

# Assessment of Student Learning at Western Connecticut State University

A Report to the Board of Trustees of the Connecticut State University System

James W. Schmotter, President  
July 23, 2009

## WCSU's Assessment Plan

Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. In 2004-05 WCSU developed and implemented a comprehensive plan in response to the 2004 New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) reaccreditation report. The plan calls for ongoing collection, analysis and dissemination of information on student learning outcomes in every degree program. The five stages of the assessment cycle are to be reported on annually:

1. Determine program goals and objectives.
2. Gather direct and indirect evidence of student learning outcomes.
3. Interpret the evidence.
4. Make changes in curriculum and/or instruction for improvement, when necessary.
5. "Close the loop" by gathering information on the effectiveness of changes and/or by focusing on different objectives and repeating the process.

## Organizational Structure and Support for Assessment

Each school has an assessment budget to support data collection and analysis. Moreover, each school has a committee with responsibilities for integrating curriculum development and assessment of student learning outcomes. Both the Assessment Committee and General Education Committee are standing committees of the University Senate, with responsibilities for advising the Provost and the Senate.

Student attainment of general education goals is measured by administration of the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP) test (first-year students in November 2008 and seniors in April 2009). Student participation in activities that tend to result in learning is measured by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).

*Western Connecticut State University capitalizes on its **outstanding faculty** and its **location** in the greater New York metropolitan area to create a **diverse university community** that—in its **range of quality academic programs** and in its enriching and supportive **student-focused environment**—is characteristic of New England's best small private universities, but with **much more affordable costs**.*

*WCSU Vision Statement  
Adopted, March, 2007*



WESTERN  
CONNECTICUT  
STATE UNIVERSITY

## Program Review and Results

A plan for academic program review was approved by the Committee on Undergraduate Curriculum and Academic Standards in December 2007 and by the Graduate Council in April 2008. Assessment of student learning outcomes is an integral part of program review. All degree programs have assessment plans in place. As of May 30, 2009, one program had completed its review (Psychology Baccalaureate). Six programs are continuing the three-year program review cycle begun in 2008-09, and six programs are scheduled to begin the process in 2009-2010. *See Appendix.* In addition, accredited programs require evidence of student learning. Eleven degree programs are pursuing accreditation and nine are currently accredited. *See Appendix.*

## Assessments Across Academic Programs Results

### *Ancell School of Business*

The school has begun to use SEDONA software to organize and summarize information on faculty teaching, service, experience, professional development and assessment of student learning outcomes. All departments have student learning outcomes integrated into their programs.

*Example:* The Marketing Department's assessment of student skill levels determined that students needed to have a managerial writing course (WRT 210 W). The course was first offered to students in Fall 2008.

### *School of Arts and Sciences*

Assessment of student learning outcomes is conducted using a variety of methods including pre and post testing, external reviews by experts, portfolio evaluation and standardized national tests. All departments have student learning outcomes integrated into their programs.

*Example:* In 2008-09 the Mathematics Department undertook a revision of the calculus sequence and a larger program revision based on the 2007-08 assessment. The Educational Testing Service (ETS) testing showed that students were weak in proof reading and writing as well as basic calculus skills. The resulting calculus revision identified topics most important to cover in each course and revised course outlines accordingly. The broader program revision is designed to provide breadth of knowledge and proof writing skills early in the curriculum.

### *School of Professional Studies*

All teacher education programs are in their third year of using TK20 software to achieve full compliance with the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards for accreditation. All departments have student learning outcomes integrated into their programs.

*Example:* The Social Work Department continues to meet the standards of its national accrediting body, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). Every other year the department surveys field agency personnel, which includes fifteen items measuring students' functioning in the context of program objectives. Recent results indicated the need for improved communication skills. In response, course content will place additional emphasis on exploring student perspectives on the scope and nature of all types of communication.

### *School of Visual and Performing Arts*

All departments have student learning outcomes integrated into their programs.

*Example:* The Music and Music Education Department maintains policies and procedures that contribute to the learning assessment of students. These policies and procedures are consistent with the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) accreditation agency. Assessment data are collected and most recently, in Fall 2008, faculty adopted stricter standards for admission to the B.M. Jazz programs as well as the sophomore barrier assessment prior to enrollment in upper division music courses.

## Assessments of Student Learning Outcomes Division of Student Affairs

Two years ago, the Division of Student Affairs mandated that every department begin the process of self study using the standards developed by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS). This past year, seven of the twelve departments completed the process which included creating a set of action plans focusing on measuring student learning outcomes. Each of these seven areas are now in the process of developing student learning outcome measures using the six student outcome domains based on research presented in "Learning Reconsidered 2: Implementing a Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience," Richard Keeling, ed., 2006.

*Example:* For the 2008-2009 academic year, students in the WCSU Cooperative Education and Internship program who completed the Student Evaluation Form identified the following learning outcomes as a result of their involvement in the co-op program: enhanced knowledge of a particular discipline (e.g. accounting, marketing, justice and law); expanded interpersonal skills (e.g. confidence, speaking ability, communications, time management); and expanded support and understanding of personal career goals. As a result, Student Affairs will continue providing the same structured co-op program as in 2008-09.

## Assessment Initiatives

### Results

#### *NEASC*

The university's Fifth Year Interim Report to NEASC-CIHE was accepted by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education at its meeting on November 20, 2008, and the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2010 confirmed. The Commission's letter to President Schmotter read, in part: "The Commission commends [WCSU] for progress made in addressing the areas of emphasis... We note with approval that WCSU has implemented an assessment plan across academic units..."

#### *MAPP TEST*

The Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP) test is a measure of college-level reading, mathematics, writing and critical thinking in the context of the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. It is designed to assess general education outcomes. This test was implemented this academic year in order to gain a unified picture of the effectiveness of the WCSU general education program.

#### *NSSE*

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) obtains, on an annual basis, information from hundreds of four-year colleges and universities nationwide about student participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development. The results provide an estimate of how undergraduates spend their time and what they gain from attending college. Institutions use their data to identify aspects of the undergraduate experience inside and outside the classroom that can be improved through changes in policies and procedures more consistent with good practices in undergraduate education. The Spring 2009 administration of NSSE at WCSU achieved a 23.8 percent response rate (232 of 1036 first-year students and 170 of 650 seniors responded).

#### *NASM*

The National Association of Schools of Music had a site team visit WCSU during the Spring 2009 academic semester. The Music Department has a comprehensive student outcomes assessment plan which received an excellent review.

#### *NCATE*

The visitation team for NCATE in April 2009 reviewed the standards as they are implemented in the varied departments of the School of Professional Studies and the School of Arts and Sciences and offered complimentary statements about the WCSU assessment plan.

#### *CCNE*

The Nursing Department received excellent comments from the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education accreditation team for a comprehensive student outcome assessment plan and impressive results.



# Western Connecticut State University Approved Degree Programs

## Appendix

School	Division/Dept.	Degree	Program	Status of Accreditation or Academic Program Review (APR)
Arts & Sciences	Biology	BA/BS	Biology	
	Biology	MA	Biological and Environmental Sciences	
	Biology	BS	Medical Technology	
	Chemistry	BA/BS	Chemistry	Accredited by American Chemical Society
	Comm.	BA/BS	Communication	
	CS	BA	Computer Science	Continue APR in 2009-2010
	English	BA/BS	English	
	English	MA	English	
	Hist./NWC	BA/BS	History	
	Hist./NWC	MA	History	
	Math.	BA/BS	Mathematics	Continue APR in 2009-2010
	Math.	MA	Mathematics	Continue APR in 2009-2010
	PAM	BA/BS	Earth and Planetary Sciences	Begin APR in 2009-2010
	PAM	MA	Earth and Planetary Sciences	Begin APR in 2009-2010
	PAM	BS	Meteorology	Begin APR in 2009-2010
	Psy.	BA/BS	Psychology	Completed APR in May 2009
	Soc. Sci.	BA/BS	Anthropology/Sociology	
	Soc. Sci.	BA	Economics	
	Soc. Sci.	BA/BS	Political Science	
	Soc. Sci.	BA/BS	Social Sciences	
	WLCP	BA/BS	Professional Writing	
	WLCP	MFA	Professional Writing	
WLL	BA/BS	Spanish		
	BA/BS	American Studies	Continue APR in 2009-2010	
	BA/BS	Contract Major (individualized study)		
	AS	Liberal Arts		
Business	JLA	MS	Justice Administration	Begin APR in 2009-2010
	JLA	BS	Justice and Law Admin	Begin APR in 2009-2010
	Acct.	BBA	Accounting	Assoc. to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business Pre-Candidacy August 2009
	Finance	BBA	Finance	Assoc. to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business Pre-Candidacy August 2009
	Mgt.	BBA	Management	Assoc. to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business Pre-Candidacy August 2009
	MIS	BBA	Management Info Systems	Assoc. to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business Pre-Candidacy August 2009
	Mkt.	BBA	Marketing	Assoc. to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business Pre-Candidacy August 2009
	Mgt.	MBA	Business Administration	Assoc. to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business Pre-Candidacy August 2009
	MHA	Health Administration		
Professional Studies	Educ/EP	MS	Counselor Education	Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Ed. Programs Reaccreditation 2009
	Educ./EP	MS	Education	NCATE Site Visit in April 2009 / Licensed by the CT State Dept. of Ed. (SDE)
	Educ./EP	MAT	Master of Arts in Teaching	New program in Spring 2009 / Licensed by the CT State Dept. of Ed. (SDE)
	Educ./EP	BS	Elementary Education	NCATE Site Visit in April 2009 / Licensed by the CT State Dept. of Ed. (SDE)
	Educ./EP	BS	Secondary Education	NCATE Site Visit in April 2009 / Licensed by the CT State Dept. of Ed. (SDE)
	HPX	BS	Health Education	NCATE Site Visit in April 2009 / Licensed by the CT State Dept. of Ed. (SDE)
	HPX	BS	Health Promotion Studies	Prepare for Society for Public Health Education Accreditation
	Nursing	BS	Nursing	Comm. on Coll. Nursing Ed. Accreditation in October 2008, accreditation through 2019
	Nursing	MSN	Nursing	Comm. on Coll. Nursing Ed. Accreditation in October 2008, accreditation through 2019
SW	BA	Social Work	Council on Social Work Education Accreditation through 2012	
	Ed.D.	Instructional Leadership		
Visual & Performing Arts	Art	BA	Art	Continue APR in 2009-2010
	Art	MFA	Visual Arts	Continue APR in 2009-2010
	Music/ME	BA	Music	National Assoc. of Schools of Music Site Visit in March 2009, accreditation through 2019
	Music/ME	BM	Music (Perf., Comp., Theory)	National Assoc. of Schools of Music Site Visit in March 2009, accreditation through 2019
	Music/ME	BS	Music Education	National Assoc. of Schools of Music Site Visit in March 2009, accreditation through 2019
	Music/ME	MS	Music Education	National Assoc. of Schools of Music Site Visit in March 2009, accreditation through 2019
	Theatre	BA	Theatre Arts	Begin APR in 2009-2010