Eastern Washington University

*Inspiring the Future* Strategic Planning Process

Insight Interview Executive Summary

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COMMUNICATIONS
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Insight Interviews
In June and July 2011, DHC conducted twenty-seven (27) one-on-one confidential insight interviews over the phone with a pre-selected list of interviewees. Interviewees were asked questions regarding their perceptions of EWU, its role in the region, its community engagement, its mission, vision and values, and what it can do to better prepare students for success after graduation. Each interview was conducted by phone and lasted between 20 and 40 minutes in length.

We targeted two (2) primary groups of individuals including:
- Twenty (20) business and community leaders, elected officials, and higher education representatives
- Seven (7) EWU Board of Trustees members

Participants were sent a preconception email or provided with a phone call ahead of time to ask for their participation in the interview. All participants were guaranteed confidentiality to ensure candid feedback.

Research findings are strictly qualitative in nature but reveal significant local and regional trends that EWU should consider during development of its strategic plan.
Executive Summary of Key Findings – EWU Board of Trustees

Key themes emerged across EWU Board of Trustees members who participated in interviews. These include:

Catering To First Generation and Minority Students Is a Strength For EWU
Not only is catering to first generation and minority students a strength for Eastern Washington University, Board of Trustees members also agreed it’s a niche for the university. Board members felt that where other universities choose not to cater to this demographic of student, EWU excels at making a quality college education accessible for them.

EWU Provides a Good, Quality Education at an Affordable Price
Board of Trustee members agree that when comparing local and regional universities, EWU provides just as high quality of an education as any other university but at a much more affordable price. Board members also found this to be one of the most important things that EWU provides for the community as well as a strong value for the university.

Budget Cuts Are Unavoidable
Throughout the interviews Board of Trustee members agreed that a lack of state funding is simply a way of life right now. They recognized these budget cuts as a major challenge for EWU, but also realize it’s out of the university’s hands.

Offer Fewer Programs That Are High Quality, Instead Of Many Programs That Are All Sub-Par
As a creative solution to budget cuts, a common idea was for EWU to specialize in a smaller group of programs and degree offerings. This way, the university could offer fewer programs that were at the highest caliber of quality, as opposed to a myriad of programs that were all sub-par. Many board members agreed the university is stretched too thin, and focusing on fewer programs would improve the overall quality of the education that EWU offers.

“Accessibility” Is a Stand-Out Core Value for EWU
“Accessibility” was a term board members consistently used when describing EWU and its core values. It was also commonly the first, “top-of-mind,” descriptor that board members used. Board members accredited “accessibility” with meaning everything from location to low-cost and small class sizes to quality programs.

EWU Should Better Communicate its Story and Successes
Board members felt that EWU could do a better job telling its “story” and communicating successes (student, faculty, athletics, etc.) Many board members agreed that EWU should maximize its advertisement opportunities for athletic successes. Board members recognize the potential for community engagement, student recruitment, and local, state and national recognition.

EWU’s Mission Needs Improvement
When reviewing EWU’s mission, the majority of board members felt that it’s not personalized enough to the university’s unique attributes. Board members felt that certain values and offerings should be better represented in the mission. These include: accessibility; low-cost education; high-quality education; a focus on minority and first generation students.
Executive Summary of Key Findings – Community Leaders, Business Leaders and Elected Officials

Key themes emerged across external audiences who participated in interviews. These include:

**EWU Can Continue to Build on its Current Community Engagement Efforts**
While many community and business leaders agree that EWU’s community engagement is strong now, there is an overall sense that EWU can be doing more to enhance regional partnerships, participation on committees and boards, and relationships with businesses to generate student internship programs. Community members strongly agree that EWU needs to be adaptable the needs of the community, region and workforce.

**EWU’s Reputation is Good, Yet Below other Regional Schools**
When asked to describe EWU’s reputation, the majority of community and business leaders agreed that overall, EWU has a strong, positive reputation. Some participants mentioned that EWU faces somewhat of an “uphill battle” in the sense that its reputation is still growing and many people don’t give EWU the credit it deserves. However, when asked to compare EWU to other regional schools, many participants ranked EWU below our local private and state schools, calling it “average” or “mediocre.”

**EWU’s Multiple Campuses are a Strength and Opportunity**
Interview participants pointed out that EWU’s presence in Cheney, downtown Spokane and Bellevue is a strength for the University. This also came up as an opportunity as EWU looks to grow these campuses and develop partnerships and a strong reputation state-wide.

**EWU is an Affordable, Accessible Institution**
Affordability and accessibility came up multiple times as EWU’s core values, strengths and differentiators from other universities. Community members value the fact that EWU is a high quality institution that is affordable and accessible – making it possible for many students to attend EWU who might not have been able to go to college originally.

**Build EWU’s Brand**
Community members mentioned that EWU can continue to build on the school’s brand, which could help lead to increasingly positive perceptions and increased awareness of the school. Some interview participants pointed out that many people are not aware of what’s going on at EWU, partly because of the distance from Spokane. EWU can do more to tell its story and communicate the school’s successes.

**Focus on Strong Programs**
Community members recognized the fact that EWU has multiple high-quality programs, many of which are not widely known. EWU should continue to build upon and focus on these high-performing programs, and increase communication about them.