“We want to be the best urban university ... in the United States. Our students and community members deserve it.”

– Debra Friedman, Chancellor, University of Washington Tacoma
Mission Statement

“The University of Washington Tacoma educates diverse learners and transforms communities by expanding the boundaries of knowledge and discovery.”

– Adopted 1990
Overview – An Anecdotal History

“"We lobbied and we convinced the legislators and the Regents that Tacoma was the place for a UW campus. It was the right decision; it’s been the key to a turnaround for Tacoma…. There’s still a ways to go. They have important real estate; they have critical state support; they’re an economic engine; they’re an educational center; it’s a gateway.”

After the opening of Evergreen State College in Olympia, in 1967 – viewed by many as a non-traditional, experimental institution of higher education – which influenced the culture and economy of the state’s capitol city and surrounding Thurston County, interest in developing additional opportunities for higher education, especially for residents of the South Sound area, grew. Over the next two decades, community support and activism promoting the idea of a university based in Tacoma increased. Initially, Washington State University expressed interest in establishing a campus in the city, but residents pushed for a branch of University of Washington (which at the time had only its flagship Seattle site).

In 1987, the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) developed its first master plan which concluded that the current higher education programs in the state of Washington were inadequate for its growing population. Two years later, the Legislature established five branch campuses operated by the state’s two public research universities (University of Washington and Washington State University). The locations selected for these branch campuses were all considered to be growing urban areas (Tacoma and Bothell for UW; Vancouver, Spokane, and Tri-Cities for Washington State University).

These branch campuses were intended to:

– increase access to higher education, especially targeting placebound students and the transition of the growing number of community college graduates seeking four year degrees

– promote and support regional economic development, responding especially to the demand from local businesses and research activities for degreed professionals
The University of Washington Tacoma campus opened the doors of its first building in 1990 in downtown Tacoma’s historic Perkins Building, with 13 faculty and 175 students. One year later, it graduated a class of four.

At the time, some felt the location was a mistake and preferred areas with more open space, including a site near Point Defiance. But placing the campus downtown - directly across from the old railroad station on Pacific Avenue - in a district of historic warehouses built in the 1800s and early 1900s at the terminus of the transcontinental railroad - was seen as an immediate boost to the revitalization of downtown Tacoma and an innovative way to articulate and merge the history and the future of Tacoma.

Within a few years the campus hosted more than 400 students, and by the time the University opened its current campus in 1997, baccalaureate and graduate programs were underway – paving the path for a comprehensive institute of higher education in downtown Tacoma and greatly boosting the city’s renewal plans. Indeed, a few years later, the Sierra Club named UWT one of the top ten most sustainable developments in the nation.

The decision to site the UW campus in downtown Tacoma and not in an outlying area of the city is often cited as one of the most important factors in the city’s renewal, as businesses began opening in close proximity to the campus, including within the campus itself, given the mixed use plan established from the onset.

Building names such as Mattress Factory and West Coast Grocery recall the earlier uses of each structure. Following several years of transfer-only undergraduate admissions, UWT admitted its first freshman class of approximately 150 students in 2006. UWT expects to continue to increase enrollment and add additional buildings.

Throughout the two decades, political, philanthropic, and community support has never diminished. From the outset, the South Sound community knew that private investment would be needed to support their goals for excellence – physically, architecturally, academically – beyond what could be expected from public dollars.

Key highlights in the most recent years (2008-2011) include the completion of the University’s first capital campaign ($40 million); the addition of residential students; programs in Information Technology and Healthcare leadership; a unique cooperative arrangement with the city of Tacoma and the Puget Sound Partnership to develop the Center for Urban Waters to establish the South Sound region as a national leader in research and development in environmental sciences; the graduation of the ten thousandth student and of the first class of freshmen; the creation of a BA program in Sustainable Urban Development; and the current record enrollment nearing 3,700 students.

In 2011, UWT installed its fifth Chancellor who brings optimism and expectations that match the roots of the young university.
Academic Programs

Undergraduate Education

Undergraduates at UWT are exposed to a coordinated core of courses representing the various disciplines in the University -- fulfilling general education requirements -- designed to develop critical thinking, writing, research and analytical skills while being exposed to socially relevant topics. First-year students are part of learning communities that take classes together throughout the year. Cohorts are enrolled in four to five academic classes and one lab section.

Degree programs include:

- Business Administration (B.A.) with emphasis in Accounting, Finance, General Business, International Business, Management, and Marketing
- Computer Science and Systems (B.S./B.A.)
- Computer Engineering and Systems (B.S.)
- Environmental Science (B.S.)
- Healthcare Leadership (B.A.)
- Information Technology and Systems (B.S.)
- Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences (B.A.) with emphasis in American Studies; Arts, Media, and Culture; Communication; Environmental Studies; Ethnic, Gender, and Labor Studies; Global Studies; History; Politics, Philosophy, and Economics; Psychology; and Writing Studies
- Nursing (R.N., B.S.N.)
- Social Welfare (B.A.)
- Sustainable Urban Development (B.A.)
- Urban Studies (B.A.)
Graduate Degree Programs

University of Washington Tacoma offers several Master's programs including:

- Accounting (M.Acc.)
- Business Administration (M.B.A.)
- Computer Science and Systems (M.S.)
- Master of Education (M.Ed.) with emphasis in Educational Administration, K-8 Teacher Education, Secondary Education, and K-8 Special Education
- Interdisciplinary Studies (M.A.)
- Nursing (M.N.)
- Social Work (M.S.W.)

Other Programs

The KeyBank Professional Development Center is a joint venture between the South Puget Sound community and UWT to extend the resources of the University to the community. The Center offers a broad array of continuing education opportunities for public and private sector professionals and organizations in a range of disciplines. It provides advanced non-degree education through specialized courses, seminars, workshops, conferences, and services.

The Center offers upper-division and graduate-level workshops and certificates and also develops customized courses for corporations. Educational programming can be designed to enhance the skills and qualifications of employees and potential employees of South Sound public and private businesses and agencies.

The Global Honors Program is an interdisciplinary upper-division program that adds distinction to the undergraduate degree, through a global curriculum, a stimulating learning environment, and an active community of highly motivated students. The curriculum, including rigorous seminars, study abroad programs, and extra-curricular events, is designed to enhance the understanding of global issues.