

## Western Carolina University Statement on Economic Development

Western Carolina University had its origins in 1889 as a common school to serve the educational needs of the western part of the state. In the subsequent 123 years, our commitment to regional engagement and service has never waned, as reflected in our current mission statement, “To improve individual lives and enhance economic and community development in our region, state and nation through engaged learning opportunities in our academic programs, educational outreach, research, and creative and cultural activities.”

The university and its supporting region have a high interdependence on one another. Western Carolina University cannot thrive in attracting faculty and students and in providing rich educational opportunities without a vibrant economy, good public schools, educational partnerships with businesses and nonprofit organizations, and a high quality of life in the region. In the same way, the regional economy depends on the university for highly educated employees, research that spawns innovation and new businesses, and the sheer economic and social impact of thousands of faculty, staff, and students living and working in the region. WCU accepts its role as a “steward of place,” an enduring institution that anchors the local economy through its rich intellectual resources.

Western Carolina supports economic development in the region in a number of ways:

- Graduating students with skills needed in a twenty-first century economy: writing and oral communication, critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, and a global perspective;
- Focusing resources on academic programs highly needed in the region: engineering, health care, tourism, biodiversity, entrepreneurship, and education;
- Developing a Millennial Campus with public-private partnerships and investment;
- Supporting businesses, especially manufacturing, with the Center for Rapid Product Realization that works in prototyping innovative ideas and products, resulting in new businesses and industries that have remained in or relocated to North Carolina;
- Hosting instructional sites at Biltmore Park in Asheville, Harrah’s Casino and the Cherokee Center in Cherokee, and in Hickory.
- Supporting applied research by faculty and students in areas ranging from green building materials to national park preservation to assistive medical technology;
- Developing contract educational programs for organizations in areas such as innovation and project management
- Assisting military members and adults with on-line degree completion programs to make North Carolina more attractive to business and industry weighing location decisions.
- Placing graduate and undergraduate students in internships, residencies, and community-based learning opportunities to assure that graduates have skills valued in the workplace.
- Supporting a regional Small Business Technology and Development Center with two sites to serve small businesses.
- Launching the Pre-K to 16 Education Consortium to promote cooperation among educators and create a seamless system of education
- Hosting a Regional Conference on Economic Development in Fall 2013