

Standard VI

Students

Description

Western Connecticut State University's mission is "to meet the educational needs of a diversified student body through instruction, scholarship and public service." It seeks to do so by capitalizing on outstanding faculty, a premium location and by creating quality academic programs and a rich student-focused environment. Several departments work hard to provide our students with an outstanding academic experience. Admissions, Student Financial Services, Advising, Registrar's Office and Academic Support Services report to the Provost. Other departments report to the Vice President for Student Affairs. Communication across each of the offices as well as across the three departments is essential for the delivery of integrated services in support of our students achieving success. Academic Affairs and Student Affairs set a strong tone for the departments.

Collaboration happens at the university-wide level with such programs as new student orientation, working with "at risk" students and the development of strong student-support systems. Collaboration happens at the department level in such areas as the Career Development Center, Residence Life working with the Honors Program to create and manage a special Honors Housing option and the dean of students working with individual faculty and academic deans to respond to the needs of "at risk" students.

Fall Semester Admissions

Admissions counselors meet with prospective students, parents and guidance counselors in the Admissions Office and at various high school visits, open houses and college fairs. Admissions criteria and requirements are published in both print and electronic versions. In addition, information is sent to high schools and community colleges in the states of Connecticut, New York and New Jersey. The Admissions Office and faculty both individually and through the Enrollment Management Committee continually address the qualifications of the incoming class as they relate to standards. The university administers placement tests in Mathematics, Writing, Chemistry and foreign language.

As shown in the DATA FIRST tables, WCSU became slightly more selective in first-time freshman admissions, accepting only 59% of those who applied in 2012, compared to 62.4%, 63.4% and 62.2% in the prior three years (see Appendix: Standard VI: 1). WCSU uses SAT Composite Score (Critical Reading plus Mathematics) as one indicator of the quality of first-time students. (This measure decreased by 1.8% between 2009 and 2012.)

In the area of transfer admissions, applications increased by 1.4%, acceptances increased by 4.5%, and enrolled students decreased by 2.9% between 2009 and 2012 (see Appendix: Standard VI: 2).

Fall Census Data

WCSU classifies enrolled students as first-, second-, third- or fourth-year according to the number of credits completed at the time of the fall semester third week census (less than 30, 30-59.5, 60-89.5, and 90 or more, respectively). Over the last four years, the FTE of first-year students decreased by 22.8%, compared to a negligible decrease (0.3%) for second-year, an increase of 7.3% for third-year, and an increase of 13.7% for fourth-year. The FTE of unclassified non-matriculated students increased by 24.5%.

Over the same period, undergraduate FTE decreased by 3.7%, graduate FTE decreased by 36.1%, and total FTE decreased by 5.9%. Total FTE peaked in 2010 and then declined by 3.4% and 4.3% in the two succeeding years.

Financial Aid, Debt, and Developmental Courses

WCSU describes [the students it seeks to serve](#) on its official website. There are separate guidelines for first-time freshmen, transfers, and graduate students.

Annual expenditures for student financial aid total approximately \$43.1 million. Three-quarters of the aid comes from federal sources, including \$26 million in loans and \$6.3 million in grants. State aid comprises \$5.3 million, private aid \$4.7 million, and institutional aid \$620,000.

Student aid from all sources increased by 11.4% from FY 2010 to FY 2012. Although private grants and scholarships decreased between 2010 and 2011, the three-year comparison yielded an increase of 12.6% (see Appendix: Standard VI: 3).

Approximately 88% of undergraduate students and 86% of graduate students graduate with debt. This debt increased sharply between 2011 and 2012 (from 53% and 28%, respectively). The average debt for students leaving with bachelors' degrees increased by 27.3% over three years (from \$26,000 to \$33,095), but remained relatively unchanged for students leaving with Masters' degrees (from \$22,000 to \$25,000 to \$21,000) (see Appendix: Standard VI: 4).

Developmental courses are defined as courses which do not count toward the credits needed for graduation. In Fall 2009, the percentage of students in developmental courses was 36.7 in Mathematics and 6.0 in Writing (English). In Fall 2010, the percentages were 22.6 and 7.2, respectively. In Fall 2011 and Fall 2012 no remedial coursework was offered by WCSU as a direct result of a State mandate for colleges and universities not to offer remedial education.

SERIES-S tables reveal the one-year retention rate at 69% for the first-time full-time (FTFT) cohort matriculating in Fall 2011 (596 of 870). The six-year graduation rate was 42% for the FTFT cohort matriculating in Fall 2006. Enrollment management goals are 75 percent and 50 percent, respectively.

Student Affairs

During academic year 2005-2006, the Division of Student Affairs revised its mission and vision statements to build on the university-wide Values & Visions work initiated by the university president in the previous year. The revised mission statement's goal was to create a seamless learning environment and become a more student-centered, service-oriented campus. The revised vision statement hoped to increase student retention, to emphasize the role of leadership in transforming lives and to focus on working closer with Academic Affairs. To that end, the Academic Vice President and the Vice President for Student Affairs sought greater collaboration on many levels. These included expansion of the Student Concern Team (threat assessment) to include faculty and academic deans; the development of the Hancock Student Leadership Program; and the agreement between the two vice presidents to have the Dean of Students join the Provost's regular meetings with the academic deans.

Admissions, Orientation, Financial Aid

Creating a true living-learning community requires the collaboration across all offices that are involved with the recruitment, admission and orientation of new students and continues throughout a student's time at Western Connecticut State University. Under the direction of the Provost, the Admissions Office is responsible for the recruitment and admission of freshmen and transfer students. The Admissions Office is also responsible for internal transfer of students and re-entry of undergraduates who left the university. This department also admits international and ISEP (incoming study abroad) students.

Underprepared students and students with special needs are supported throughout their educational program through several departments at the university. The Educational Achievement and Access Program (EAP), a joint program of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, provides underprepared students with the opportunity and support they need to obtain a college education. This consists of a challenging five-week residential summer program which includes academic classes, skills development programs and continued support throughout the academic year. In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the university is fully committed to meeting its responsibilities to admit and provide reasonable accommodations and appropriate services to qualified students who have a disability.

All first time and transfer students are invited to attend an Orientation to the university. Students entering in the fall are encouraged to attend a one-day program in June which focuses on getting students registered, meeting other students and faculty and getting student IDs and taking care of other details that will help them enter seamlessly into university life. Additionally, a four-day Orientation in the fall focuses on getting students connected on a broader level. It includes social activities and addresses a wide range of transitional issues relevant to their first semester needs. Orientation for students entering in January is less extensive but still attempts to help students make a smooth transition to university life. The orientation programs are a collaborative effort of academic and student affairs and other administrative units of the university. A standing Orientation Committee chaired by the Dean of Students oversees these efforts.

Student financial aid is administered through the Office of Student Financial Services which is responsible for managing all federal, state and institutional grants, loans and scholarships as well

as the University Student Employment Program. The Office also is responsible for certifying the Veteran's Educational Benefits Program. Additional support for veterans comes through the Vice President for Student Affairs Office (see Appendix: Standard VI: 5).

All new first year students are pre-registered for their first semester by the Registrar's Office while all transfer students register themselves in consultation with advisors/summer advisors working out of the Registrar's Office (see Appendix: Standard VI: 6).

All students admitted to the university are provided with academic advising. Students who have not declared a major are advised through the Academic Advising Center while students who have declared their major work with a full-time faculty advisor from their respective major department. Although not directly linked with the Academic Advising program, the Career Development Center (CDC) provides a wide range of programs to approximately 2,400 students annually. The CDC assists students with career planning and job searches. The Center hosts workshops on job search strategies, conducts a cooperative education program to provide students with experience related to major or career interests, an annual career fair, an etiquette dinner and other events (see Appendix: Standard VI: 7).

Student Support Services

WCSU students capitalize on a wide range of support services. The Dean of Arts & Sciences oversees a Math Clinic, a Writing Lab and a Tutoring Resource Center. These facilities provide one-on-one and group tutoring (see Appendix: Standard VI: 8). There is also a Computer Science Clinic located on the Westside campus for students needing assistance in computer science courses.

The Office of AccessAbility Services coordinates and provides accommodations and support services to students with all types of disabilities that impact their educational experience. The efforts of this office complement WCSU's overall commitment to diversity. Each semester, the office works with approximately 400 students with documented disabilities in order to provide reasonable accommodations, advocacy, academic coaching, assistive technology, writing assistance, and support for foreign language alternatives (where appropriate). Professional development workshops and individual consultations are provided to faculty and staff. Topics range from disability laws to best practices for creating an accessible and inclusive classroom environment (see Appendix: Standard VI: 9). Programs are publicized in admissions materials, at open houses, and university orientations, including a specialized orientation program for incoming students with disabilities and their parents.

AccessAbility Services moved to new office space in Higgins Annex 017 during the fall of 2010 in an effort to better accommodate the growth of its programs and services. Permanent staffing includes a full-time coordinator, a secretary, three part-time university assistant positions to provide individual academic coaching, accommodation coordination and writing assistance.

WCSU recognizes the need to help students with needs that extend beyond practical concerns. To that end, the university strives to offer services that address students' physical, mental and spiritual concerns. WCSU provides primary health care (Health Service), mental health care (Counseling Center) and Substance Abuse Prevention Services (CHOICES Program). CHOICES works closely with Judicial Affairs, other campus departments and the broader Danbury community to identify at-risk students and

provide assessment, screening and intervention services. The university also provides spiritual support for students through an Office of Campus Ministries.

Residence Life

The university houses approximately one third of its full-time undergraduate students in on-campus housing. There are three residence halls on the Midtown campus and three apartment style residence halls on the Westside campus. The combined residence halls can accommodate 1,675 students (see Appendix: Standard VI: 10).

Although residence halls provide the primary source of activities and programs for residential students, the Student Center on the Midtown campus and the Campus Center on the Westside campus serve as hubs of campus life for both residential and commuter students. Student Center and Campus Center staffs are responsible for the administration and operation of the buildings as well as the auxiliary services (see Appendix: Standard VI: 11).

The Department of Residence Life, along with the Campus and Student Center (CSC) staff, work closely with the University Police Department to create safe living and safe learning environments across the two campuses. The fully certified Police Department is responsible for maintaining a safe and secure environment on campus and to educate the community in campus safety. University Police provides 24-hour coverage to both campuses through the use of vehicle, foot and bicycle patrol units.

With the opening of the Westside Campus Center in Fall 2007, the functions of the previous Student Center/Student Life Office were divided into separate areas under the direction of a Director for Student Centers Operations and an Associate Director for Student Life/Student Activities (see Appendix: Standard VI: 12).

Athletics, Student Life, Leadership, Campus Governance

The Department of Athletics reports directly to the Vice President for Student Affairs. The Student Life/Recreation Office reports to the Dean of Students. These departments provide opportunities for intercollegiate competition, club sports, recreation, intramurals and fitness centers on both campuses. Students participate in fourteen varsity sports, five club sports and a variety of intramurals throughout the year. Approximately three hundred athletes participate in varsity sports annually (see Appendix: Standard VI: 13). The freshman-to-sophomore retention rate for male and female athletes (80% and 85%, respectively) exceeds the rate for non-athletes (66% for males, 72% for females).

In addition to participation in campus activities and organizations, students have many opportunities to serve in leadership positions and campus governance. These include the Student Government Association (SGA), Inter Residence Hall Association (IRHA), and Greek Council. Each of these organizations serves as the governing body of its respective area. Other student leadership include the select Hancock Student Leadership Program and the Student Athletic Advisory Committee. The Student Life Office also provides leadership training, as do the Residence Life Office (resident assistant, academic resource mentor), Information Technology & Innovation (student employees), and the Campus Center/Student Center (student employees) (see Appendix: Standard VI: 14).

The Division of Student Affairs and other student-centered departments continue to attract outstanding and qualified professional staff. Western Connecticut State University and the State University System have developed certain institutional values and expectations. All members of the university are expected to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with these values and expectations. The Office of Judicial Affairs is responsible for administering the student discipline system. All Western Connecticut State University students are expected to adhere to the policies and procedures outlined in the Student Code of Conduct and Statement of Judicial Procedures (see Appendix: Standard VI: 15).

Following the violence at Virginia Tech and other universities around the country, WCSU organized a risk assessment committee comprised of both academic and non-academic staff. Formed in 2007, the Student Concern Team (SCT) is charged with responding to faculty and staff concerns regarding student behavior and offer programs and workshops designed to heighten awareness of behavior that may signal serious problems.

One of the most important steps in on-going assessment of Student Affairs services was initiated in academic year 2005-2006 using the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS). The results have been used for service improvement, the development of action plans and, in some cases, the development of learning outcomes. Every department within Student Affairs completed a self-study using the CAS Standards.

Work continues on the strategic goals that emerged from the President's "Values and Vision" process begun in 2004. The Vice President for Student Affairs chaired the team that reviewed one of the goals focusing on the creation of an enriching and supportive student-focused environment, one that fosters a holistic approach to intellectual and social growth and prepares students to be productive citizens of the State of Connecticut (see Appendix: Standard VI: 16).

Appraisal

The past few years have been challenging to higher education in general and certainly to the State of Connecticut and its state universities. Generally speaking, there has been support for programs and services within Standard 6, yet the economic climate of the state and at the national level remain a concern in terms of potential impact on WCSU's ability to meet the needs of students.

Enrollment at the university grew and then began to decline since the 2007-2008 fifth year report. The high point in fulltime undergraduate enrollment was Fall 2010 with 4,905 students. The university uses SAT Composite Score (Critical Reading plus Mathematics) as one indicator of the quality of first-time students. In Fall 2011, the university stopped providing remedial courses for those students who don't place in the necessary level for math and English (see Appendix: Standard VI: 17).

Additional efforts to support enrollment include introduction of an SAT-optional program, social media marketing, direct-mail advertising, fall and spring open houses, Accepted Student Day, bus trips from urban centers, a student shadow program, two high school counselor lunches and campus tours throughout the year. The SAT-optional program is an internal Admissions option

which allows Admissions to look at students in the top 30% of their class with a B+ average and consistent high school performance and offer university acceptance without the minimum SAT requirement.

On average thirty-five students are enrolled in the EAP program annually. Retention rates have been increasing with the past few cohorts. Academic success data are also encouraging. At the end of the Fall 2009 semester, sixty-four percent of the 2009 cohort maintained a GPA of 2.0 or higher (see Appendix: Standard VI: 18).

In its May 8, 2012 preliminary report to the campus community, the team exploring the university's strategic goal of being an affordable public university with the characteristics of New England's best small private universities found that WCSU is on the path of fostering student scholars who are also engaged citizens (see Appendix: Standard VI: 19). While academic teaching and performance is largely responsible for moving the university closer to fulfilling this goal, the team pointed out that WCSU's extensive extra-curricular activities and programs also contributed. Two areas highlighted in the report are the Career Development Center and the Office of Residence Life.

Helping students to get connected with others is a fundamental goal of the Division of Student Affairs. More than half of the graduating seniors participating in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in 2011 indicated that their participation in co-curricular activities contributed to their total educational experience (see Appendix: Standard VI: 20).

In its Spring 2012 preliminary report to the campus community, the team exploring the university's strategic goal concerning the University's student-centered focus recommended that the university continue to promote Residence Life programming, Clubs' Carnival (part of Welcome Week for all new students in the fall) and other events that enhance student engagement (see Appendix: Standard VI: 21).

The team also found that only 52% of seniors indicated that their primary source of academic advising during the current academic year was their actual academic advisor. To address this issue, the team made several recommendations which focused on creating a stronger relationship between the student and his/her advisor.

Six-year graduation rates have improved since the last NEASC report. According to Worksheet 10 of the FY13 Spending Plan, 43.5% of the Fall 2004 first-time fulltime cohort received bachelor's degrees within six years, compared to 33.3% of the corresponding Fall 1999 cohort. Although there was a recent small decline in the six-year graduation rate (40.1% for the Fall 2005 cohort), we are encouraged by improvements in four-year rates for the 2006 and 2007 cohorts. The team recommended that the university implement a First Year Experience Program as well as develop learning communities/cohorts (see Appendix: Standard VI: 22). Student Affairs remains committed to working with Academic Affairs programs like the Explorer Program. We have found that students completing the first year with at least 24 credits and a GPA of 2.0 are much more likely to persist to graduation than their counterparts. Therefore, any efforts to improve these two measures of academic progress will likely result in improved graduation rates (see Appendix: Standard VI: 23).

Students entering colleges and universities today face challenges of a new intensity or altogether previously unseen. These issues may be academic in nature; they may involve physical or mental health concerns; they might be interpersonal, family-related, financial or a combination of several of the aforementioned. Ultimately, students are simply bringing more “baggage” to school; therefore, the development of “at-risk” support programs is crucial. The exploration team recommended increasing resources in such support areas as counseling; reviewing university processes that concern student needs, and providing consistent information across the university. Such improvements will advance the university’s goal of creating a true student-centered focus.

Despite the above concerns, there is much good news: 89% of recent graduates report being satisfied or very satisfied with their experience at WCSU and 89% would recommend WCSU to a prospective student (see Appendix: Standard VI: 24).

Over the past few years the Orientation Committee focused on refining the process of getting students connected to the university on both an academic and non-academic level. All fulltime students have been pre-registered for the fall prior to their June orientation arrival. At the orientation, students meet within their departments to learn more details about their programs. Students also have an opportunity to make appropriate adjustments to their schedules.

Additionally, a new program, “Voices of Students,” introduces incoming students to a wide range of scenarios they may experience on campus and serves as an introduction to a series of information sessions, workshops and speakers provided over the course of the fall semester. Together, these sessions make students aware of information and programs at a developmentally appropriate time. Parent programs were also introduced to the June and Welcome Week meetings to provide parents with information, student services and available programs. Parents have responded very favorably to all these programs.

As enrollment increased over the years leading up to 2010-2011, funding levels of federal, state and institutional money remained constant (see Appendix: Standard VI: 25). More recent years have seen a reduction which can be attributed to the state of Connecticut’s current financial situation. Staffing has remained below the current NAASFAA-Staffing Predictor Model which should be 10 FTE. (WCSU is currently at 5 FTE.) These deficits continue to pose a challenge to providing adequate service to our students.

The Registrar’s Office recently implemented Ad Astra Scheduling module optimizes class assignments and better utilizes classroom space with the intent to more evenly distribute the classes and increase student enrollment in various sections. A bonus for students is their continued ability to register for classes electronically once they have obtained a Personal Identification Number (PIN) from their advisers (see Appendix: Standard VI: 26).

A permanent office for the Academic Advising Center was established in Higgins Hall in 2003 and is staffed with three full-time professional advisors, a full-time director, a full-time secretary and several part-time workers. The center has expanded services to include change of major counseling and has added computers for students to self-register. A new “General Education Requirements” flyer provides students with a simple, easily accessible summary of all such information. The center also provides online testing and follow-up sessions to review results. Facebook and Twitter accounts have been established in an effort to get more students involved

with academic advising. To meet the need of students taking only evening classes, the center offers evening advisement by appointment.

The Career Development Center (CDC) evaluates the quality and effectiveness of its services through a number of surveys and instruments including student and employer evaluations. Students and employers generally rate CDC programs and service very positively. Helping with assessment learning outcomes has also been a goal of the CDC. The Center has assisted the Ancell School of Business in assessing business students who were involved in Co-op Programs

WCSU's academic support services provide a wide range of services to students. These services have sought out ways to reach out to serve a wider student audience. The Strategic Vision Assessment Team for "How Real is the University's Student-Center Focus" supports these kinds of efforts and has recommended that the centers seek to educate the university community about support systems and provide timely interventions for "at-risk" students (see Appendix: Standard VI: 27).

A new coordinator to work with students with disabilities was hired in August 2012. She discovered that current practices, policies and procedures are not up-to-date with best practices outlined in Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) Program Standards and Performance (see Appendix: Standard VI: 28). Additionally, as is common with many university offices that serve students with disabilities, WCSU harbors a growing population of students with psychological disabilities and students on the autism spectrum. A university assistant currently provides mental health related counseling to these students; however, such services would be more appropriately centered in the Counseling Office (see Appendix: Standard VI: 29). Related issues concern auditory confidentiality, office space, and physical safety of students and staff, especially in light of recent incidents at other schools and colleges. Also, the number of exams proctored in the office simultaneously is limited due to limited space in the office conference room.

Opening in the Fall 2009 semester, the veterans' lounge in the Midtown Student Center has become a key location for vets to come together. Attendance in the lounge has been steadily growing with continued support from external groups and the university. Each semester a welcome mailing goes out to all veterans informing them about services, resources and a list of the key offices on campus with location, liaison, and telephone information. This single correspondence has played a major part in enhancing connections to the vets (see Appendix: Standard VI: 30).

A number of issues have impacted the Office of Residence Life's operations. Facilities need renovation, as do the programs offered and their delivery method; including staff training, the budget for which has actually decreased over the last ten years. Academic year 2012-2013 marked the first time that part-time matriculated students were allowed to live in on-campus housing. Unfortunately, there was little interest. The other major issue facing the department is its cost structure. As changes are considered, Residence Life needs to address the question of whether or not its price point is getting too expensive for WCSU students. Although the Residence Life Office is facing a number of challenging issues, they have implemented a number of new systems to enhance operations. The development of Unimatrix to cover for what

is missing in Banner; ARM program focusing on academic coaching and development of a newsletter; using Facebook and Twitter for several years to enhance communication to students and potential residents.

Over the past several years, Campus and Student Centers/Auxiliary Services have expanded to include the opening of the new Westside Campus Center, the expansion of hours and services at The Daily Grind, management of the university box office. Campus and Student Centers/Auxiliary Services also acts as liaison between the bookstore, food service, vending and shuttle service. In Fall 2011, the department resumed responsibility for testing services after having relinquished them to Academic Affairs for several years. Connections with the bookstore, food services and shuttle services have improved and resulted in higher levels of satisfaction among students. Operations such as the box office, conference services and fiscal management of student activities funds have also improved.

One of the accomplishments of the department is its leadership in the development of an assessment program that has been built into student leadership training using Blackboard. Other accomplishments include expansion of services in the Bookstore including expansion of used textbook buybacks and sales, exposure on Facebook, web orders and assistance with meeting HEOA requirements. Dining service has also improved services with an expanded website that includes menus; greater theme nights; collaboration with campus activities such as the Health Fair; and expansion of services for students with dietary needs (see Appendix: Standard VI: 31).

The shuttle service has been one of the main challenges. Previously, there was no direct day-to-day liaison between the service provider and students. With the CSC taking over contact of the shuttle, student complaints have declined, new initiatives such as GPS have been explored and ridership is strong.

The primary activity of Campus Ministries revolves around two organizations – the Newman Center/Newman Club and the Protestant Campus Ministries. The Jewish Student Organization has had difficulty garnering enough student support to be active. Bi-weekly Newman Dinners serve as a major attraction to students of all faiths. Students gather for a free meal and meet and talk with other attending students, faculty and staff. The Newman Club (funded by SGA) and Newman Center provide regular services and programs that meet the needs of the campus. Protestant Campus Ministries has also had an ongoing Wednesday evening program that has been very active.

In recent years, physical and mental health services (including substance abuse services) have focused on assessing student learning outcomes and on wellness options. Of all students participating in the Fall 2011 Health Fair, 86% indicated that they were considering a lifestyle change. Recreation, Health Service, the Counseling Center, CHOICES and other organizations have worked collaboratively to provide “Student Health 101” to all undergraduate students as part of their wellness outreach. Departments will continue to collaborate to educate and bring wellness programming to the student body and target populations identified through needs assessments, focus groups and the nationally normed Core survey (see Appendix: Standard VI: 32).

In the Counseling Center, case-loads remain high and have grown significantly over the past few years not only in terms of number of students seeking support but also in the increasing

intensity and multiplicity of issues students face. A total of almost 1,800 student sessions were held this past academic year.

Other recent accomplishments include the purchase of the software package, Titanium, which will allow computerization of transactions and records. The implementation of an “on-call” emergency response system on a 24-hour basis is on campus and ready for implementation. With the increase in student needs in recent years, outreach to faculty for consultations and the development of support to Residence Life staff continue to grow. Campus and Student Centers/Auxiliary Services has also built a strong relationship with Danbury Hospital in terms of providing support for students who need prescriptions as well as in creating greater connections for students who are transported to the emergency room for mental health emergencies.

During calendar year 2012, the Police Department actively participated in over fifty personal safety and security educational programs with over 1,100 face to face contacts with students, staff and faculty. The department has also collaborated with the CHOICES Office, Health Service, AccessAbility Services and Residence Life to present community awareness and safety initiatives (see Appendix: Standard VI: 33).

The challenges that face Student Life/Activities revolve around two main themes: staffing and budget. Although the department now includes the merged Recreation and Student Life Departments, there is still no secretarial support. (The position was lost when the office was separated from the CSC Department.) Although the Associate Director for Student Life/Activities is the head of the department, the actual position of Director has been vacant for six years since the separation of the department from the Student Center and Campus Center programs. An additional concern: there is no department budget to speak of which means that the department is not able to fund programs or training beyond the most basic. And still another problem: the department does not oversee the management of the student activities fee as is typical on most college campuses. (This oversight currently is under the management of the Director of Campus and Student Centers.)

Greek Letter Organizations (GLO), with one hundred seventy-five members, have witnessed various cycles of high participation followed by difficult recruiting years. GLO remain a major way in which commuter students “connect” to campus and overall they remain visible and active across campus life. With the creation of the Assistant Dean of Students position in 2006-2007, the GLO have had a real link to university administration.

There has been a commitment across WCSU in the last few years to helping commuter students feel more a part of the university. Recently the SGA recognized and funded the Commuter Student Organization which sponsors multiple programs, holds bi-weekly meetings, established a Commuter Student web and Facebook page and produces the Commuter Student E-Newsletter (see Appendix: Standard VI: 34).

The Athletics Department and head coaches continue to experience difficulties in the recruitment of prospective student athletes who project to be successful in both the classroom and competition. These efforts are economic and financial-aid based. More athletes are choosing to commute rather than live on campus. Long term, this decision presents problems regarding levels of participation. Recreation currently faces two main issues: inadequate funding and lack of available and proper facilities. The lack of funding results in inadequate programming. Facilities

are less than one-third of the recommended square footage for an institution our size (see Appendix: Standard VI: 35).

The SGA has achieved much over the past several years. With the assistance of Information Technology & Innovation, the SGA has created an online election system where students can vote in SGA elections from their own computer. The SGA has re-designed the budget request process, thus allowing clubs more opportunity to better plan events. Also, SGA took the lead in creating stronger campus pride by creating a “WestConn Pride Campaign” and “WestConn Wednesdays” when students are encouraged to wear WCSU shirts and other “WestConn” gear.

Over the last several years the Office of Judicial Affairs has created a University Judicial Board system with three-person panels that are comprised of faculty, administrators, and students. There are currently 30 members of the university community on this board who are available to serve on any hearing board. Board members are thoroughly trained on student rights. Another recent initiative is the Judicial Advocates program. Composed of student volunteers, Judicial Advocates provides support for the accused student and the victim prior to, during and/or following a hearing. Since completing the CAS Standards, the Office of Judicial Affairs has put into place several assessment pieces. Most recently, the office has focused on assessing students who have encountered the judicial process focusing on helping them gain better self-understanding of the judicial process, accepting responsibility for their behavior and learning from past mistakes.

[Parent involvement](#) in their student’s education is an area of recent emphasis. We are actively working to connect our parents with university programs and resources. This will not only have an impact on retention efforts, but it will also allow us to assist parents in helping students work toward degree completion, graduation and ultimately a professional career.

Projection

In looking at State of Connecticut demographic projections for the next several years, the Admissions Office recognizes a forthcoming decline of graduating seniors. Therefore, enrollment projections will need to be made with caution. The SAT-optional admission program implemented quietly in the Fall 2012 for incoming freshmen will be expanded with the anticipation that it will provide greater access for targeted students who would otherwise be successful at the university. This two-year pilot program is designed to address the changing demographics within the state of Connecticut. The implementation of the program is based on findings regarding the lack of correlation between student success and their standardized test scores, positive correlation between high school GPA and student success indicators, research into the bias of standardized testing against students of diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, and the changing demographics of the state of Connecticut (see Appendix: Standard VI: 36).

The EAP program is interested in providing a seminar that would focus on acclimating students to the university and to various academic and student services. Without expansion of the EAP program, many of the program’s students will have to attend a community college in lieu of a four-year state university. It is highly recommended that the part-time position of the EAP Advisor be expanded to a fulltime position.

Academic support centers need to provide projection updates. Math Clinic hours and tutor availability will continue to be adjusted based on student attendance and usage data. Attendance recording will be improved to more accurately track usage. The Clinic is beginning to make more use of experienced adjunct faculty and graduate students in order to enhance its available services.

The Registrar's Office wants to further help students achieve their academic goals and complete their degrees. Course sequencing, registration processes, and student progress toward graduation will be evaluated to pinpoint support solutions that will improve graduation rates.

Although Orientation continues to grow and provide a wider range of programs and activities for both students and parents, more can be done to facilitate students' transition from high school to college. There is great interest in developing an overnight orientation program in the summer for students and running a parallel one-day program for parents. Budget and staffing issues are the primary barriers to expanding in this direction but the Orientation Committee will continue to discuss development of such a program and move it forward as resources allow.

Although enrollments have fallen off recently, the Office of Student Financial Services is still below the current (NAFAA-Staffing Predictor Model) standard of FTE staffing to students. One means of responding to this shortfall is the establishment of additional online information and processes.

The development of a centralized Advising Center has been discussed. Such a center would combine campus tutoring labs, AccessAbility Services, academic support services labs and the Advising Center. The hope is to provide a centralized model for students to access academic support services for efficiencies. A dual-advisement program providing every student with both a faculty advisor and a professional advisor is also being considered. All first-year students would be provided dual-advisement or be included under the Advisement Center regardless of declaration of major (see Appendix: Standard VI: 37).

The Career Development Center (CDC) will continue to stay abreast of technology and social media innovation in order to better network with WCSU students. The CDC will also continue to work on assessment activities and to identify learning outcomes and employment information of students and graduates. The CDC will continue to utilize its on-line career system and new features to provide even more access to career services. The CDC will continue to collaborate with academic departments and seek to expand employer development activities. However, with the CDC staff size remaining the same size for over twenty years, while enrollment has increased dramatically and demands for individual student services, special programs, data collection, and employer development increases, this presents a major challenge in the implementation of these initiatives.

Also in development and scheduled to be in place by Fall 2013 are revised policies and procedures, written in consultation with Best Practices as defined by the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) Program Standards and Performance Indicators.

AccessAbility Services is now providing academic related coaching, rather than counseling. The office hopes to increase student retention and success rates by providing one-on-one academic coaching for students with disabilities. Students in need of non-academic related counseling have been referred to the Counseling Center or to outside providers.

Concerning student housing: the university recognizes that decreased occupancy is reflective of the state – and nation’s – unstable economic conditions, as well as increased competition from local entities. In an attempt to halt this decline, we are changing from a one-semester housing contract to an academic-year contract and implementing a campaign to educate students on the hidden costs of living off campus and the positives of living on campus. Instituting the academic-year contract will bring WCSU in compliance with industry best practices and will help manage retention rates. Over the past few years, we have aggressively begun the process of renovating residence halls which have been long overdue for updating. Renovation of one of the oldest dorm facilities, Litchfield Hall, is currently being planned. Expansion of theme housing is also in the works.

For various socio-economic reasons, more students are choosing to commute. Programs and activities will continue to be developed and enhanced in order to ensure that commuter students are fully connected to the university and have opportunities to participate in campus life.

Additionally, plans to expand the GROW program will provide more opportunities for students to address academic, cultural, and community responsibility programming. The recently developed iMATTER program will continue to promote self-growth through education, use of resources, self-advocacy, community and personal involvement in the campus community. As the department moves forward, they are hoping to adopt a housing management system such as Adirondak. The implementation of this software package will allow the department to operate in a manner our students prefer; online and automated.

Campus and Student Center/Auxiliary Services faces many challenges in the coming years. Collaboration among team members has proved that much can be accomplished with minimum resources, inter-departmental cooperation and “can do” attitudes. The overall focus will be on refining student support systems and fostering cooperation among partners in preparation for the opening of the Visual & Performing Arts building on the Westside campus in Fall 2014.

The university’s health and mental health services also faces significant hurdles in the coming years. Health Service anticipates moving toward electronic medication prescriptions that will ease support of students on the Westside campus. The dramatic increase in the number of students arriving at school with personal issues presents the greatest challenge to the Counseling Center. Despite the Counseling Center’s success in meeting students’ needs, there has been somewhat of a revolving door of counselors and directors. This instability is due in part to attrition and lifestyle decisions, but the transitions have been too frequent for the center to “settle in” and build on its various successes. Once all its positions are filled, the Counseling Center can gain greater stability and build on its accomplishments (see Appendix: Standard VI: 38).

The University Police Department plans to continue its outreach to the community and to be active advocates of campus safety. They will continue to improve services and expand those

services in crime prevention, promoting safety and security for all members of the community. These efforts will be preserved in light of the reality of reduced resources.

Student Life/Student Activities hopes that improvement in State budgeting will advance several initiatives. These include funding the positions of director and secretary. Increased staffing would allow management of the Student Activity Fee and greater support for existing and planned programs. The latter include expanding the Center for Student Involvement to create more space for clubs, building a new recreation center on the Midtown campus (which would allow Student Life to expand its intramural and fitness programs) and offering more program series in addition to *Western After Hours* and *Midtown Coffeehouse*.

The Greek Letter Organization community goal is to strive to maintain its raised visibility on campus through sponsorship and participation in a variety of campus events, programs and activities. It will also look to implement a Three Stage CAS – Assessing Learning Outcomes measure for its new, continuing and graduating members.

Multicultural student organizations will endeavor to sponsor and support culturally related programs, events and activities. These events will assist in addressing academic, social and personal issues and work to build individual and community-wide cultural awareness and support.

The construction of a Midtown Campus Recreation Center would greatly enhance the function of the Recreation Department and allow it to better serve the university population. A Midtown Campus Recreation Center would provide adequate recreation space for our institution, allow for interdepartmental collaboration and foster new-student interest and retention. In the meantime, once the Visual and Performing Arts building opens on the Westside campus, the Recreation Department hopes to secure space in Higgins Annex and Berkshire Hall to help relieve some of its space availability issues. Recreation will continue to budget creatively and look to partner more with other clubs and organizations on campus to help support programming costs.

The SGA has several projects on its agenda for consideration in the immediate future. These include making their processes more club-friendly. The SGA is also very interested in creating a training program and/or retreat for SGA senators and in redesigning student organization officer training (see Appendix: Standard VI: 39).

Parent engagement efforts are to be encouraged through annual programs and activities such as Orientation, Homecoming and Graduation. Parents will also be invited to special invitational events including the fall and spring Theatre productions and the Annual President's Lecture Series. A quarterly E-Newsletter is being designed for parents that will feature a targeted informational article, parent feedback and other connections to university resources.

Institutional Effectiveness

Western Connecticut State University regularly assesses the effectiveness of its student services, academic support programs and student achievement using a combination of surveys (BCSSE, NSSE, CORE, EBI, NCAA), the CAS Standards, etc. to allow it to review trends, identify

strengths and weaknesses, and prioritize allocation of resources. Many of the departments included in Standard VI are developing ongoing assessment instruments to evaluate and improve their services. Examples include: the Office of Student Financial Services is seeking to improve customer service to students by using bi-annual Satisfactory Academic Progress evaluations; the Academic Advisement Center utilizes a popular method of assessing student satisfaction via anonymous surveys when students change from Exploratory/Undeclared to an academic major; and several departments in the Division of Student Affairs are developing learning outcomes as a means to evaluate the success of their programs and services.