



HLC ACCREDITATION VISIT October 7-8, 2024

Western's Institutional Overview

Founded in 1912, Western Technical College (Western) is a two-year, technical college that serves primarily rural communities, which includes all or parts of 11 western Wisconsin counties. As an open-access higher education institution the college offers over 122 two-year associate degrees, certificates, one-year technical diplomas, and credit course options for technical programs as well as associate of Arts (AA) and associate of Science (AS) degrees. Western also offers GED, High School Equivalency Diplomas (HSED), English Language Learners (ELL) courses, and developmental course programming to thousands throughout the region at no cost, including justice-involved, first-generation, and other historically underserved students. In serving over 14,000 learners annually, Western strives to meet each individual student's need while providing relevant, high-quality education in a collaborative and sustainable environment.

As the only open access institution in the western Wisconsin region, Western's student population ranges from those who have the support structures and finances to navigate higher education with little to no support needed, to those who have limited to no funding and/or support structures to guide them through the systems of attaining higher education credentials, systems that can be challenging even for those who work within them. To best serve students and guide the actions of Western's employees, Western developed Experience 2025, a comprehensive strategic plan designed to

- Embody increased student engagement through first choice service.
- Increase student success by eliminating equity gaps experienced by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).
- Embed work- and community-based learning opportunities to increase workforce and community engagement.
- Increase co-worker engagement.

Western's strategic planning process is agile, iterative, and grounded in the Deming framework for continuous improvement – Plan, Do, Check, Adjust (PDCA). Western completed the planning process in 2018 by incorporating stakeholder engagement, extensive data and evidence analysis, and opportunities to gather input and vet assumptions with multiple audiences. Implementation of the strategies within the plan began, only to have it significantly delayed by the events of 2020 – a global pandemic, emergent social unrest, and an economic downturn.

westerntc.edu

Mission

Western Technical College provides relevant, high quality education, in a collaborative and sustainable environment that changes the lives of students and grows our communities.

Vision

Western Technical College is the college of first choice in our region.

Values

Leadership | Excellence |
Accountability | Diversity | Student
Success | Teamwork | Integrity |
Respect

Culture

Western strives to create a culture where people feel empowered to make a difference; where we are passionate about collaboration and student success; where we take equitable actions that respect our differences; and where we serve students, partners, communities, and each other from a place of unconditional positive regard.

Strategic Directions

- First Choice Service
- Workforce and Community Engagement
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Co-worker Engagement

Personal and Organizational Commitments

- Act with clarity and consistency
- Demonstrate resiliency
- Drive action through data intelligence
- Practice sound fiscal stewardship

Western
Technical College

Because so much of the College’s development and strategic work was put on pause during that time, the College conducted a deeper dive to refresh and focus its strategic plan in 2021. This refresh included a comprehensive environmental scan, an analysis of new data, student and employee input, and celebrations and lessons learned from recent disruptions.

Western is one of 16 technical colleges across the state of Wisconsin that make up the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS). Western is consistently ranked one of the best value propositions for workforce training and general education in our region with a national ranking of 50 out of 922 community colleges¹. Nearly all of Western’s associate degrees, technical diplomas, and external and internal certificate offerings are in demand, tied to local employment, and are informed by external, private partner advisory committees, college teams, and faculty, along with an extensive analysis of job openings, career pathways, and other partner information when available. With the launch of the College’s strategic plan, Experience 2025, Western is committed to closing achievement gaps with academic affairs and student service areas leading a focus on Guided Pathways and continuing to infuse culturally responsive teaching, trauma-informed practice, and poverty-informed practice into the classroom and key support areas. Guided Pathways “is a whole-college redesign model designed to help all students explore, choose, plan, and complete programs aligned with their career and educational goals efficiently and affordably. Guided Pathways reforms are intended to improve student completion rates, close equity gaps, and increase enrollments in an increasingly competitive environment (Community College Research Center).”

This work led Western to the decision to enact two student-focused endeavors: embedded supports and 7-week course sessions. Western leadership has driven both a commitment towards performance excellence and equity and inclusion since before adopting its strategic plan, Experience 2025—achieving mastery level of Wisconsin’s Malcolm Baldrige Award process, no citations during its last accreditation cycle, achieving Leader College status with Achieving the Dream – a national movement aimed at helping community college students, particularly low-income students and students of color, stay in school and earn a college degree – early in 2019, and recognized as a semi-finalist for the 2023 and 2025 Aspen Award. Fiscal discussions address decision-making by asking first and foremost, “What is best for the student?” The College is now amid an equity audit of policies and mapping of processes to better serve students. These efforts and changes are often communicated through multiple venues, including town hall meetings, “focused forums” (similar to town halls but with a single, important topic), and management development meetings.

Wisconsin Technical Colleges are funded by a mix of property taxes from the College’s region, Wisconsin state aid, and tuition. As a result, 50% of Western’s revenue is guaranteed before serving a single student, affording the institution a level of fiscal stability not felt by private college counterparts, or indeed, many businesses. Although Western has grown its federal and state grant revenue and private Foundation-based giving in the last decade², it continues to have clean audits from both private accountant agencies (Wipfli) and the federal government (Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training [TAACCCT] and YouthBuild Audits). Sound fiscal practice has left the College with a fund balance—a reserve that can be used, as it is right now, for emergency situations—the use of which is monitored and approved by district board vote. Budget requests are approved by senior leadership after an annual planning process that creates a list of requests that can be viewed by the College and measured against long-term or emergent priorities, allowing budget dollars to be allocated as appropriate based on a manager-driven process. Despite a wealth of equipment-heavy, expensive technical programs, Western continues to be one of the lowest cost-per-student colleges in the region and remains in the bottom 3 among the 16 Wisconsin technical colleges for cost-per-student in the state.