

Standard I

Mission and Purposes

Description

The University serves as an accessible, responsive and creative intellectual resource for the people and institutions of Connecticut. We strive to meet the educational needs of a diversified student body through instruction, scholarship, and public service. Western aspires to be a public university of choice for programs of excellence in the liberal arts and the professions by providing full-time and part-time students with the necessary background to be successful in their chosen careers and to be productive members of society. It accomplishes this by emphasizing:

- A strong liberal arts foundation
- Strong skills in communication, problem solving, and critical thinking
- Opportunities for experiential, cooperative, and internships experiences
- A strong background in information technologies
- Interdisciplinary programs
- A strong sense of commitment to public service
- A personalized learning environment

[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’s [Mission](#) and [Vision](#) statements identify its stakeholders, define the university’s [strategic priorities](#) (as translated through its [strategic planning goals](#); Strategic Plan, page 2), provide its strategic framework for planning ([Strategic Plan](#)) and its basis for institutional evaluation ([Strategic Assessment Reports](#); [Economic Impact Report](#); [Annual Report](#); [State of the University Report](#)). (See Appendix: Standard I: Table 1 for specific information on how WCSU lives out its mission and obligations to its stakeholders through its Strategic Goals.)

The University’s Mission and Vision statements are displayed both online ([President’s webpage](#); [graduate](#) & [undergraduate](#) catalogs; [State of the University Report](#); [faculty handbook](#)) and in print within the graduate (2009-2011; page 14) and undergraduate (2010-2012; page 7) catalogs, and the faculty handbook (2012-2013; page 3). The Mission of the University was approved by its governing board, the Connecticut State University System Board of Trustees (BOT, 12-11-1998), and affirmed by the current Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education (BOR) ([House Bill No. 6651](#); [Public Act No. 11-48, Sec. 230](#)).

WCSU's mission statement is concrete and realistic and defines its educational and other dimensions, including scholarship, research, and public service. The Mission is made tangible through the University's [strategic planning goals](#), specifically, strategic planning goals 1-5 (refer to Appendix: Standard I: Table 2; Standard 1.1). These strategic planning goals guide and inspire the University toward excellence in scholarship, research and public service. Listed in Table 2 for Standard 1.1 are the [many activities and contributions](#) that define WCSU's educational and other dimensions.

[Per House Bill No. 6651; Public Act No. 11-48, Sec. 230](#) (effective July 1, 2011), the [Board of Regents](#) for Higher Education was mandated to develop and implement a plan for maintaining the distinct missions of the Connecticut State University System, the regional community-technical college system, and the Charter Oak State College. In spring 2012, the [Board of Regents](#) requested that all four Connecticut State Universities, twelve Community Colleges and Charter Oak send their mission statements to the Board, in order to assure that all mission statements would be reflected in the newly crafted mission statement of the [ConnSCU](#) system.

In 2005, WCSU's vision and strategic planning goals were adopted and internalized by the University community. Growing out of the mission and created from the input of 76 focus groups engaging more than 650 stakeholders, the Vision and strategic planning goals provide the fundamental framework that guides the actions and activities of WCSU.

In March 2012, the University conducted a survey of its faculty and staff (360 respondents; 248 faculty and 112 staff) to better understand how its Mission is lived out through its people. Questions asked help determine the level of communication, understanding and fulfillment of the mission. Further, in the spring of 2012, a smaller scale survey was issued to both students (100 respondents) and faculty (64 respondents) to [measure the advances made in delivering quality academic programs](#) that are critical to the University's Mission. The latter survey was used to identify sources of evidence that could serve as indicators of quality within academic programs.

Lastly, it is important to note that the University Senate Committee on General Education proposed that General Education at WCSU move to a tiered competency-base model, which passed the University Senate in its February 2013 meeting. This move is in keeping with the University's commitment to provide "excellence in the liberal arts...by providing full-time and part-time students with the necessary background to be successful in their chosen careers and to be productive members of society."

Appraisal

The University has a history of [continued growth](#) in both academic excellence and positive contributions to its community and to the State of Connecticut. Appendix: Standard I: Table 2 highlights a story of significant accomplishments by our faculty, staff and students that enables WCSU to live out its mission in a real and meaningful way to its stakeholders.

The [State of the University Report](#) summarizes the broad spectrum of activities, contributions, and impact WCSU has in shaping a vibrant educational environment for its students and communities. Further, each of the four Schools (Ansell; Arts & Sciences; Professional Studies; Visual & Performing Arts) and each of the Departments within the Schools prepares its own Annual Report which addresses its activities in light of WCSU's Mission Statement. These documents are summarized in the overall [University Annual Report](#).

The University's [Mission](#) and [Vision](#) statements are included in many of the outgoing catalogs, documents, and reports that are distributed to the various stakeholders and community. WCSU should begin placing these statements in other widely distributed documents such as the Cupola alumni and friends of WCSU newsletter, its student handbook, and in key community spaces around the university (for example, in its Student Centers and conference rooms).

WCSU has a history of continued growth in both academic excellence and positive contributions to its community and to the State of Connecticut. Appraisal of our Strategic Plan's goals reveals a faculty who research, present and publish in their academic areas, garner awards and grants, spearhead learning initiatives, and represent the university in many professional organizations. Appraisal of our administration highlights the strong networking that has been built between the school and the region (see Appendix: Standard 1: Table 2: Appraisal of a Mission-Driven Institution).

The University's growth is in part the result of its long history of administrators, faculty, staff, and students engaged in active service to its community. President Schmotter's [2012-2013 opening address](#) highlighted this dedicated involvement: "Our university's service to the community was notable last year: hosting the Connecticut Supreme Court, providing social media expertise for nonprofits; providing space for the Mission of Mercy and the Homeless Connect project; Ives Concert Park partnership with the City of Danbury; research for the Community Health Report Card; storm sheltering last year. We are directly touching the lives of thousands in our community. We should be proud of that."

Testament that WCSU is doing justice to its Mission and Vision is reflected in [faculty, staff and student surveys conducted in 2012](#). Moreover, the survey results indicate that the mission is well-communicated to the fulltime faculty and that it is well-understood. Approximately 80% of the faculty and staff agree that WCSU and its individual departments should use the Mission and Vision statements as the basis for future planning, student learning, budgeting and enrollment.

It is encouraging that a comparison of the 2012 surveys with similar surveys conducted in 2002 shows significant improvement (greater than 20%) regarding WCSU's emphasis on a strong liberal arts foundation, emphasis on interdisciplinary programs, commitment to public service and integrity in handling its affairs.

There is a similar pattern of responses to survey questions about the ways in which each department and program area uses its vision, mission, strategic goals to provide a basis for planning, evaluation, and goal-setting. In support of the vision statement, 72.9% of faculty and staff responded that WCSU maintains the affordability and access of a mid-sized public university while creating the quality experience of the best private institutions.

Student respondents to the 2012 faculty/student survey rated the quality of their educational experience as very high. Strong indicators of student success included: preparation of students for success in their careers or graduate school; provision of programs and course options that attract quality students; and provision of an experiential learning environment enabling students to acquire real-world knowledge and skills. (See Appendix: Standard I: Table 3 for highlights from faculty / staff survey, 2012.)

Projection

The Mission of the University addresses the institution's stakeholders, and how WCSU will serve their needs. It will continue to set the University's priorities and activities. WCSU will continue to serve its stakeholders (students; faculty; people and Connecticut institutions); to build an active and engaged University that lives out its mission through its strategic goals; to offer meaningful activities and contributions that benefit its stakeholders. (See also: [Strategic Assessment Reports](#); [Economic Impact Report](#); [Annual Report](#); [State of the University Report](#).)

WCSU will continue to publish its Mission and Vision in on- and off-line catalogs, documents, and reports where WCSU's various stakeholders will see it. The University will begin placing its Mission in other published reports and community gathering places to achieve greater exposure of our mission to the stakeholders we serve.

WCSU will continue its strong engagement with its students and faculty, Danbury citizens, and citizens throughout the region and state. Moreover, we will reaffirm our strong commitment to provide excellence in scholarship, research and public service. Our Mission and strategic planning goals will continue to guide us in this area.

WCSU will continue to monitor the acceptability and understanding of its mission for all its stakeholders. We will also monitor the ways our Mission provides direction to the curricula and other university-related activities that together form the basis on which expectations for student learning are developed. The University will continue to gather this information through the four Schools' annual reports, which includes reports from respective departments, faculty, staff, and student surveys.

While recent survey results show improvement over the last ten years, WCSU will need to better demonstrate the link between its mission and staffing since agreement of faculty and staff regarding this issue is among the lowest scored of the questions. The current fiscal crisis in the State of CT creates a challenge for the University to establish alternative sources for funding, but this will further enhance faculty hiring. We have room to grow, but we are certainly making progress. As our Annual Reports reveal, WCSU faculty are engaged in scholarly contributions to their fields; and as demonstrated by the increasing number of WCSU programs achieving accreditation, the university's academic programs are achieving high standards of quality.

Second, the survey highlights room for improvement when it comes to WCSU utilizing its location and proximity to the New York metropolitan area. Through its Strategic Plan Assessment (see [Goal 2: Location](#)), the University has established a set of recommendations to help it better capitalize on its location.

Institutional Effectiveness

WCSU will continue to implement the recommendations coming out of the six Strategic Assessment Teams, moving forward in its aspiration to become “the institution of choice” in Western Connecticut and our service area. In the words of President Schmotter: “We must be continually and proactively on message in presenting our institutional vision... And we must continually improve all we do to demonstrate the validity of that message—we must walk the talk of high academic performance and quality standards.” With this charge, and with the continued support of WCSU’s administrators, faculty and staff, WCSU will continue to grow and flourish, providing a vibrant educational environment with long-lasting benefits to its stakeholders.