September 20, 2012

Reply from Janice Welborn, Director of Sponsored Programs and Grants, to HLC regarding:

Page 102, it would be interesting to see the breakdown of PIs/disciplines and funding sources for grants, and some explanation of the large annual variations. Also, actual annual expenditures in addition to award amounts would be helpful.

Grant writing at Western has been a fringe activity since the opening of the Sponsored Programs Office in the mid-90's. The history is incomplete in terms of grants submitted and not funded prior to 2005.

The large annual variations are attributed to several issues surrounding grant writing at Western.

First, many faculty state they are employed at Western to teach, and Western has often been described as a teaching institution by a variety of people in a variety of venues. With the focus being on teaching, the faculty teaching load is high and faculty often express the need for a shift in teaching responsibilities in order to write grants.

In the past fifteen years, there has not been an active incentive for faculty to engage in grant seeking and writing. Teacher Education is the exception to this statement. In 2000 staff within the teacher education department became engaged in grant writing. Grants between 2000 and 2009 were based in outreach and providing professional development for existing teachers in partnering school districts in Southwestern Colorado, and the US Department of Education, Transition to Teaching Program, Teach NOW, a statewide program to recruit and train professionals in other fields to become teachers while teaching in the classroom. Teach Now was very successful and earned Western's Teacher Education Department notoriety at the state and federal level. The entire department was involved in the grants with some responsibility. The grants provided additional income to salaries that were determined to be very low when compared to national averages. which was a good incentive and motivator in the department. While several faculty in other departments were also employed by a few of the education grants during the 2000 – 2009 time period, there was little support for leveraging that momentum at the time. One contributing factor could have been the budget constraints of the time and the impact this had on faculty and staff. Following the close of those Education grants, there has been no activity in Teacher Education in grant writing. There are a handful of faculty in other departments who have been engaged in grant writing historically and continue to use grant monies to fund specific projects and activities. An example of this is the Archaeology Department. With an archaeological site a few short miles from campus, and the very active statewide presentation office, grants have been used for several years to continue the work at this dig site. This particular faculty has an established relationship with this funder and is a proven contributor to the field. This faculty member has been encouraged to seek larger sums of grant money at the federal level in the future by the OSP. There are faculty who have submitted grants, some with success, that have not continued to use this type of strategy to continue their research or scholarly activity.

In 2006-07, the WSC Foundation, in collaboration with Academic Affairs, introduced the Professional Activity Fund (PAF), managed by the Center for Teaching Excellence, that faculty could apply to for small amount of funds used for professional development, mainly focused on travel to conferences. While the amounts are small, $500 - $3000, the application is easy to complete and much less time consuming than a state or federal grant.

Another consideration for the limited grant submission is Western's ability to compete for funds at the federal level. Being a teaching college the focus in not on research and therefore resources for research are limited in terms of lab space, travel funds, lack of post-graduate interns, teaching assistants, and until recently, the ability to secure reassign time from classroom teaching responsibilities. The institutional support for grant writing is limited to one part-time pre-award office.

Western's student population, collectively, does not meet any of the state or federal guidelines for low income students, and therefore Western has not been eligible for US Department of Education grants, such as the FIPSE, which are staples in many PUI's across the country.

While grant writing is a consideration in a faculty members application for tenure, service to the campus community and participation in the many faculty based committees is required in each department. These assignments, coupled with the teaching load, leave some faculty with very little energy for additional time consuming activities, such as grant writing.

Western has a very strong, long standing, relationship with the local state and federal land management offices and is actively involved in providing services via contracts with agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management, US Forest Services, and Department of Wildlife. There is a history of contracts with local governments in the Gunnison Valley to fulfill contracts for specific needs in areas such tourism, energy and business development. These contracts are not included in the grant office historical documents provided for the Self Study. Contracts are handled in the accounting department as a post award activity.

Successful grant writing activities at PUI's are generally based a culture of support and expectation of grant writing. The infrastructure at Western is present and many steps have been taken in the recent past to encourage more activity in this area. For example, an Incentive Fund was developed which puts a percentage of the indirect costs generated by a grant back into the department funds to support additional activities in sponsored programs. Membership in the Grants Resource Center, an arm of ASSCU, was secured but later stopped due to budget constraints. That membership provided professional development for pre-award activities and a grant search tool for faculty and staff use. Policies for securing federal, state and private grants were established and continue to be refined to provide support for the culture of grant writing. One-on-one training and small group training is offered through the Office of Sponsored Programs, as well as facilitation of small group writing teams for larger grant submissions. Another strategy that appears to be taking hold is the submission of "Collaborative Proposals" to NSF with larger institutions that have an established track record, or are at least further along in their competitiveness. Three collaborative proposals were submitted in the past 6 months (Geology, Biology and Environmental Studies). The first was denied, and the other two are in review at

this time. One more collaborative proposal, with Yale, will be submitted October 9, 2012 (Computer Science). Given Western's history, it will take time and resources to develop a "reputation" at the federal level to compete with other PUI's for federal funding but there does seem to be a shift in activity level of grant writing in the last six months.