MEMO

To: Geoffrey Landward, Interim Commissioner of Higher Education

From: Brad Mortensen, President of Weber State University

Subject: Weber State University Peer Institutions

Weber State University proposes an updated list of peer institutions to compare and benchmark key mission fulfillment metrics.

Current list of Peers:

- Boise State University
- Clarion University of Pennsylvania
- Eastern Kentucky University
- Ferris State University
- Northern Kentucky University
- Northwestern State University of Louisiana
- University of Alaska Anchorage
- University of North Florida
- Utah Valley University
- Youngstown State University

Weber State University is proposing to adopt the following comparison institutions for internal and institutional accreditation purposes:

- Arkansas Tech University
- Austin Peay University
- Eastern Washington University
- Middle Georgia State University
- Middle Tennessee State University
- Northwest State University of Louisiana (a recent peer)
- Southern Oregon University

- Southwestern Oklahoma University
- University of Central Arkansas
- University of Northern Colorado
- Utah Tech University (formerly Dixie State University)
- Utah Valley University (a recent peer)

This list was presented to the University Planning Council on January 17, 2023, and the WSU Board of Trustees on September 21, 2023, following approval on August 2, 2023, by the President's Council.

Use of Peer Institutions

Weber State University has established this list for internal planning and assessment. Peer institution comparisons are used for special requests by the administration and the Board of Trustees. The institution also uses peer institution comparisons when assessing a potential problem or policy evaluation. Finally, Weber State regularly uses this list to assess mission fulfillment measures, such as comparisons in retention, completion, and tuition, as reported in various institutional accreditation reports required by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). Faculty/staff ratio comparisons of peers are also required by NWCCU in the year-seven accreditation report.

In addition to internal planning and assessment use, the Utah Board of Higher Education (UBHE) has policy R508 that requires peer comparisons. The list of peers allows for some statistical comparison of institutions within the UBHE to other institutions nationally. This proposal will be submitted for preliminary review by the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE). qPolicy R508 requires that OCHE review proposed changes and supporting data prior to approval by the Utah Board of Higher Education.

Need for Updated List

Weber State University's current list of peer institutions has been in place since 2009. That list of peers has become increasingly outdated, as both Weber State and the peers have evolved over the past twelve years. Few of the 2011 peer list institutions are open-enrollment institutions, a hallmark of Weber State University (see Appendix A). Several of the schools are classified as Carnegie R1 institutions or are moving in that direction. These changes result in benchmarks that are no longer meaningful as the university evaluates strategies and initiatives in support of improvement of student success. It is anticipated that a revised comparison group will provide more appropriate benchmarks as Weber State strives to implement a robust strategic planning process.

Methodology

A cross-divisional working team was put together with representation from Academic Affairs, Administrative Services, and Student Affairs. Using the Guidelines for Approving Lists of

Comparable Institutions ([R508](#)) that suggests both general considerations such as mission, enrollment, and state support, and specific considerations such as specific function, sponsored research, etc., the team identified the following strategy:

- Define exclusions:
    - The team determined that the peer list would not include tribal institutions, historically Black college or university institutions, land-grant institutions, private institutions, and no institutions that require students to live on campus during their first year. The team also wanted to exclude any all-distance schools.
- Extend exclusions:
    - With a goal of identifying 'more-similar' schools, the group extended the exclusions to non-Carnegie institutions, R1 or R2-designated institutions, and associate-only or other schools with a special 2-year focus.
- Consider selectivity:
    - One of the challenges presented by the current list of institutions is the level of selectivity evident at the schools – this ranged from an admission rate of 72% (averaged over three years) to one other open-enrollment institution (UVU) only. Considering only open-enrollment institutions, however, was too restrictive, so the group broadened the search criteria to include schools with an 85% or higher admissions rate.
- Narrow range based upon Carnegie classifications:
    - In an effort to find schools that are more similar to Weber State than in the current list, the decision was made to focus on schools within the Carnegie classifications of 17-23. Classification 17 includes schools with doctoral/professional programs but are not R1 or R2; Classification 18-20 includes schools with masters programs – large, medium, and small); classification 23 represents schools that award a mix of associate and bachelor degrees.
- Finally, the team looked at the university's current strategic plan for student success measures for which peer benchmarking would be helpful. A review of the plan suggested a focus on HSI status (percentage of enrollment represented by Hispanic and Latino students), retention rates, the mix of degrees offered and awarded, and total enrollment.

Using these parameters, a list of potential peers was generated. The list included 255 institutions. To help winnow the list further, a Euclidean distance score was calculated for each school on the list. This is a measure of similarity where Weber State = 0. Scores ranged from 1.95 (Utah Tech), the most similar, to 8.16 (the University of Maryland Global), the institution in the list that is the least similar.

Through a careful review and discussion about the remaining schools, the team was able to create a list of 15 possible peers, which was then culled to 12 peers. This list was shared with

the University Planning Council. With input from that body, one school was dropped (Central Washington State), and another was put in its place (Eastern Washington State). The final list was informally presented to the President's Council.

Outcome

The list of twelve peer institutions provides Weber State University with a robust set of peers with similar missions that provide excellent baseline comparisons, some of which are aspirational. By tracking common metrics of enrollment, retention, completion, and tuition between the peers, Weber State has a means of signaling both successes and concerns. By focusing on institutions with low or no selectivity, the revised peer list provides a more even playing field for comparison. Sudden jumps in metric placement – positive or negative - should prompt review and discussion.

Appendix A
Admission rates of current and proposed peers

Proposed Peers:

Institution	AY19	AY20	AY21	3Yr Avg
Arkansas Tech University	95	98	94	96
Austin Peay State University	95	91	93	93
Eastern Washington University	96	79	97	91
Middle Georgia State University	94	99	99	97
Middle Tennessee State University	94	94	68	85
Northwestern State University of Louisiana	82	95	96	91
Southern Oregon University	78	90	90	86
Southwestern Oklahoma State University	91	93	94	93
University of Central Arkansas	90	94	95	92
University of Northern Colorado	91	88	91	90
Utah Tech University	100	100	100	100
Utah Valley University	100	100	100	100
Weber State University	100	100	100	100
Yearly average	92.8	93.9	93.6	
Overall 3-year average				93.40

Current Peers:

Institution	AY19	AY20	AY21	3Yr Avg
Boise State University	77	77	83	79
Clarion University of Pennsylvania	95	94	99	96
Eastern Kentucky University	94	98	98	97
Ferris State University	87	82	85	85
Northern Kentucky University	90	87	80	86
Northwestern State University of Louisiana	82	95	96	91
University of Alaska Anchorage	83	77	69	73
University of North Florida	72	80	77	73
Utah Valley University	100	100	100	100
Weber State University	100	100	100	100
Youngstown State University	67	70	78	72
Yearly average	86.1	87.3	87.7	
Overall 3-year average				86.5

Appendix B
Additional data of proposed comparison institutions

The data reported is for the 19/20 Academic Year.

Unit ID	Institution	Adm_Rate	Perc_PT	Prop_Hisp	RET_PCF	RET_PCP	Ttl_Deg_Seek_Enr
230782	Weber State University	open	0.3514	0.1203	66	40	17575
230171	Utah Tech University	open	0.2154	0.1278	59	35	8867
230737	Utah Valley University	open	0.3466	0.1204	67	44	28745
106467	Arkansas Tech University	0.9766	0.1614	0.0812	67	38	8103
210146	Southern Oregon University	0.9043	0.2152	0.1256	68	44	4084
160038	Northwestern State University of Louisiana	0.9485	0.2720	0.0637	76	40	9307
219602	Austin Peay State University	0.9115	0.2525	0.0853	70	40	9380
235097	Eastern Washington University	0.9707	0.1558	0.1600	67	36	10892
482158	Middle Georgia State University	0.9932	0.3575	0.0588	59	44	7769
106704	University of Central Arkansas	0.9378	0.1148	0.0560	79	50	9957
127741	University of Northern Colorado	0.8770	0.1103	0.2013	70	53	10497
207865	Southwestern Oklahoma State University	0.9320	0.1573	0.1039	74	24	4717
220978	Middle Tennessee State University	0.9420	0.1392	0.0689	79	67	20897