

# BLUEPRINT FOR REFORM

THE JAMES G.  
MARTIN  
CENTER  
FOR ACADEMIC  
RENEWAL

## Wyoming

Wyoming's colleges and universities play an essential role in preparing students for civic life and productive careers, as well as supporting the state's long-term economic vitality. Yet higher education in the Cowboy State faces several significant structural challenges.

- University enrollment is declining. Fall enrollment at the University of Wyoming fell from 13,717 in 2015 to 10,800 in 2024, a decrease of 21 percent. With a small population and only one public four-year university, even modest demographic changes or shifts in student demand can quickly translate into financial strain and inefficiency.
- Academic programs are not always well aligned with Wyoming's workforce needs, particularly as the state economy evolves and employers seek workers with specific technical and professional skills. This means that some academic programs offer little return on investment to either students or taxpayers.
- With only one public university, Wyoming's higher education resources are concentrated, resulting in limited competition, innovation, program diversity, and viewpoint diversity.

Together, these challenges make reforming the University of Wyoming critically important to the state's civic and economic health.

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1 Scott Yenor, "Restoring Confidence in the University of Wyoming," The American Way of Life (Claremont Institute), January 13, 2025, <https://dc.claremont.org/restoring-confidence-in-theopportunities-university-of-wyoming/>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

These challenges are not insurmountable. Through thoughtful policy reforms, Wyoming can strengthen its higher-education system, expand opportunities for students, and ensure that public investment creates value for the students, taxpayers, and citizens of Wyoming.

### Accreditation

Wyoming’s public colleges and universities must maintain accreditation from federally recognized accrediting agencies in order for their students to access federal financial aid. Before changes to federal regulations made by the Department of Education in 2020, Wyoming institutions were tied to a single traditional “regional” accreditor: the Higher Learning Commission. Existing Wyoming statutes and regulations often still assume or reference HLC and/or “regional accreditation.” This structure limits institutions’ ability to choose among accrediting bodies and reduces competition in the accreditation market. As a result, accreditors can exert significant influence over institutional governance, academic programs, and campus policies—even when those expectations may not align with state priorities.

State law regulates how public institutions satisfy accreditation requirements. Now, the legislature has an opportunity to clarify that institutions may pursue accreditation from any qualified federally recognized accreditor. Doing so will increase competition, strengthen institutional independence, and ensure that accreditation practices remain consistent with state policy.

Wyoming legislators and trustees should work together to:

- **Align state laws** with recent education department changes: “Nationally recognized accreditor” should replace “regional accreditor” and “Higher Learning Commission” in all state statutes.
- **Ensure respect for state authority** by prohibiting accreditors from compelling institutions to violate state laws.
- **End discrimination** by prohibiting discrimination in hiring and admissions against students or faculty based on the accreditor of that person’s academic program or institution.

The Martin Center’s model [Accreditation Choice Act](#) includes all of these provisions.

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2 Council for Higher Education Accreditation, “New Rules for Accreditation Published,” CHEA News, November 1, 2019, <https://www.chea.org/new-rules-accreditation-published>

## Academic Program Review: ROI and Productivity

According to an analysis of federal earnings data by the Foundation for Equal Opportunity, more than 30 percent of bachelor's degree programs at the University of Wyoming have a negative return on investment once the risk of dropping out is included in the calculation, including<sup>3</sup>:

- Zoology/Animal Biology: -\$330,060
- Psychology, General: -\$169,867
- International/Global Studies: -\$77,476
- Social Sciences/General: -\$71,573
- Romance Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics: -\$50,198

Even students who graduated on time from these programs have historically experienced a negative return on investment.

These are in stark contrast to the lifetime return on investment of some of the University of Wyoming's most lucrative degrees (including risk of dropping out)<sup>4</sup>:

- #1, Petroleum Engineering: \$1,081,498
- #4, Registered Nurse, Nursing Administration, Nursing Research, and Clinical Nursing: \$737,200
- #6, Accounting and Related Services: \$509,483
- #8, Dental Support Services and Allied Professions: \$335,511

Moreover, student demand is unevenly distributed, regardless of ROI. Some programs continue to be robust despite declining student enrollment at the university overall, while others have shrunk significantly.<sup>5</sup>

Wyoming legislators and trustees should work together to ensure that academic programs at the University of Wyoming are targeted to both student demand and return on investment. They should:

- **Review program-level ROI data:** Undergo academic program reviews that prioritize return on investment for students, as well as enrollment, mission, and cost-effectiveness. Each program should be reviewed at least every five years.
- **Eliminate low-ROI programs:** Eliminate academic degree programs that provide a negative return on investment for students. If individual courses within the program are essential for the university's general-education curriculum, they should be consolidated into another department.
- **Eliminate or consolidate low-enrollment programs:** Programs that produce fewer than 10 majors per year should be considered for elimination or consolidation.

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3 Cooper, Preston. 2025. "ROI Undergraduate: Return on Investment in Higher Education." Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity (FREOPP). Accessed March 31, 2026.

4 Ibid.

5 Yenor, "Restoring Confidence in the University of Wyoming."

## General Education

Significant academic drift has occurred at the University of Wyoming. Students are increasingly exposed to fragmented curricula that lack intellectual coherence and fail to prepare them for citizenship or critical thinking. For example, UW students can take niche courses such as “Global Climate Governance” or “Backgrounds of Dance” to fulfill their human culture requirement. Likewise, they can enroll in “Gender and the Humanities” or “Feminist Theories” to fulfill a communications requirement.<sup>6</sup>

Wyoming is not alone in these challenges. There is a growing public demand for general education reform, as evidenced by voters and legislators across the country calling for education that emphasizes civics, history, and tradition. Legislators in states across the country, including Florida, Texas, Arkansas, and Utah, have risen to the challenge. Utah adopted a version of the General Education Act in 2025.

The University of Wyoming has already begun the process of reforming its general education curriculum. Now is the time to build on these efforts. In addition to academic benefits, reforming general education can also help rein in costs. General education bloat contributes to extended time-to-degree and higher tuition. A lean, focused core reduces waste and confusion and contributes to on-time graduation.

This is particularly important as some American jobs are threatened by artificial intelligence. As we have seen with computer programming, AI can replace certain “skills.” A general education curriculum based on the liberal arts will emphasize students’ humanity, flexibility, and deep knowledge.

Wyoming legislators and trustees should work together to:

- **Adopt a liberal-arts-focused general-education curriculum:** The curriculum should give students a coherent and meaningful education in the history, works, and civic culture of the West, particularly of the United States. The General Education Act, jointly published by the James G. Martin Center, the National Association of Scholars, and the Ethics and Public Policy Center, recommends the following courses:
  - Rhetoric & English Composition
  - Mathematics (e.g., Precalculus, Logic, Statistics, Calculus I)
  - Laboratory Science (Intro Biology, Chemistry, or Physics)
  - Western History I & II
  - U.S. History
  - U.S. Government/Civics
  - U.S. Literature
  - Introduction to Economics
  - Founding Ideas of Western Liberty or Art or Economics
  - Western Humanities I & II
  - World Civilizations
- **Prohibit DEI course requirements:** Courses on “diversity, equity, and inclusion” (DEI) or “critical race theory” (CRT) should be eliminated from mandatory general-education requirements.

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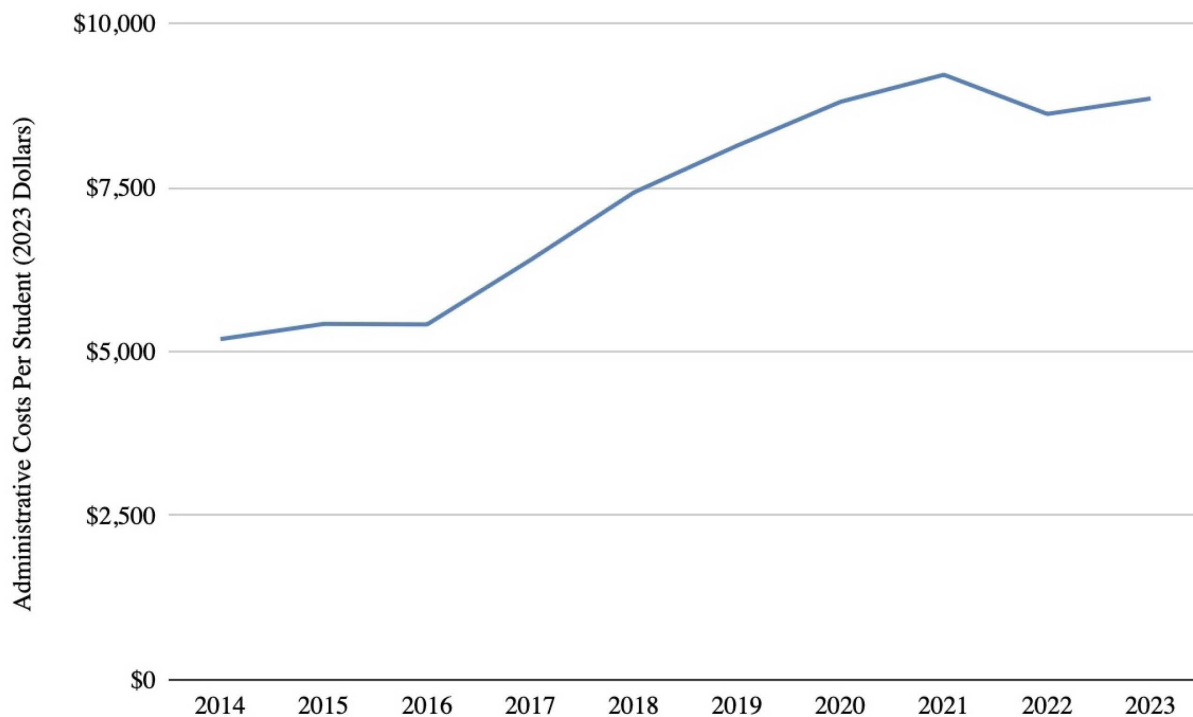
<sup>6</sup> University of Wyoming, University Studies Program, USP 2015 Approved Courses (Laramie, WY: University of Wyoming, revised June 28, 2023), [https://www.uwyo.edu/usp/\\_files/docs/usp-2015-approved-courses-6.28.23.pdf](https://www.uwyo.edu/usp/_files/docs/usp-2015-approved-courses-6.28.23.pdf)

## Administrative Bloat

Over the past decade, administrative spending at the University of Wyoming has grown substantially on a per-student basis, raising important questions about efficiency and priorities in the state's higher-education system. In 2014, administrative costs amounted to about \$5,190 per student. By 2023, that figure had climbed to roughly \$8,855 per student—an increase of more than 70 percent in less than ten years. This growth has occurred even as many universities nationwide face enrollment pressures and rising concerns about affordability. Such trends suggest that administrative bloat may be consuming an increasing share of institutional resources. For state policymakers responsible for overseeing public investment in higher education, these data raise a key question: whether spending is being directed primarily toward teaching and student success, or toward administrative structures that do little to advance the core educational mission.

The chart below defines administrative cost as a measure of expenditures per student for day-to-day executive operations of the institution, not including student services or academic management. Using constant 2023 dollars, per-student administrative expenditures at the University of Wyoming rose from \$5,190 in 2014 to \$8,855 in 2023, an increase of 70.6 percent.

**FIGURE 1: Per-Student Administrative Expenditures at the University of Wyoming**



Source: ACTA, How Colleges Spend Money: University of Wyoming.

To reduce administrative bloat, Wyoming legislators and trustees should work together to:

- **Restructure administration:** Shrink, consolidate, or centralize administrative functions to enhance efficiency and reduce costs. Eliminate vacant positions. Consider shared services among IU universities, including human resources, financial aid, investment management, procurement, and other relevant areas.
- **Manage costs for students:** Freeze tuition and keep student fees, housing, and other costs low to attract students.
- **Limit capital spending:** Pause or cancel unnecessary capital improvement projects. Maximize facilities use.
- **Incentivize faculty retirement:** Offer retirement incentive plans to faculty who are nearing (or past) retirement age.
- **Reform tenure:** Establish a policy that allows for laying off individual tenured faculty members in cases of low academic-program productivity, significant financial emergency, and financial exigency.
- **Right-size athletics:** Downsize intercollegiate athletics activities, especially in departments that are deeply in the red or rely too heavily on student fees. Introduce more intramural sports.

## Viewpoint Diversity

Viewpoint diversity is essential to the academic mission of colleges and universities. Academic freedom, open inquiry, honest debate, and the search for truth rely on diverse viewpoints being welcomed and protected on campus. In the past three decades, university faculty and administrators have become overwhelmingly liberal. This orthodoxy of opinion is bad for academic research, student learning, and for universities' respect and support in the eyes of the public.

Like many other universities, the University of Wyoming's faculty and staff appear to be predominantly left-leaning. Federal Election Commission data on donations to political candidates and PACs from UW employees reveal that in 2025, 97 percent of all such political donations went to Democratic candidates or progressive causes.<sup>7</sup> Of 370 donations in 2025, 359 went to Democratic candidates or causes. Some examples include Act Blue, Democratic Action, and Friends of Bernie Sanders. Ten went to the Republican National Committee.<sup>8</sup>

In 2024, UW president Ed Seidel announced that UW would "not allow units of UW to require job candidates to submit statements regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion" and would also stop evaluating employees on DEI-related criteria in annual reviews.<sup>9</sup> This is a good start, but more should be done.

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<sup>7</sup> Federal Election Commission, "Individual Contributions," search results for employer "University of Wyoming," 2025–2026 election cycle, accessed June 9, 2026, <https://www.fec.gov/introduction-campaign-finance/how-to-research-public-records/individual-contributions/>

<sup>8</sup> The political direction of one organization wasn't immediately identifiable. It was left out of the calculation.

<sup>9</sup> University of Wyoming, "UW Makes Changes in Response to Legislative Actions on DEI," University of Wyoming News, May 10, 2024, <https://www.uwyo.edu/news/2024/05/uw-makes-changes-in-response-to-legislative-actions-on-dei.html>

To improve viewpoint diversity on campus, Wyoming legislators and trustees should work together to:

- **Host Additional Public Policy Debates:** Organize events and invite speakers representing a broad spectrum of ideological perspectives to encourage open dialogue and critical thinking among students and faculty.
- **Ensure Fair Evaluation of Academic Performance:** Affirm students' rights to impartial assessment of their academic work, safeguarding against bias based on personal beliefs or viewpoints.
- **Encourage Constructive Dialogue in Syllabi:** Professors should include commitments to free expression and constructive dialogue in their course syllabi, setting clear expectations for open discourse in the classroom.
- **Incorporate Free Expression in Course Evaluations:** Add questions on classroom free expression issues to course evaluations to monitor and enhance the campus climate for open dialogue.
- **Put Prudent Limits on Academic Freedom:** Make it clear that academic freedom does not include teaching content that is irrelevant to the proscribed course or using university resources for political activity.<sup>10</sup>

## Encourage Competition and Efficiency

To keep the Cowboy State competitive, higher education must be aligned with workforce needs, student demand, and market realities.

To encourage competition, efficiency, and economic vitality, Wyoming legislators and trustees should work together to:

- **Expand the Hathaway Scholarship:** Eligibility for Wyoming's Hathaway Scholarship, based on "Governor Hathaway's dream of building a better Wyoming,"<sup>11</sup> and funded through the State's Permanent Mineral Trust Fund, should be extended to Wyoming residents attending private colleges and universities in the state, including Wyoming Catholic College and WyoTech. This will improve college access and flexibility for Wyoming's postsecondary students.
- **Encourage public-private partnerships:** Allow colleges and universities the maximum flexibility to contract with private providers for online programs. This should include program design management as well as support in key service areas such as marketing, admissions, instructional design, and student success.
- **Align degree requirements with workforce skills for state government jobs:** More than half of state governments have adopted policies encouraging skills-based hiring, including eliminating degree requirements for many job postings. According to a study by the National Governors Association, "these states saw faster growth in job postings that don't require degrees compared to states without such policies – helping states address talent shortages, diversify their workforce, and improve hiring outcomes." Wyoming should follow suit for state government positions.<sup>12</sup>

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10 For a recommended definition of academic freedom see UNC System Code Chapter VI, Section 601A. <https://www.northcarolina.edu/apps/policy/doc.php?type=pdf&id=58>

11 Hathaway Scholarship Program, "About," accessed June 9, 2026, <https://hathawayscholarship.org/about/>

12 National Governors Association, "New Report: Growing Number of States Drop Degree Requirements," press release, February 11, 2025, <https://www.nga.org/news/press-releases/new-report-growing-number-of-states-drop-degree-requirements/>

## CONCLUSION

Wyoming's higher education landscape faces important challenges: student demand, workforce needs, and public attitudes toward higher education are in continual flux.

The recommendations in this Blueprint offer a practical path forward rooted in academic excellence, fiscal responsibility, and the principles of free inquiry. By strengthening accreditation choice, prioritizing student return on investment, restoring a rigorous general education curriculum, reducing administrative bloat, safeguarding viewpoint diversity, and encouraging competition and efficiency, the Cowboy State can position its higher-education institutions for long-term stability and renewed public confidence.

These reforms are specific, implementable steps that legislators, trustees, and institutional leaders can begin adopting immediately. With clear priorities, firm accountability, and a commitment to mission-driven governance, Wyoming can ensure that its investments in higher education deliver exceptional value to students, taxpayers, and society.

## For More Information

For supplemental data or additional research on this topic, please contact the Martin Center by phone or email. You can reach us at 919-828-1400 or [info@jamesgmartin.center](mailto:info@jamesgmartin.center).

To read more from the Martin Center about the importance of civics education, visit: <https://www.jamesgmartin.center/state/wyoming>

## About the Martin Center

The James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal is a private nonprofit institute dedicated to improving higher education policy. Our mission is to renew and fulfill the promise of higher education in North Carolina and across the country.

We advocate responsible governance, viewpoint diversity, academic quality, cost-effective education solutions, and innovative market-based reform. We do that by studying and reporting on critical issues in higher education and recommending policies that can create change—especially at the state and local level.

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