

Campus Feasibility Study for the
Monticello, Utah site

George Wythe University

January, 2012

INTRODUCTION

Background

In 2007 the Board of Trustees received a donation of 200 acres one mile west of Monticello, Utah and accepted a proposal to build the first additional satellite campus with more campuses to follow in other regions. Since that time, two important changes have taken place. First, the economy entered into a protracted recession. Second, the leadership of the Board of Trustees was fortified with new members possessing greater board experience. In the process, the board also strengthened its relationship with AALE, the accreditation agency with whom it has been working. Consequently, a number of questions arose with regard to the initial Monticello proposal that are addressed in this report.

A committee from the board of trustees and its advisors was formed to conduct this study early in 2010. This was comprised of members of the new marketing, fundraising and finance committees and administration. Meetings and discussions were held through 2011 to gather and analyze data that would shed light on the influences that would bear upon the viability of a campus, including the need for faculty, staff and students to relocate to Monticello and other market and logistic variables that would play important roles.

Research Question

The mission of George Wythe University and George Wythe Foundation is to build statesmen who move the cause liberty in order to instill good government everywhere. Because commitment to this mission is paramount, the Board of Trustees sought to answer the following question: For the purposes of George Wythe University, what is the best use of the donated land in Monticello and what is the feasibility for development of a campus at this location?

Scope

This report summarizes the findings of our study in seeking to answer the question of feasibility. Point by point analysis has been limited to those variables of greatest relevance for George Wythe University and its unique mission of building statesmen by means of classical liberal arts education. This is not intended to be an authoritative statement regarding other potential uses for the property or industries that may better suit the local economy of Monticello, Utah.

Method

Among other things, this study included:

1. Analysis of demographic trends in San Juan County and Monticello, Utah using U.S. Census data and historic and projected data collected the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget.
2. Analysis of economic trends in San Juan County and Monticello, Utah.
3. Analysis of livability factors with potential to impact long term student, faculty and staff relocation to San Juan County and Monticello, Utah. This includes factors such as local economics, transportation, amenities, culture, climate, medical facilities, demographics, etc.
4. A survey of attitudes toward Monticello, Utah among present and past students, parents, and other stakeholders in the GWU database, including financial supporters of the school and participants in GWU seminars.

Along with the Board of Trustees, the committee agreed to a two-phase decision pathway sequenced so that if the findings from the above analysis indicated potential for a favorable outcome, a second phase of study would then be justified for considering details surrounding financial parameters of potential campus development, price points and strategic growth phases.

While it is customary for feasibility studies to begin with a broad overview of the location in question, most of that information was presented in the initial proposal. Consequently, this study will only address the most relevant data and considerations that have meaningful bearing upon the decisions at hand.

FINDINGS

Demand for Monticello as a campus location

The most fundamental questions to viability are (a) whether enough students would want to attend college in Monticello, and (b) whether enough faculty and staff would want to relocate. If not, the third question would be (c) whether the local area could supply enough qualified people to fill the gaps in each of these categories. We will first address factors that impact demand.

The importance of Access

Access to Commerce

With a population hovering around 2000, Monticello has sufficient options for purchasing basic groceries, fuel and bare necessities. However, significant travel is required to access goods and services such as clothing, most office supplies, most banking, substantial automobile service, etc. The nearest Walmart or equivalent is 61 miles away in Cortez, Colorado (pop. 8,500) and a distance of 104 miles is required to access the incremental increase in purchasing options in Durango (pop. 16,900). According to the original campus proposal, most Monticello residents shop for clothing in Flagstaff at 270 miles and Provo at 244 miles. However, Grand Junction, Colorado (pop. 58,600) can be reached in just under three hours at 166 miles. In any case, these present substantial livability barriers for the average American family accustomed to greater convenience.

Access to Internship Opportunities

Central to the mission of GWU is its focus on preparing future statesmen. To this end, it is increasingly important for students to have the ability to intern at the physical centers of political and societal influence such as state capitols. This includes not only the rich opportunities within state legislatures, but also the network of influential public policy think tanks and public affairs firms that work closely with them. Monticello provides virtually no such opportunities to students. To a lesser degree, Cedar City has shared this weakness as well, such as when students are unable to attend on campus during the semester they intern at the state legislature. By contrast, students in locations like Salt Lake City, Phoenix or other state capitals could be provided many hundreds more such opportunities.

Amenities and Facilities

Cultural Offerings, Performing Arts, Museums, Libraries

A valuable asset to any campus location is the area's robust supply of engaging cultural experiences that can enrich a student's education. Orchestras, professional theatre, traveling museum exhibits and libraries can all supplement a student's learning in powerful and important ways. Local to Monticello is a branch of the San Juan County libraries and in the general vicinity a number of minor museums that offer Native American, pioneer and dinosaur exhibits. In this study, we were unable to identify any offerings customary for enriching the study of Western Civilization in the classical liberal arts. This appears to be a natural consequence of Monticello's small population coupled with its geographic isolation in the Four Corners region. By comparison, the greater Cedar City/St. George area and Salt Lake City each provide a rich supply of offerings, especially in the categories performing arts and traveling exhibits that change from season to season. From universities to private commercial offerings, their large number and constant flux precludes listing them in this report.

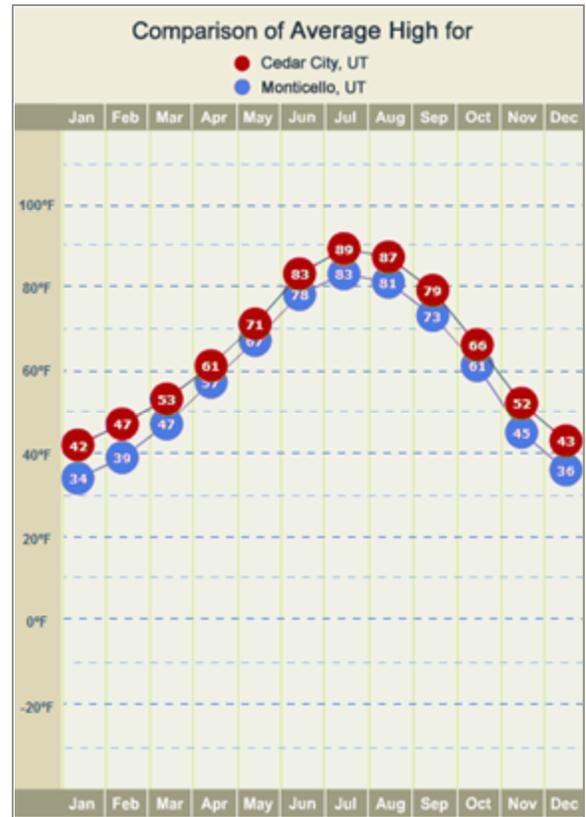
Outdoor Recreation

Monticello is close to a rich supply of national and state parks and monuments, as well as other public lands with spectacular natural beauty. These are accessible much of the year with temperatures allowing them to be enjoyed with little impediment during the five warmest months. Among these are the bordering Abajo Mountains, the Needles District of Canyonlands National Park (45 miles northwest), Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado (90 miles southeast), Arches National Park near Moab (73 miles north) and a number of other attractions within a few hours of the four corners region.

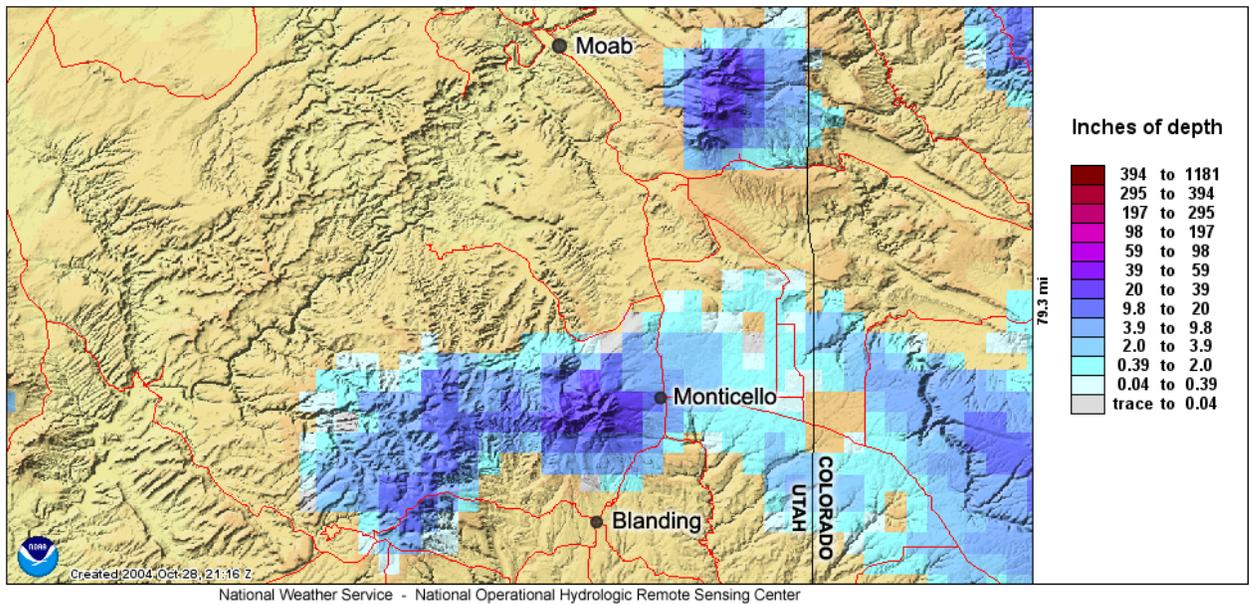
By comparison, Cedar City provides access to Zion National Park, Cedar Breaks National Monument, Dixie National Forest, Brian Head, Bryce Canyon National Park and several others. Likewise, Salt Lake City provides access to the numerous outdoor attractions of the Wasatch Mountains. If outdoor amenities are to be considered a serious criteria for a campus location, there is little difference between Monticello, Cedar City and Salt Lake City other than one's preference among landscape types. Furthermore, due to the greater number of improved rural roads and highways surrounding the Cedar City and Salt Lake City areas, it is arguable that these locations provide even greater accessibility than Monticello to such amenities.

Climate – Temperature and Precipitation

The prospect of harsh winters was reported by many survey participants as a sizeable deterrent to living in Monticello, Utah. Most people in the GWU database live in climates similar to or milder than Cedar City, which shares a nearly identical climate to Salt Lake City. Monticello rests at a notably higher elevation above sea level on a high altitude plateau. The donated land itself reaches 7500 feet in altitude (compared to Cedar City’s 5840 ft) resulting in significantly colder temperatures and harsher weather conditions. Cold winter temperatures also last nearly two months longer in Monticello, beginning in late fall and extending into mid-spring. The adjacent graph is a comparison between Cedar City and Monticello temperatures.

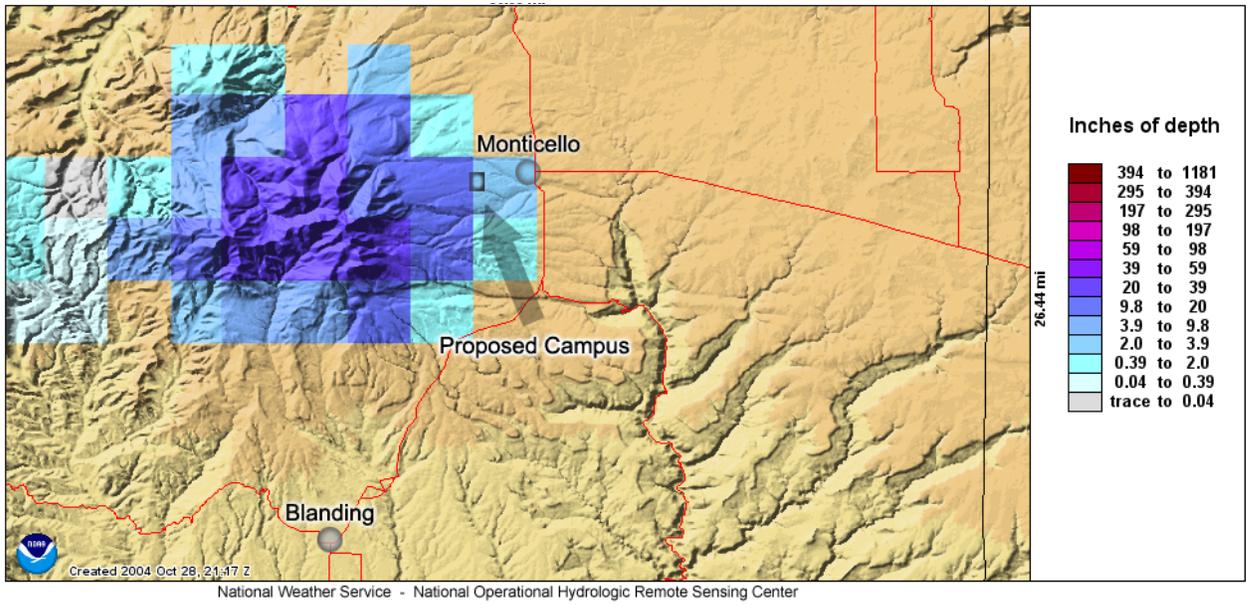


Monthly Normal Snow Depth for March



Data from NOAA shows the typical snowpack depth remaining on the ground averaged over the month of March. Several weeks after springtime conditions arrive in neighboring communities, daily high temperatures rise only briefly above thaw levels in Monticello. This generates an icebox effect resulting in deep accumulated snowpack that can persist into April.

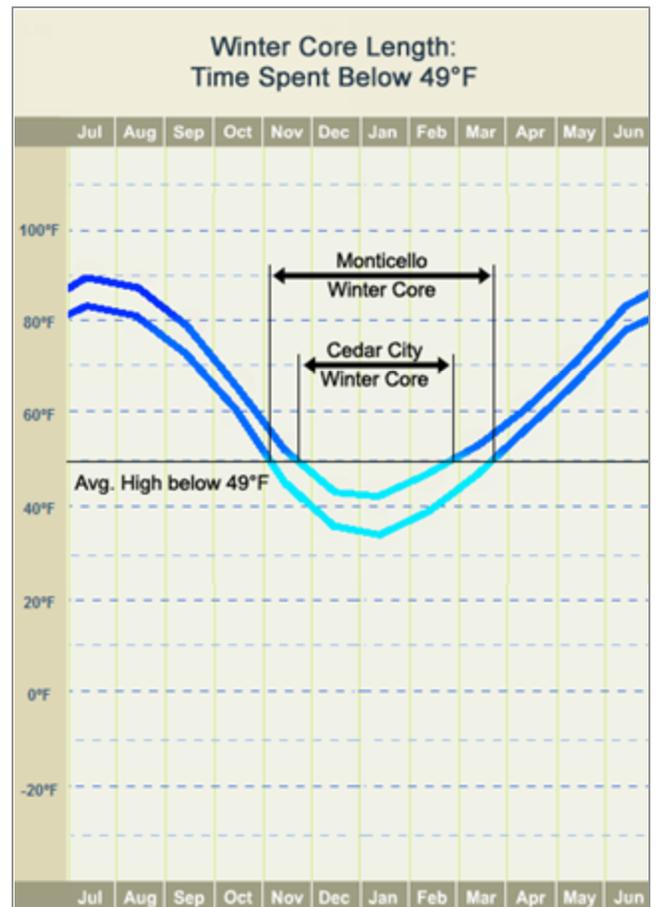
Monthly Normal Snow Depth for April



Average snowpack through the month of April is anywhere from 4 -20 inches of depth on the proposed campus site. Only from mid May to mid June does the resulting mud begin to firm up in an average precipitation year.

Climate Summary

- On average, Monticello winters are 8 degrees colder than Cedar City.
- On average, Monticello is wetter than Cedar City by 4.9 inches annually.
- Snowfall in Monticello is roughly twice that of Cedar City.
- Daytime winter temperatures often fail to reach the snowmelt threshold in Monticello. This generates an icebox effect resulting in deep accumulated snowpack lasting into mid Spring or later.
- Winter conditions begin early and extend late, spanning nearly 2 months longer in Monticello than in Cedar City.
- The proposed campus site reaches nearly 500 feet higher in elevation than Monticello. This results in significantly deeper snowfall and colder temperatures than the available data.
- The lack of natural windbreaks at the proposed site on the mountain slope results in substantial wind exposure.



Market Realities and Economic Indicators

Education

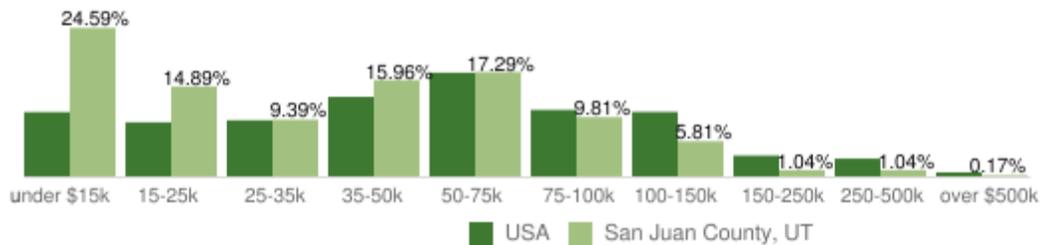
A region's average educational attainment is a fairly accurate indicator of the cultural value it places on education. Despite the initial proposal's assumption that most students would be imported from elsewhere, local attitudes remain a highly relevant metric for any institution of higher learning. San Juan County's comparatively low completion of high school and attainment of college degrees do not indicate substantial motivation and market demand for higher education beyond the basic need for career training. The pool of regional students prepared for the rigor of an intense classical liberal arts education would likely be reduced proportionately.

	San Juan County	Iron County	United States
4 yr College Grad.	10.99%	22.21%	17.42%
Graduate Degrees	4.45%	6.60%	10.12%
High School Grads.	74.34%	90.40%	84.72%
Median Income	\$35,875	\$42,453	\$52,954

Income

Significantly lower household income also indicates a market with limited capacity to afford tuition without Title IV funding or external scholarships. For a student to qualify for such grants, student loans and scholarships, GWU or any similar institution would need to complete its accreditation beforehand. Otherwise, the substantially lower-income student market of San Juan County and the Four Corners region would likely remain inaccessible.

Median Household Income



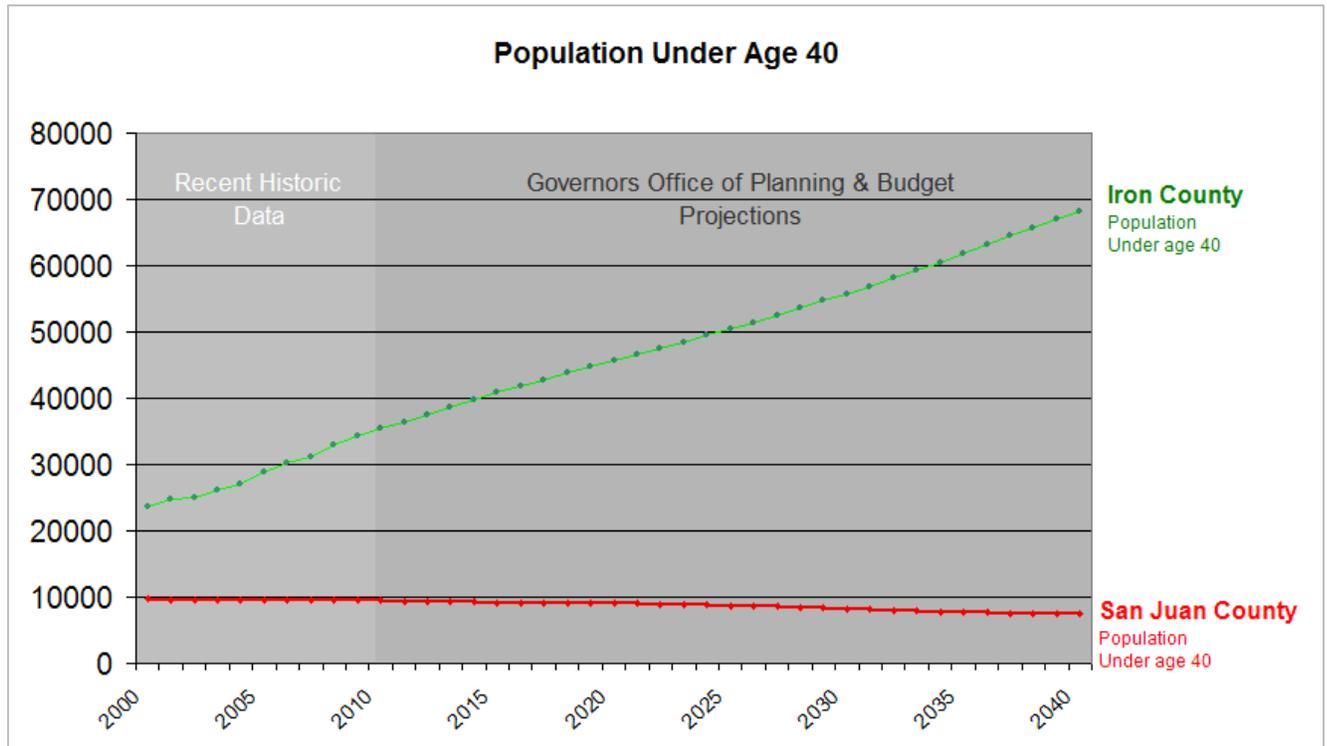
Employment

Bureau of Labor Statistics data collected for 2011 reveal the unemployment rate in San Juan County trending above the national average despite Utah trending lower. Below is a comparison of quarterly data between San Juan County and the two counties where most GWU students currently reside. Students or family members of staff hoping for supplemental income would find dramatically fewer prospects than what they are accustomed to.

2011 Unemployment Rate				
	Jan	April	July	Dec
San Juan County	16.0	11.7	12.7	11.7
Iron County	10.0	8.5	9.7	6.7
Salt Lake County	7.7	6.8	7.5	5.4

Population Trends

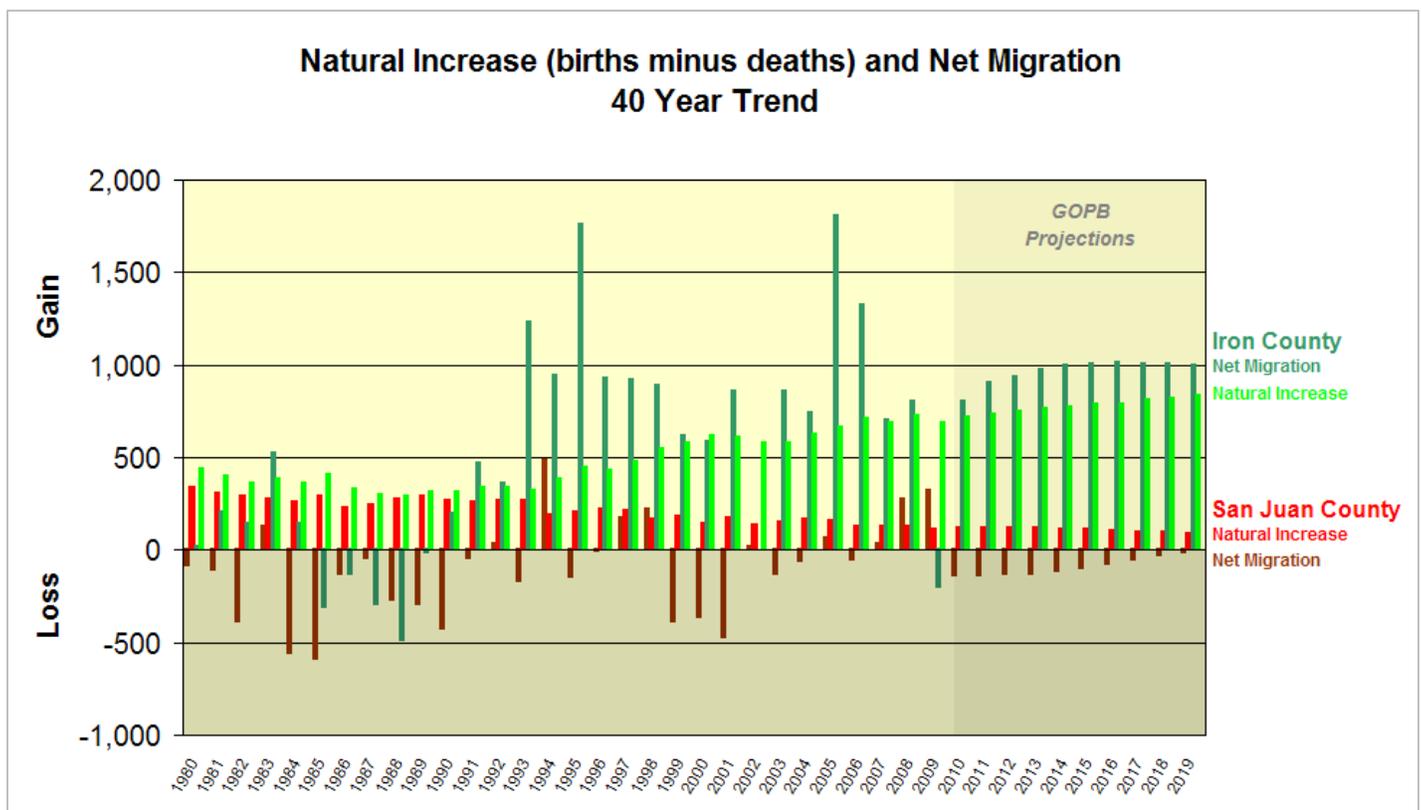
Data from the Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget reveals a declining trend in both overall and key populations in San Juan County. Of particular concern is that these trends are directly opposite of those occurring elsewhere in Utah, which have set national records in overall growth, particularly in the under-40 population segment. Recent historic data and GOPB calculated projections are illustrated in the chart below.



Trends in the population segment under age 40 are of great relevance to institutions of higher education seeking any meaningful supply of employees and students from its local population. Even in comparison to GWU's current home of Iron County, which is only a modest growth county within the state of Utah, the contrast is striking.

Long-standing historic trend of out-migration and decline

The interplay between demographic shifts, changes in local industries and economic strength is a powerful force that perpetuates community reputations and trends. Historically, Iron County and San Juan County were each influenced by mining industries (iron and uranium respectively) and shared similar net migration and birth rates up until 1980. These trends diverged dramatically in the decades that followed on all counts, setting the patterns for growth and reputation that perpetuate today. As illustrated in the chart below, these trajectories are not projected to change in the future.



Survey Results

Volunteers performed telephone interviews among a broad sample of 125 people from the GWU database. Respondents included current students, alumni, parents of students, substantial donors, attendees of school sponsored conferences and other associates of the institution.

Data collected

Below is a sample of typical responses collected during the surveys.

Monticello offers beautiful surroundings and nice recreation, but it seems really limited as far as facilities.

Monticello is simply not feasible in today's economy, and it's too remote anyway.

Monticello is not appealing at all because of the remoteness. There is no close airport.

It is way too remote and too far from good medical services. There is also not much to do.

When my kids go to college I don't want them having to travel that far on long empty highways. Students are often sleep deprived and this adds an unnecessary hazard.

I don't see how Monticello can realistically support any meaningful enrollment, donations or faculty.

Too cold, windy and off the beaten path.

I can think of no advantages to a campus in Monticello. I have been following the situation and think it would be a wise choice to pull back.

I like Monticello because the costs are lower, but it is too hard to get in and out by air travel and that's an issue.

If remoteness was the goal, why not just open a campus in Nome, Alaska? Monticello just doesn't seem prudent.

My choice would be to have a campus somewhere in the Intermountain West, but not too far from a metro area and international airport.

It's secluded, which is cool, but it's so hard to get to. It's just not on the way to anything or any place we normally go.

It should be near to Salt Lake, because there are lots of people there who already love GWU.

Monticello is too remote and it is difficult to travel there. It is better to fly into a major airport and then have a short drive. Monticello is a long drive from any major airport.

For a second campus, anywhere outside of Utah is better than inside.

I think Denver would be better than Monticello. Monticello is so remote that it just won't work. Denver is pretty too and travel is easier.

A place like Phoenix would be preferable because Monticello is so much farther from amenities.

Monticello is a problem. The master plan with all the buildings are too much and it makes us forget the education part which can be done on a simpler scale.

I like the idea of creating a community, but Monticello is too remote, and it would be hard to build it up.

When I first heard about the campus I considered moving there for a while, but it is too far from everything.

I went to the groundbreaking and decided not to move there.

Driving from the nearest airport is still way too far. I like the rural setting and mountains, but it's not enough to overcome.

Findings: Response Trends

Interviews often revealed significant overlap among a number of opinions, but prevailing attitudes were discernable. Analysis of respondent answers revealed a natural grouping into the following categories,:

- San Juan County Stakeholders – A small cluster with a personal stake specific to the Monticello area.
- Architectural Fans – Interested in a substantial and beautiful campus, but don't care where.
- Neutrals – No opinion one way or the other.
- Campus Skeptics – Those preferring a smaller more modest campus.
- Monticello Skeptics – Those viewing Monticello as an unreasonable choice in general for a campus.

Two findings are particularly noteworthy.

1. Aside from being a minority, those who appeared initially to be supportive of Monticello were actually divided. The greater portion ultimately revealed themselves to be architectural fans with no specific desire for Monticello itself as a location. The small remainder formed a core of stakeholders (most often local to San Juan County) with a personal vested interest in the area. These comprised approximately 3% of all surveyed.
2. The *Monticello skeptics* group was the overwhelming majority (approximately 75% of respondents) and their criticism followed a variety of patterns, although predictable as well. Most reported having felt intuitively from the outset that Monticello's isolated remoteness didn't make sense to them for a campus. Many also questioned the objectivity of the research in the initial proposal.

People Insist Upon Access

The initial proposal for the Monticello campus site argued that the remoteness of the Four Corners area would be overcome by its aesthetic beauty and the desirability of a *georgics* model for rural isolation during study. This formed the rationale for its speculation on generating regional growth. Survey results have not supported this as a potential market reality. Instead, interview participants consistently identified the degree of remoteness as being excessive. Many noted that the nearest major transportation artery is Interstate 70, which itself passes through multiple hours of isolation before joining the highway that diverges toward Moab, the closest city with marginal services. The full half-day drive from the popular Interstate 15 corridor through Utah proved to be too inconvenient for most people in the survey. Without sufficient airport access to compensate for this, no argument was persuasive enough in the eyes of the overwhelming majority of those interviewed.

More Modest Alternate Uses

If a full campus is not viable at Monticello, the question remained whether an alternate, scaled down extension campus would be viable or possibly a summer retreat campus.

Extension Campus Option

For years, extension courses have been offered by GWU via traveling faculty in large metropolitan areas. On occasion these have also been held in small rural towns such as Rigby, Idaho. Extension Courses were offered in 2008 in Monticello with 14 students attending the first semester. This number reduced to seven students in the fall. All students were from the local area and consisted mostly of non-traditional adults. This pilot program was only possible by having a local faculty member present in order to teach and recruit, and offering courses below cost. After the recession began, these courses were discontinued. Because extension courses are small, overhead is kept low by means of leased or donated use of space. If market demand were to arise in a small community like Monticello or Rigby long term, we determined that GWU already has the resources to service those students through a combination of live online courses and traveling faculty. Without a substantial number of local students registering for classes, servicing them would not require the expense of construction and maintenance of a permanent extension campus.

The Recreational Retreat Campus Option

To provide every opportunity for finding a viable use for the land, additional questions asked whether people would be interested in the Monticello site as a scaled down summer retreat campus for supplemental educational activities in an outdoor recreational environment. Below is a sample of typical responses.

I think I'd like the area, but I still can't go there. Using it for a retreat facility wouldn't help. The extra day of driving is just more time away from home.

It's unrealistic to expect young people to want an educational retreat in Monticello. Even for that, it's too far and only a few are attracted to it.

I would consider sending my kids to somewhere near Cedar rather than Monticello. The practicality of the Monticello location is not good. Cedar is better.

Definitely do this closer to a larger city and not in Monticello. Even for a recreational retreat we'd have to fly, then drive a long way after the flight.

If Monticello was the only option, I suppose you could overcome it. But why bother if you could do it somewhere closer? Keep it near Cedar City or the Wasatch Front.

We'd prefer the Cedar City mountains for that, or maybe just do it closer to a bigger town.

I guess it could be nice in Monticello but I would want it to have more shade. I would also rather it be close to I-15 between California and Idaho.

I think more people would go to a retreat that is closer to the freeway between St. George and Salt Lake, but maybe Monticello would work. I'm not sure.

It needs to be easy to get to. Monticello is too far to drive. Flying is a problem too, since the closest airport is still several hours drive.

I would prefer a retreat center near Cedar City. It is better for travel and it's also beautiful. There are also plenty of nice secluded areas along I-15.

When offered as an alternative to other recreational locations closer to the Interstate-15 corridor, remoteness once again presented itself as the primary deterrent. Occasionally a respondent showed interest in a potential single event, but not for annual repeated events at the same remote location. With few exceptions, a strong preference persisted for a hypothetical setting to be within one hour of the I-15 corridor.

Supply, Demand and Financial Sustainability

With only a handful of exceptions, respondents overwhelmingly indicated an unwillingness to relocate to, or to attend college in Monticello. This suggests that selling off parcels of real estate for revenue would not be a viable option as proposed by the previous GWU administration in 2007. Instead, liberal arts colleges in more convenient locations would likely siphon a large percentage of students. Weak market demand for taking classes in Monticello appears to be the first domino that would lead to a host of additional barriers to financial sustainability. The resulting costs of maintaining a campus would remain in excess of income and would likely impede accreditation indefinitely. This, in turn, would permanently limit enrollment growth and create a closed loop of perpetual stagnation.

DISCUSSION

Advantages and Disadvantages of Monticello

From a feasibility perspective, it is difficult to identify any genuine advantages for the Monticello location other than the fact that a parcel of land was being offered for donation. Even when considering smaller campus models down to a seasonal educational retreat facility, the GWU community preferred similar offerings in more accessible locations from the I-15 corridor. The abundance of such locations was frequently pointed out in survey interviews when people felt free to express themselves. This was explored at length for over a year in order to give every opportunity for the Monticello property to fit into a cost effective use that people genuinely desired.

Even among residents of San Juan County the survey found critics of the notion of Monticello as a GWU campus site. After expressing his own preference for Phoenix, Denver and Richmond, VA as better campus locations, one Monticello resident observed, “I’ve lived here over 30 years. People always complain about having to drive here for any reason.” This preference for less remoteness among some locals may also reflect the common divide among rural Americans over how the early adult years are best spent. While some insist on staying local, others view it as a healthy and vital period to expand one’s horizons away from home.

Remote Isolation as a Liberal Arts Model

A number of excellent Classical Liberal Arts colleges based upon Great Books programs exist from which we can draw examples of viable models. Perhaps the best known is St. John’s College in Annapolis Maryland. Its classical Great Books program was born in 1937 and for 75 years has been perhaps the most rigorous and renowned in existence. Yet rather than remote isolation, its campus achieves seclusion behind a dense shroud of trees while located in the very heart of Annapolis. Baltimore International Airport is precisely 21 miles away by car. The New Mexico campus of St. John’s is even more compelling. With downtown Santa Fe only hidden by a hill, students are just two miles from the state capitol.

By comparison, the pristinely wooded Hillsdale College is located within the boundaries of quaint Hillsdale, Michigan. However, it is conveniently surrounded in all directions by the large metro areas of Toledo, Fort Wayne, Detroit, and the state’s capital city, Lansing—each slightly over an hour away.

In another successful example of seclusion without isolation, Thomas Aquinas College is just six minutes outside its home town of Santa Paula (pop. 30,000) and

only another nine miles to Ventura, California (pop. 106,000). Los Angeles International Airport is just 70 minutes away.

Other examples of rigorous classical liberal arts colleges were examined as well, some even being recently opened. In no case was a *major* airport farther away than 90 minutes. Most were significantly closer.

Notwithstanding this, it has sometimes been proposed that GWU should pursue a genuinely isolated, more strictly rural *Georgics* campus as its model for learning. Such was the argument for choosing Monticello. Yet it is noteworthy that the educational experiences of Thomas Jefferson and others prior to the American founding were not a product of remote, distant isolation. Rather, the secluded privacy of their quiet farms was still within comfortable proximity to the centers of commerce and government—where opportunities for culture and influence were still accessible. This was the case for many leaders such as George Washington, whose tranquil Mount Vernon estate was still only six miles from downtown Alexandria. Traveling distances in Virginia, and for that matter throughout the eastern United States, England and Europe, bear no resemblance to the vast tracts of emptiness in the American West. If a *Georgics* model is desired, it requires no more remoteness than a location on the quiet outskirts of any given city.

We can draw guidance from George Wythe himself, who taught his students at the College of William and Mary. Indeed, this revered institution where Wythe mentored his pupil Jefferson was not located in an obscure inaccessible community, but in Williamsburg—the seat of government in Virginia. Indeed, such locales provide the richest opportunities for modern students as well, to intern with governors, legislators, judges and the numerous think tanks and supporting organizations that shape governments and society. It is also where vital key networking relationships are initially forged in one's youth, just as benefitted the young Jefferson. Such a model instead points to settings like Richmond, Virginia; Salt Lake City and other state capitals as providing the most fitting locations for new campuses to match the unique mission of George Wythe University.

Goodness of Fit

Given the numerous reasons cited in this report, compounded by unstable economic trends nationally, the findings of this study indicate that other uses more fitting to the four-corners region would better match the donated land in Monticello, Utah. These may include recreation or other commercial or philanthropic projects that realistically complement and benefit the community by providing local employment. If a viable use for the land were to be pursued in higher education, county demographics point to a two-year community college or trade school designed to serve the more practical and immediate economic needs of surrounding local populations. That being said, the nearby USU College of Eastern

Utah in Blanding would certainly weigh heavily on such a consideration. By necessity, our focus must remain limited to determining the best fit for the unique needs of the mission of George Wythe University. While it is beyond the scope of this study to speculate further, it would also be a disservice to stakeholders on all sides to ignore a categorical misalignment that may be of value for all to respectfully acknowledge.

Conclusion

The findings of this study strongly suggest that the prospects for a viable campus in Monticello, Utah are unsubstantiated. The evidence does not support the viability of a classical liberal arts institution, particularly for the mission of *building statesmen* as adhered to by George Wythe University. The rationale for using the land as a part-time recreational campus for educational retreats is likewise unsupported, given the abundance of similar land elsewhere that is more accessible. This report does not find sufficient justification to recommend advancing to further stages of study.

Recommendation

The recommendation of this committee to the Board of Trustees is to return the donated land, cut its losses and continue focusing all resources on accreditation. To better serve the unique mission of the school, serious consideration should also be given to following George Wythe's example at the College of William and Mary by instead mentoring students in close proximity to state capitols where they can take advantage of the abundance of rich learning and networking opportunities available.
