global citizens, how might universities also adopt a global mindset—one that no longer assumes that our long-standing teaching practices, learning outcomes, and curricular offerings are the best or only option for our students?
- How can universities more proactively seek to understand our students' backgrounds, their educational goals and expectations, and their post-graduate aspirations? How might this knowledge reshape our structures or offerings?
- How can we ensure that institutional structures and practices reflect the needs of our students, the University's stated values regarding equity, and our institutionally-defined measures of success?



# Takeaway #3: What are the traits of a successful institution in the 21st Century?

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When asked to describe the key traits of a successful 21st Century university, panelists included the following:

- Institutions should be adaptive, reflexive, and responsive to changes in the world around them. Sustainable institutions are able to evolve while maintaining their core values.
- Universities should have a clear understanding of their mission and goals—including their desired size, the kinds of students they seek to cultivate, and what they and their students contribute to the world.
- Institutions should strive to graduate students who are confident, ambitious, able to place themselves within larger systems and structures, and able to follow their passions on a path to personal and professional success.
- Organizational culture should be reflected in our students and graduates. We should strive to create an institutional culture that spreads with our graduates as they leave Willamette and go out into the world.





# Want to learn more?

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**You can watch the full videos for these conversations, read more about Willamette University's Strategic Planning process, and learn how you can contribute on our website:**

<https://willamette.edu/about/leadership/president/strategic-plan>

