

Western Connecticut State University
181 White Street
Danbury, CT 06810

Five-Year Interim Report for New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE)

August 15, 2018

Contents

Introduction..... 3

Institutional Overview 4

Response to Areas Identified for Special Emphasis 5

 Area One: Goals for Enrollment, Retention, and Graduation 5

 Area Two: Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes 8

 Area Three: Governance Changes..... 10

 Area Four: Strategic Planning 11

 Area Five: Ed.D. in Nursing Education Program, Three Areas of Focus 13

Meeting the Standards..... 16

 Standard One: Mission and Purposes 16

 Standard Two: Planning and Evaluation..... 17

 Standard Three: Organization and Governance..... 19

 Standard Four: The Academic Program 20

 Standard Five: Students 25

 Standard Six: Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship 28

 Standard Seven: Institutional Resources..... 29

 Standard Nine: Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure 33

Reflective Essay: Educational Effectiveness 34

 What Students Gain as a Result of Their Education..... 35

 Assessment of Student Learning 40

 Measures of Student Success..... 41

 Satisfactory Levels of Student Achievement on Mission-Appropriate Student Outcomes 43

Institutional Plans..... 45

Appendix 46

Introduction

In preparation for this report, the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Missy Alexander, constituted the Advisory Committee in March 2017. The chair of this Advisory Committee, the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, served as the co-chair of the Steering Committee for the 10-Year Reaccreditation Visit in 2013. In her role as the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, she shares an office suite with the Provost which facilitated ease of communication about this process and about initiatives that inform the substance of this report.

Several members of the Advisory Committee attended the NEASC orientation workshop for completing the Interim Report in April 2017 with the Provost.

Prior to attending this meeting, the committee met to discuss the timeline for completion of the report and to assign specific tasks to that end. The discussion was informed by the committee's reading of the team report following the 10-Year Reaccreditation Visit, the substantive change report about the Ed.D. in Nursing Education, and the letter from the Commission announcing our reaccreditation. In June 2017, the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Research Analyst for Enrollment Services attended the NEASC Data First workshop.

The draft of the Five-Year Interim Report was posted to the Western's NEASC web page in May 2018. Members of the WCSU community were invited to submit comments regarding the contents of the report. These comments were reviewed and included where appropriate.

Members of the Advisory Committee reached out to faculty and staff for assistance with completion of specific areas of the report. The Provost and the chair of the Advisory Committee discussed the report with the University Senate and provided updates at Cabinet meetings and Deans Council meetings during the process to complete the report for NEASC review. A draft of the report was reviewed by NEASC staff in June 2018. *The campus was provided with an additional opportunity to comment on the penultimate draft. The report was transmitted to NEASC on August 15, 2018.*

The process to produce this interim report encourages the campus community to consider the ways we have responded to the critique expressed in the letter from the Commission announcing our reaccreditation, the ways the strategic planning efforts have contributed to our improvements, the challenges that remain and our plans to respond to them.

Advisory Committee:

Ann Atkinson, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, Chair

Ranjan Bhatt, Research Analyst, Enrollment Services

Kelli Custer, Associate Professor of Writing and Director of the Writing Center

Josephine Hamer, Interim Dean of the Macricostas School of Arts and Sciences

Jay Murray, Associate Vice President for Enrollment Services

Jennifer O'Brien, Serials and Government Documents Librarian

Jerry Wilcox, Director, Institutional Research

Institutional Overview

Over its 115-year history, Western Connecticut State University (WCSU) has transitioned from normal school, to teachers' college, to state university, positioning itself to respond to the needs of the region and its students. Located on two campuses in Danbury, Connecticut, WCSU offers undergraduate, graduate, and certificate programs in four schools. Of these, two schools are named – Ancell School of Business and the Macricostas School of Arts and Sciences, with discussions underway to name the School of Visual and Performing Arts. Approximately 30% of our undergraduates live on campus and the majority of our graduate students attend part-time.

President John B. Clark has led an effort to expand our recruitment area by offering in-state tuition to residents of New York State and northern New Jersey starting with the fall 2018 semester. This effort extends a program, initiated in 2017, to offer in-state tuition to residents of seven counties in New York's Hudson Valley. The extension was approved by the Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education as a two-year pilot program for WCSU.

Recent achievements reflect WCSU's dynamic status and expansive focus. Since the 10-Year Reaccreditation Visit, our university has:

- Developed a new general education program, launched in fall 2016, with 10 competencies, a tiered writing requirement and a capstone experience.
- Steered a strategic planning effort which included recreating the mission, values, and vision statements and establishing five goals, to include creating new curricula, enhancing student support services, increasing a sense of community, revisiting our public image as it relates to the new mission, and creating a sustainable financial model. Approved by the Board of Regents in spring 2017, the Strategic Plan is in the first year of implementation.
- Won regional and national awards at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival in 2016 and 2017 for productions of *Parade* and *The Drowsy Chaperone*.
- Received a \$1.8 million federal grant to improve and expand support for students training to respond to mental health crises. Dr. Gabriel Lomas, professor of Education and Educational Psychology, led the application.
- Received a \$1.6 million grant to study the ticks that transmit Lyme disease. Dr. Neeta Connolly, associate professor of Biological and Environmental Sciences, led the application.

Similarly, our ongoing improvement of the Midtown and Westside campuses underscores our commitment to provide students with optimal environments and technologies that improve learning. Recently, we have:

- Opened the Visual and Performing Arts Center on the Westside Campus in fall 2014.
- Renovated Newbury Hall, a residence hall on the Midtown Campus, which opened in fall 2017.
- Rolled out Degree Works, a part of the Banner system which assists with improvements to the advisement system and data to create more effective and efficient course scheduling in fall 2017.

Response to Areas Identified for Special Emphasis

Area One: Goals for Enrollment, Retention, and Graduation

Focus: Achieving its goals for enrollment, retention, and graduation as assurance of financial stability

Description: Enrollment

In the 2013 Self Study, we predicted an increase by 4% overall enrollment in FY14 and FY15, an increase in out-of-state enrollment by 5% in FY14 and 10% in FY15. Retaining students first- to second-year was forecasted to increase by 3% in FY14 and 3% in FY15.

The actual numbers represent a decrease in total fall enrollment by 2.8% from 2014-17 (from 5,826 to 5,664). While the forecast was designed to be aspirational, the 2015 Environmental Scan Report, prepared during our strategic planning process, did not support this projection. The Connecticut population is declining with the number of high school graduates projected to continue declining for the next 10 years.

Facing these enrollment declines, WCSU chose to pursue a new market. Located on the New York State border, WCSU's recruiting radius in Connecticut was effectively half that of our sister schools in the system. The out-of-state tuition cost was prohibitive for many of the available graduating seniors, just across the state line. To address this cost differential and constrained recruiting area, in fall 2016, WCSU sought and was granted approval from the Board of Regents to offer in-state tuition to students residing in seven neighboring counties in New York. Admissions initiated an aggressive recruitment and marketing campaign. In year one, results exceeded expectations with more than three times the number of New York students from the prior year. In fall 2016, before the initiative's approval, we enrolled 67 students from this area. In fall 2017, the number increased to 238 students.

The success of the New York initiative has helped us to stabilize our enrollment for 2017-18. Had we been limited to Connecticut, our total enrollment would have likely continued to decline. With New York, we managed an overall enrollment of -0.1%. While this was still a slight decrease, it represents a stabilization for WCSU. As we look forward, we anticipate a more significant increase in 2018-19 due to an expansion of our recruiting efforts in New York (we have approval for the entire state now) as well as the anticipated graduation of our two smallest classes in 2018 and 2019. Early reports for 2018-19 are indicating an increase of nearly 2%.

In concert with a new recruitment and marketing campaign, the Admissions Office completely retooled the enrollment process. This effort included the implementation of a Customer Relationship Management system which has enabled Admissions to track, report, and communicate more effectively with students at all points in the admission funnel. WCSU also became a member of The Common Application, streamlining the application process and expanding the reach of our name.

We have focused on a branding refreshment project, a strategy associated with one of the goals of the Strategic Plan, with EFK Group, a consulting group specializing in mission-driven branding.

Our attention has also turned to expanding graduate study. In the 2013 Self-Study, the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs was charged with meeting with the deans of the four schools to determine how best to strategize about curricula and facilitate recruiting and enrollment efforts at the graduate level. Those efforts have resulted in converting a graduate certificate in Applied Behavior Analysis to a fully developed MA, which has grown from 41 to 113 students in two years, the

discontinuation of several programs that no longer serve students well, and the development of two new graduate degrees that are currently under review. We continue to see this as an area for growth.

Description: Retention and Graduation

In our decennial report, we set an ambitious goal of improving our first-year retention by 3% in 2014 and 2015. In reality, retention of this group was flat in those years and improved by 2% in 2015-16.

Retention Rates: First-Time, Full-Time Students

| 2013-14 | 2014-15 | 2015-16 | 2016-17 |
|------------|----------|----------|------------|
| 74% (-.2%) | 74% (0%) | 76% (2%) | 73% (-3%)* |

*The 2016-17 number was dramatically influenced by a residence hall renovation that led to triples in the remaining first year hall spaces. The retention rate for this group was much lower than commuters who returned at a 78% rate. We anticipate improvement in our 2017-18 numbers as tripling, a strong predictor of attrition, is no longer an issue.

This mismatch of goals and reality reflect a few important gaps. First was the unsuccessful implementation of Mapworks. While that technological solution seemed promising in 2013, it was not fully adopted by faculty advisers. Secondly, we had not yet implemented our First Year Program.

The new general education program includes a First Year (FY) Competency to assist all new students with successfully navigating the university in terms of discovering their academic interests and talents, learning to self-advocate, and exploring myriad opportunities available on campus. In its first year of implementation, faculty report increased requests for advising and inquiries about degree planning. Additional work is now underway to strengthen the FY for even greater impact.

We have also done a systematic analysis of who we are losing in the first year. While some of the reasons point to WCSU being used as a stepping stone to UCONN and private schools, a significant number of students come in underprepared for college (below a B average in high school). We are working to enhance our advising practices to support this group more directly. We anticipate a partial roll out of this approach in 2018-19, with a full program in 2019-20. This should support our goal of regularly meeting a 78% retention rate by 2020.

Six-Year Graduation Rates

| 2013-14 | 2014-15 | 2015-16 | 2016-17 |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 45% | 42% | 49%* | 46% |

*In 2015-16, we met the CSU System Normalization of Credits Goal of 120 credits for all degrees, reducing many from 122 to 120 credits. This is likely to have improved our graduation rates that year as students with a few elective credits left to complete were able to progress to degree completion.

The table above indicates wide variation in our six-year graduation rates. Our continuous goal is 50%. To achieve this, the following steps have been taken:

- Four-Year Plans have been created for all programs. These are easily accessed from the main academic pages.
- Pre-major pathways have been developed for entering first year students who have not decided on a major. These pathways are organized to ensure that students enroll in critical prerequisites so that they are on track for timely graduation when they determine their major. These pathways will be used for the 2018 incoming class and promoted on our website for 2019.

- As part of the Strategic Plan, WCSU has established faculty liaisons who will work with the professional advisors in Academic Advisement to assist students with declaring majors and to connect students with their faculty advisors as soon as they have declared a major.
- Coordination and promotion of tutoring resources (2018-19); enhanced tutor training (2019-20).

Description: Financial Stability

Our annual budget process involves forecasting enrollment and projected state contributions to arrive at a balanced budget. The university has reserves of approximately 12 million dollars to serve as a contingency plan for enrollment shortfalls. Our enrollment projections have been realistic in the past two years, allowing for accurate budgeting. We have experienced some rescissions from the state in recent years, but have been able to close gaps with careful management of O&E and attrition savings. Revenue from the summer rental of facilities helps to offset other expenses.

The University Foundation supports numerous scholarships and activities, but we are not overly dependent on that resource. We hope to expand that endowment (currently at \$18 million), to increase support for students and faculty scholarship. This is an affordability effort, but does not impact our annual budget plans.

One of the goals of the Strategic Plan is to create a sustainable financial model. To that end, the Evaluation of Programs Committee has been constituted to create a template to evaluate all programs on campus—academic, support, outreach, and administrative—to determine greater efficiencies, to include help with decision-making around low-enrolled programs and investments in new programs.

Findings and Analysis

The results of the initiative to offer in-state rates to undergraduate students residing in seven neighboring counties in New York State exceeded expectations. The addition of 238 students in fall 2017 resulted in \$2,479,484 of revenue. Had we not been able to offer this program and the enrollments in fall 2017 had been the same as fall 2016, the revenue would have been \$1,548,169. The result of the program was an additional revenue of \$931,315. In late fall 2017, we gained approval to expand this program to all of New York State and New Jersey.

With membership in the Common Application, applications for admission are up 40% since fall 2013. While that is good news, it is complicated by a decrease in the conversion of accepted to enrolled applicants, from 35.9% to 20.5% since 2013. This translates to additional staff time to process applications that do not contribute to enrollment gains.

While undergraduate enrollment numbers have not reflected overall gains since 2014, graduate numbers have increased (undergraduate FTE decreased by 5.3% from 3 years prior to current year, from 4659 to 4413; graduate FTE increased by 26.6%, from 237 to 300).

Accepted master's applicants increased by 60.6% (from 142 to 228) with enrolled master's applicants increasing by 15.6% (from 141 to 163). Our low-residency program, the MFA in Creative and Professional Writing, increased enrollment by 23.5% (from 26 to 34).

We have experienced financial success with the Master of Science in Applied Behavior Analysis. In FY 16, the program operated with a \$35,000 shortfall. In FY 17, the program operated with a \$133,000 surplus and the gains are projected to nearly double from the FY 17 figures in FY 18. With this success,

we have focused more on our ability to reach adults who wish to add to their credentials while working. We are now exploring other options for hybrid and fully online graduate programs.

The Evaluation of Programs process will help us further focus our efforts on curriculum development and revision at the graduate and undergraduate levels so that we are poised to meet regional needs and increase enrollments.

Appraisal and Projection

We expect to continue to see enrollment growth for fall 2018 as we roll out the recruiting plan in all of New York and New Jersey. Given state demographics (CT high school graduate -6.9% through 2022, National Center for Education Statistics), we project continued decreases in-state, with the growth in our New York/New Jersey initiative. Our goals for undergraduate recruiting are to increase by 1% per year for the next three years. Many of our new students from the seven neighboring counties in New York are commuters. With this expanded initiative, enrolled undergraduate students from these areas will live in residence halls, helping us to fill our 200 empty beds in a 1590 bed-design capacity.

At the graduate level, we have experienced some growth since 2013. In fall 2014 there were 424 graduate students; in fall 2017 there were 497. This growth stemmed from converting a certificate in Applied Behavior Analysis into a full graduate degree. We plan for further growth at the graduate level as we close some of our underperforming programs and add two new graduate degrees. Increasing graduate by 1% per year will help us meet the needs of adults in Connecticut, as we adjust to a smaller pool of undergraduates.

We expect to implement the branding recommendations created by EFK Consulting in concert with a campus committee comprised of faculty and staff in spring 2018. This initiative is part of Goal 4 of the Strategic Plan, to “create a distinct identity.”

As we examine the impact of the First Year Competency, we are working to strengthen the program through the addition of peer mentors. We plan to pilot this initiative in fall 2018.

We anticipate seeking approval for two more graduate programs in the next year that are responsive to the opioid crises and other health issues.

Each of these efforts contributes to creating a sustainable financial model. The evaluation of all programs is the next step, to help us determine how to invest for growth and student success.

Area Two: Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

Focus: Assessing student learning outcomes of the general education core competencies and all majors and using the results to inform decision-making and continuous improvement

Description: Assessment of General Education

With changes to the state's transfer and articulation policy, it became clear that our general education program needed to align with new transfer requirements. In addition, the curriculum lacked a pathway to assessment. Accordingly, the Committee for General Education developed a course-based competency model of general education incorporating 10 interdisciplinary competencies across the curriculum. This new framework was approved by the University Senate in April 2014. Development of

competency definitions and associated student learning outcomes occurred in 2014-15, through interdisciplinary ad hoc committees for each competency. The academic departments began submitting course proposals for the new general education curriculum in 2015. Incoming students in 2016 were the first cohort affected by this new curriculum.

The fundamental shift from distribution to course-based competencies (better described as shared learning outcomes across the curriculum), has led to expanded participation in the general education curriculum to all four schools. By embedding the outcomes across the curriculum, several degree programs have made greater efforts to focus on writing in the discipline; others have seen where they might support the Oral Communication Competency in the major, and all have reviewed their capstone courses with reference to the Culminating General Education Experience. The set of common learning outcomes has also created a path to assessment.

The Committee on General Education is beginning to develop assessment plans for the new curriculum. In response to a faculty retreat on this topic, held by the Provost in January 2017, several paths forward were identified. Initial steps include piloting assessment of Quantitative Reasoning (QR) and Writing Tier One (W1) in 2018, and a workshop on Critical Thinking (CT) in May 2018. We anticipate a fully executed assessment plan to be completed prior to our decennial review.

Description: Assessment of Majors

WCSU continues to improve its assessment practices to make them informative and routine. By 2013 all undergraduate programs had learning outcomes that were part of the undergraduate catalog and drove assessment plans. Since that time, learning outcomes have been added to all graduate programs and included in the graduate catalog. The E-series forms document assessment plans for each major.

Working toward greater use of assessment in decision-making about curriculum and resources, the Provost and deans collaborated on developing a template for departmental annual reports that has moved them from inputs (resources and resource needs) to outcomes. Faculty review enrollment, retention, and graduation rates each year, as well as report on actions taken to strengthen those outcomes (for example, strengthening advising practices). In addition, they report on changes resulting from their assessment. Including these in the annual report makes it clear that all departments are expected to conduct and use assessment.

At the same time, WCSU and the BOR have revised the program review process. At the BOR level, degrees must explain how they are using assessment to improve their programs. At the campus level, the process includes assessment and has added external review for all majors. The program review revisions were approved by the University Senate in 2017 and can be found in our Faculty Handbook.

WCSU has also pursued several new discipline-specific accreditations with positive responses and more robust assessment practices as a result. Indeed, the recent transformations in our business programs to meet AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) expectations encouraged our Justice and Law faculty to attend business program assessment retreats.

Findings and Analysis

The status of our assessment at WCSU is stronger than it was in 2013. There are learning outcomes for all programs, and there has been consistent messaging to reinforce the expectation that assessment is required. Our successful bid for accreditation of the theatre program and our anticipated success in three other disciplinary areas provides evidence that we are doing assessment well in many areas.

Development of an assessment plan for general education is underway. In January 2017, the Provost convened a retreat to discuss the new general education framework. Following an overview of the competencies and an introduction to the assessment planning process, 78 faculty members broke into groups to discuss disciplinary approaches used in the assessment of each competency, and worked toward an initial map of assessment strategies. This retreat led to suggested revisions to the learning outcomes in some areas and revealed concerns regarding the Critical Thinking and Intercultural Competency definitions. We are following up on these concerns through additional focused retreats. The Committee for General Education has identified the first two competencies to be evaluated, Quantitative Reasoning and Tier I Writing, in 2018. We anticipate additional assessments in 2019.

In addition, the FY Competency has already been reviewed in terms of student success measures (retention and GPA). This analysis has moved us to develop an FYPlus (forecast in our Strategic Plan) designed to provide enhanced advising for at-risk students and peer mentors to strengthen student engagement. As we determined this, we assessed the impact of FY on our retention, and we are building in assessment in the development of the FYPlus. This is an early indicator that having learning outcomes is reshaping how we engage with assessment.

We will continue to review learning outcomes, but the strongest support for the claim that we are on the right track came from the University Senate this year. The General Education Committee proposed that we revise the competency definition for Critical Thinking (CT), and several members of the Senate asked for evidence to support the need for this change. This request points to the culture shift necessary for a full embrace of assessment. The result was to schedule a retreat where a thorough review of the current definition will be conducted, including the review of representative assignments. An evidence-based report on the CT Competency will be brought to Senate in fall 2018.

While our review of materials shows that plans and outcomes exist in every major, we have not seen consistency in reporting on assessment outcomes yet. The new annual report template was launched in 2017. We anticipate that this change, coupled with the clarification of the program review process, will strengthen assessment going forward.

Appraisal and Projection

The Committee on General Education plans to address concerns with CT and the Intercultural Competency (IC) during 2018-19. Any substantive changes to the competency definitions and/or outcomes will be approved through our regular governance processes in the next year. This is an appropriate approach as we continuously evaluate our new curriculum.

In sum, while there is still work to be done, we have made great strides since 2013 and expect even stronger assessment protocols by 2023.

Area Three: Governance Changes

Focus: Continuing to evaluate the impact of governance changes in the State of Connecticut on the University

Description

Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) formerly ConnSCU was formed in 2011 with a Board of Regents (BOR) replacing the Board of Trustees. The agency's purview extends to four State Universities; twelve community colleges; and Charter Oak State College, the state's online institution.

Findings and Analysis

The mission of this agency was not clearly defined during WCSU's Reaccreditation Visit, and the leadership had changed several times between 2011 and 2013. With the passage of legislation in 2013 to have the appointment of a new president be the responsibility of the BOR rather than the Governor, a national search for a new president resulted in the appointment of Gregory Gray, effective July 2013.

In September 2015, the leadership changed again with Mark Ojakian, former Chief of Staff to Connecticut's Governor Dannel Malloy, now serving as the President and Jane Gates, former WCSU Provost, serving as the Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs. President Ojakian focused early in his tenure on "Students First."

Appraisal and Projection

While the structure of the system continues to evolve, the constituencies are more closely integrated than they were in 2013. The Transfer Articulation Policy (TAP) has been fully defined and is now being implemented as the Transfer Ticket Program which provides seamless transfer pathways from the community colleges to a state university in 22 degree program areas. Developing TAP has fostered conversations between campuses that have built stronger relationships between the faculty and clearer assumptions about the essentials of each discipline.

In addition, the approval processes for new curricula include university and community college members, which has led to greater collaboration between constituencies. This collaboration has resulted in shared expectations across schools and opportunities for shared curriculum.

Of concern to all in the system and the system leadership, is the continuing budget crises at the state level. President Ojakian is a strong voice for the needs of CSCU. He tells the stories of faculty, staff and student success, shares the challenges our students face, and argues for the importance of investing in education for Connecticut's future.

Area Four: Strategic Planning

Focus: Implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of the institution's strategic plan

Description

First during President Schmotter's tenure and then under President Clark's leadership, the university forged new [Mission, Values and Vision Statements and a Strategic Plan](#) that was approved by the University Senate and President Clark. The mission and vision statements were approved by the Board of Regents on June 15, 2017. The Strategic Plan has now moved to the implementation phase.

Findings and Analysis

The Steering Committee of 21 members represented varied constituencies to include faculty and staff from academic and student affairs, and students. The committee was co-chaired by a faculty member and an administrator in academic affairs. The campus was involved in all phases of the strategic planning process. In December 2014, a Stakeholders Conference was held for faculty, staff, students, alumni, members of the Foundation Board, and community stakeholders to respond to the draft of the mission statement. (See Standard One for the text of the new Mission, Vision and Values Statements). This draft was then revised based on feedback and approved by the University Senate in March 2015.

Next steps were the development of the Strategic Plan. This, too, involved multiple committees, interviews, and campus forums. Committees conducted a review of the prior Strategic Plan, an Environmental Scan, and then numerous meetings with the campus community regarding the path forward. The new plan is characterized by a stronger focus on implementation and outcomes than our last plan, and there are appropriate parties assigned to oversight of each goal. The full plan was approved at the University Senate in 2017. The five goals follow.

1. Create, strengthen, and enhance programs and curricula that are responsive to the needs of a diverse community of learners.

Rationale: As a public university committed to access, it is important to respond to the varied backgrounds and needs of our students. WCSU must differentiate services and curricula to meet the needs and interests of these varied audiences. Through research into pedagogy, andragogy, and emerging disciplines, this goal will support recruiting, retention, and degree completion for traditional and first-generation undergraduates, returning adults, and graduate students.

2. Develop and implement processes, facilities, and support services to meet the needs of a diverse campus community.

Rationale: WCSU serves full-time, part-time, commuter and residential, traditional undergraduates, returning adults, veterans, and graduate students. Our faculty approach teaching in equally diverse ways, employing seminars, lectures, flipped classrooms, workshops, online and hybrid formats. Our spaces and processes need to meet the needs of all constituencies and the expectations of a society that has 24-hour access to nearly everything. Through master planning, technology planning, and a careful review of scheduling, registration, and advising practices, WCSU will become a 21st century university.

3. Create a sense of campus community and pride.

Rationale: The challenges of two campuses, a majority commuter population, and the lack of common meeting times make it difficult to foster a sense of community among students, faculty, staff and the local community. This feeling that community is lacking impacts retention, recruiting, and long-term donor potential. Through a greater focus on communication and collaboration, and engagement among students, faculty, and staff, WCSU will foster a sense of community both on campus and in the greater Danbury region.

4. Create a distinct identity.

Rationale: Western has not yet successfully created and communicated an identity that is distinct from our regional competitors. This lack of distinctiveness makes it difficult to recruit and to focus our website and other materials. Through our branding, program offerings, and focus on student success, WCSU will differentiate itself from regional universities and colleges.

5. Create a sustainable financial model.

Rationale: Too often WCSU is in crisis mode, struggling to address budget shortfalls at the last minute. This tendency causes us to focus on short-term problems in place of engaging more thoughtfully in long-term planning. This goal lays out a plan to reverse this trend by effecting a thorough review of all programs for the purpose of making decisions about which programs are the best fit for a more stable future. This review process will be informed by academic priorities, planning, budgeting, and accountability, and will include guidance from an ad hoc Evaluation of Programs Committee and be monitored by an ongoing Strategic Plan Implementation Committee.

Appraisal and Projection

The University President and the University Senate President jointly created a standing committee to track the progress to operationalize the five goals and to hear concerns about the plan. Membership includes a representative from Academic Affairs, Finance, Student Affairs, Faculty (one member from each school and a faculty representative from University Senate), and Students. With target dates and responsible parties included in this plan, we anticipate a more robust result than in our prior plan. The

standing committee is meant to keep the plan moving forward. We are now in the process of developing a website so that the full community can monitor our progress. In November 2018, a campus-wide meeting will be held to discuss progress on the goals and on the achievement of the vision as well as to hear any concerns about the implementation of the plan.

Area Five: Ed.D. in Nursing Education Program, Three Areas of Focus

Focus One: Assuring that the rigor of courses in the Ed.D. in Nursing Education program offered by each institution is consistent and appropriate for doctoral level students

Description

The online format employs video conferences to ensure synthesis of material which includes specialization in nursing education, philosophical traditions that inform the discipline, pedagogical approaches, leadership, and the science of nursing education research. The Ed.D. requires greater analytical skill than the MS in Nursing which focuses on skill acquisition and clinical practice.

Findings and Analysis

The Ed.D. Committee comprised of faculty from Western Connecticut State University (WCSU) and Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) meet at the start of each semester to review syllabi for courses taught the previous semester. Faculty, Ed.D. Coordinators, and the Ed.D. Committee meet regularly to review course content and expectations and teaching strategies. Consistent and appropriate levels of rigor are evident in the complexity of learning objectives and assignments.

The WCSU faculty continue to implement strategies developed in 2016, requiring similar numbers of reflective journals, discussion questions, video WebEx conferences, and major paper assignments. Major paper assignments and grading rubrics were shared for feedback concerning their rigor and appropriateness for doctoral-level work. Faculty from WCSU and SCSU teaching in the same semester collaborate to ensure there is no redundancy and there is cohesiveness among the courses.

Since the January 2016 report, Cohort 2 has completed NUR 809-812 and Cohort 3 has completed NUR 800-806. Courses taught by WCSU during this time frame include: NUR 800, 802, 804, 809, and 811. Details of specific strategies developed and in use follow.

- *NUR 800 Ethical/Legal, Political and Social Issues Affecting Higher Education*: Students develop arguments to confront or support issues to include fraud in academic research, sexual assault on college campuses, provision of services to disabled students, operation of FERPA, and the impact of technologies on the faculty-student relationship.
- *NUR 802 Methods of Teaching and Evaluation*: A research perspective prompts students to question their teaching practices. In response to feedback from faculty who taught subsequent courses, the evaluation methods section was changed to include assignments requiring the application of evaluation methodology to teaching situations.
- *NUR 804 The Faculty Role in Higher Education and NUR 811 Qualitative Research Methods in Higher Education*: In *NUR 804*, the list of topics discussed during video conferences was expanded to include writing for publication and speaking at conferences. In *NUR 811*, developing a program of research with the dissertation study as a starting point was introduced.
- *NUR 809 State of the Science of Nursing Education Research*: Students analyze and synthesize nursing education research within the framework of competencies articulated by the National League for Nursing (facilitate learning, facilitate learner development and socialization, use

assessment and evaluation strategies, participate in curriculum design and evaluation of program outcomes, function as change agent and leader, pursue continuous quality improvement in nurse educator role, engage in scholarship) and identify gaps in present knowledge. Assignments require students to explore a topic for the dissertation and respond to the work of their peers.

Appraisal and Projection

Regular meetings of faculty at WCSU and SCSU has supported greater consistency in our work. Review of syllabi, shared assignments and grading standards, evaluation of student feedback, and shared assessment protocols exemplify productive peer review. These steps to improve the Ed.D. informed the development of a second collaborative program between WCSU and SCSU, to launch in 2019.

Focus Two: Assuring the sufficiency of faculty to advise Ed.D. students during the dissertation phase of their program

Description

Students in Cohort 1 were in dissertation phase by fall 2015. Cohort 2 (18 students) began working with their dissertation advisors in fall 2016. Committees of three members were constituted with faculty from WCSU and SCSU participating. A few students had outside faculty as their third committee member. This member usually had expertise in the area of research for the particular dissertation.

Findings and Analysis

Cohort 1 had a total of 13 students. Of the six from WCSU, four have graduated and one is on medical leave. Of the seven enrolled at SCSU, six have graduated and one is completing her dissertation.

Dissertation committees were constituted for the students in Cohort 1. Full-time faculty members were assigned to be a primary advisor for no more than one student and not assigned to be a second or third reader for more than two students. Faculty found these assignments to be reasonable, yet noted the time commitment required to prepare a student for proposal and dissertation defense.

Dissertation advisement meets the students' needs. Committee members may include full- or part-time nursing faculty (primary advisors and second or third readers) and one doctorally-prepared faculty outside WCSU or SCSU. Currently, SCSU has 18 doctorally-prepared nursing faculty to serve as advisors and/or committee members; WCSU has 14, representing an increase of two since our last visit.

Appraisal and Projection

Because the Ed.D. Coordinator advises all of the Ed.D. students, she supervises fewer dissertations to ensure that academic advising is effective, meets the students' needs for information and advice, and is compatible with program and course objectives.

Academic and dissertation advisement, constructed for an enrollment of 25 students per cohort, is sufficient to meet student need. Coordinators play an active role in screening dissertations and guiding dissertation chairs. The Chairs of the Departments of Nursing read each dissertation after the coordinators complete their review, adding to the quality control of the dissertation process.

Focus Three: Implementing program evaluation strategies and assessing learning outcomes of students in the Ed.D. in Nursing Education program

Description

Data has been collected to include student progress, student satisfaction with courses and program, and national learning outcomes and competencies.

Findings and Analysis

Student satisfaction with courses and program: Each year students select representatives and alternates to the Ed.D. Committee—two each from WCSU and SCSU—who bring concerns and suggestions to the committee. In addition, during Residencies 2 and 3, students discuss and record their satisfaction with courses and the program. In response to student suggestions, the Ed.D. Committee moved *NUR 812* from a summer to spring semester placement, effective in spring 2018. This will provide students more time to learn complex content, analyze quantitative research studies, and develop their own research studies. Surveys indicate students are highly satisfied with the Residency experience because they are able to strengthen connections with fellow students and faculty members, learn about expectations for the upcoming year, and get hands-on practice sessions with required technology.

Student learning outcomes, student achievement of program outcomes, comprehensive exams:

- *Cohort 2:* All students passed comprehensive exams administered in summer 2016 on first attempt. The exams tested students' achievement of competency in three components in the program (Foundations of Teaching in Higher Education, Specialization in Nursing Education, and Leadership in Nursing Education). Students were randomly assigned one question from each domain. Two graduate faculty members (WCSU and SCSU represented) read each unidentified student exam and independently rated the three sections using a standardized rubric. Students were required to receive a minimum of 15 points per question to pass. Cumulative scores ranged between 15 and 25.
- *Cohort 3:* Students will take the comprehensive exams in summer 2018.

Dissertations defended:

- *Cohort 1:* Ten students have successfully defended their dissertations. All of the studies addressed one or more of the National League for Nursing (NLN) Research Priorities in Nursing Education.
- *Cohort 2:* Of the eight WCSU students, one has successfully defended her dissertation. Four have defended their proposals and three are actively researching their dissertation topics, using the NLN Research Priorities in Nursing Education.

Appraisal and Projection

Every semester the joint Ed.D. Committee reviews the courses, the learning outcomes, and the course syllabi. The efforts of the faculty at both institutions ensure that outcomes in terms of achievement, independent learning, skills in inquiry, and critical judgment are consistent and appropriate for doctoral-level students. This claim is supported by the successful completion rate of 10 students in Cohort 1, the positive evaluations of the program by the three cohorts, and survey results of the perceptions of students' improvement in meeting the NLN Nurse Educator Competencies.

The WCSU Nursing Department reviews its courses every seven years as part of a formal report to the Board of Regents. This process, detailed in the WCSU Faculty Handbook, focuses on the careful examination of the integrity of all academic programs and charges departments under review to use findings from the assessment of student learning outcomes to develop and redesign curriculum.

Meeting the Standards

Standard One: Mission and Purposes

Description

Following the last visit, a new strategic planning process was initiated. During the process, the campus examined the mission, values and vision statements and recreated them. The new statements follow.

Western Connecticut State University changes lives by providing all students with a high-quality education that fosters their growth as individuals, scholars, professionals, and leaders in a global society.

To achieve this, we

- 1. Offer undergraduate and graduate programs that weave together liberal arts and professional education and instill a desire for life-long learning.*
- 2. Sustain a vibrant, inclusive campus that connects individuals through co-curricular programs, cultural events, and service to the community.*
- 3. Attract student-centered faculty who are passionate teachers and accomplished scholars.*
- 4. Establish partnerships that create opportunities for internships, research, and experiential learning.*

Values

Excellence. *We value outstanding achievement realized through persistence, effort, honest feedback, and self-reflection.*

Curiosity. *We value the questions that drive learning, innovation, and creativity, which serve as the beginning and the desired outcome of education.*

Dialogue. *We value the conversations that explore diverse perspectives and encourage shared understanding.*

Engagement. *We value the interactions with ideas, peers, and community that are essential to a vibrant university environment.*

Opportunity. *We value the possibilities created by affordable, accessible educational environments in which students can grow into independent thinkers and confident leaders.*

Respect. *We value the right of all people to be treated with dignity and fairness and expect this in our policies, classrooms, and community.*

Vision

Western Connecticut State University will be widely recognized as a premier public university with outstanding teachers and scholars who prepare students to contribute to the world in a meaningful way.

Findings and Analysis

The updated version reaffirms our commitment to the liberal arts, while acknowledging the importance of their relationships with our numerous professional programs. This blend is essential to our history and future. It meets regional needs while answering the question of our value to a new, diverse population of students. The addition of graduate programs acknowledges their presence and role in our future growth as we adjust to demographic shifts in the region and the need for increased education for working adults. Finally, we have looked outward to form new partnerships, which helps us to weave our educational goals into our community, reflecting our commitment to the region, the state, and ensuring continuous review of our offerings in light of trends external to our organization.

The university's mission is published online and in print, in both catalogs and the Faculty Handbook.

Appraisal and Projection

The new mission, values and vision will be supported by the Strategic Plan. The Implementation Committee, in concert with the President's Cabinet and appropriate departments and offices, has put the action steps in motion to support the new mission and move the campus toward realizing our vision. Throughout the implementation phase, the University Senate will be apprised of progress. In spring 2018, a dashboard will be added to the web page, updating the campus on progress.

Standard Two: Planning and Evaluation

Description: Planning

The Strategic Plan has five goals. (See Area of Emphasis about Strategic Planning for a full discussion). These goals align well with NEASC guidelines and our desire to become a more data-driven organization. Following the approval of the Strategic Plan, the template for annual reports of academic departments was changed to include reflection about how their work supports the Strategic Plan initiatives, making it a guiding document for all decision-making.

In parallel with the strategic planning process, the 2017 WCSU Master Plan was written in consultation with CSCU Board members, WCSU administration and faculty. With this newest update, the institution codified its intention to provide and maintain facilities that support recruitment, retention, and enrollment, while optimizing existing infrastructure and promoting sustainability. The Master Plan was a data-driven project, responding to existing and projected needs for the next 10 years. Some of the initiatives already completed or under way are:

- Construction of an \$8 million new Public Safety facility located on our Midtown Campus.
- Renovation of Higgins Hall to improve facilities for several academic departments. The \$22M renovation project is scheduled for completion in AY 2019-20.
- "Berkshire Hall Reimagined" to continue the transformation of the Midtown Campus. The project will replace inadequate dining facilities and create a more inviting community center.
- The Ansell Learning Commons, projected in the last Self-Study, offers tutoring in Business and Justice and Law. This is part of our effort to improve access to academic support on both campuses.

In 2014, the university contracted with MAP-Works to improve retention rates. The initiative was not successful, in part, because of the need to survey first-year students repeatedly and because students did not respond to offers of assistance with those challenges identified in the initial survey. After two years, we discontinued the partnership and moved the focus to strengthening FY and Academic Advisement. We are continuously evaluating the success of these initiatives.

Description: Evaluation

Academic program review occurs on a seven-year cycle. The University Senate recently approved an updated description of the process that specifically references E-Series documents and established a policy requiring external review. The Board of Regents has also revised its expectations for program review to include a summary of changes arising from assessment. These steps reveal the importance of assessment as an ongoing part of determining the effectiveness of our programs.

Specialized Accreditation: There has been a tradition at WCSU to seek relevant national accreditation for academic programs, which usually entails comprehensive assessment. We have been accredited by the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST) since our last visit.

Findings and Analysis

Two committees were formed to implement the Strategic Plan—the Implementation Committee and the Evaluation of Programs Committee. The Implementation Committee will ensure that action steps are achieved and respond to requests to adapt the plan. The Evaluation of Programs Committee will prepare the template that will be used for the evaluation of all programs. It will be reviewed and approved by the University Senate.

As a result of our experience with MAP-Works, we have taken several steps to improve data analysis and focus our efforts to support students. These efforts include:

- Revised annual report templates with retention data included
- Clarification of emergency processes (socio-emotional as well as financial)
- Routine review of DWF rates by Deans Council

Eight additional degree programs in two major areas are seeking national accreditation: Ansell School of Business from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), Visual Arts in the School of Visual and Performing Arts from the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), and Health Promotion Studies (CEPH) in the School of Professional Studies. We anticipate positive outcomes.

Academic Program Review: Recent reviews have resulted in the following actions/initiatives:

- Psychology Department began research to develop a graduate program about addiction studies.
- The Department of Writing, Linguistics, and Creative Process has redeveloped the undergraduate curriculum to consolidate the options.
- Communication consolidated options and revised core requirements to support preparation for the senior thesis.

While the Director of Institutional Research is able to keep up with current demands, recent changes to expectations for program review, annual reports, and assessment have increased the obligations of this position. As we move to Banner 9, we are constructing standard reports, which may alleviate some of this work load, but we may need a new position in the future.

The Assessment Committee's website was thoroughly revised in 2016-17, for the first time since 2008 (<http://www.wcsu.edu/assessment/>). Minutes of meetings and supporting documents are posted on the website, and longer documents are available on a password-protected server.

Appraisal and Projection

The Strategic Plan Implementation Committee will host a campus-wide meeting in November 2018 to discuss achievements, changes to the plan, and roadblocks to accomplishing the goals of the plan.

Once the template designed by the Evaluation of Programs Committee has been approved, six programs will pilot the process to evaluate their programs, adjustments to the template will be made as deemed necessary and then the campus will engage in the effort.

Higgins Hall renovation: Design of this building is focused on co-location of departments that have opportunities to grow through collaboration. Community spaces have also been prioritized in support of our Strategic Plan. Construction is set to begin May 2018 and completed for fall 2019 occupancy.

Other efforts in development to improve student success and implement the Master Plan are:

- \$7M renovation to White Hall to create a state-of-the art Nursing Education Center and a new home for the Education Department
- Improvements to the Athletic facilities to include the creation of a turf field, a cross-country course, a 400-meter outdoor track, facilities improvements to the natatorium to support program growth
- Development of a Health and Wellness Facility to consolidate and improve service delivery to the Health Services, Counseling, and Choices programs

The Provost has convened all faculty and staff who provide tutorial services to explore ways to streamline efforts such as training of tutors, scheduling of appointments for tutorial assistance, and the publicity of services. This collaboration promises more consistent support for students in all disciplines.

Standard Three: Organization and Governance

Description: Governing Board

The Board of Regents (BOR) governs 17 Connecticut State Colleges and Universities: the four CSUs, 12 community colleges, and Charter Oak State College. The 15 voting members of the BOR include nine gubernatorial appointees, four appointed by legislative leadership, and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Student Advisory Committee to the BOR. Six non-voting, ex-officio members complete the membership: The Commissioners of Education, Economic and Community Development, Public Health, Labor, and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Faculty Advisory Committee.

Description: Organization and Internal Governance

Dr. John B. Clark has been the President of WCSU since July 2015. He is the official spokesperson for university policy and other university matters and reports directly to the President of the BOR.

President Clark meets bi-weekly with his Cabinet which includes the Vice Presidents, the Associate Vice Presidents of Human Resources and Enrollment Services, and the Chief Information Officers.

The President meets monthly with his Council, a larger group, composed of senior administrators and deans. The name was changed from the President's Cabinet to the President's Council in fall 2017.

The organizational chart illustrates the operational structure of the university. Enrollment Services was added in spring 2013 and at that time included Admissions, Registrar, Financial Aid, Academic Advisement, and Publications and Design. In 2015, Graduate Studies moved from reporting to Academic Affairs to Enrollment Services. The Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs continues to work with the deans and graduate program coordinators on curricular matters. The Associate Vice President for Enrollment Services now serves on Graduate Council as a non-voting member.

Findings and Analysis

All University Senate resolutions since President Clark's entry in 2015 have been approved or noted. These resolutions included (but were not restricted to) the formation of ad hoc committees, new and revised policies and procedures, and the approval of curricular matters.

The most controversial component of the Strategic Plan is the Evaluation of Programs in Goal Five. Yet, even this is designed to be an inclusive process, from the development of evaluation questions to the scope of review (academic, managerial, and administrative programs). In tandem with this evaluation process is a call to strengthen the University Planning and Budgeting Committee (UPBC) so that it might

more effectively provide advice on program implementation and program discontinuation. UPBC is a University Senate Committee, with representation from all parts of the University.

Appraisal and Projection

WCSU has increased its use of assessment and program review as we grapple with demographic changes and regional financial challenges; yet even these steps are rooted in questions of quality first, then sustainability.

Standard Four: The Academic Program

Description: Assuring Academic Quality

WCSU offers 41 undergraduate degree programs with 86 major fields of study, 15 graduate programs and three graduate certificates. We maintain regional and national accreditation in seven programs. All undergraduate programs meet a minimum 120 credit requirement, and students are expected to complete at least 40 credits outside of the major as part of the general education program.

Degree Works serves as our degree auditing system. Implemented 2016-17, this program offers greater ease of navigation through curriculum and flags gaps in a student's progress to degree completion. While still new, we anticipate improved graduation rates with its implementation.

We continue to run two programs at Western at Waterbury, our off-campus site on the grounds of Naugatuck Valley Community College, through a Memorandum of Understanding signed annually by the two chief executive officers. The RN to BSN is the larger of the two programs, with three faculty members dedicated to its delivery. The BBA in Management provides two courses per semester.

Distance education: The WCSU Online Policy, approved by the University Senate in May 2013, explicates policies and procedures that help ensure online and hybrid courses at WCSU are of a high quality with respect to course design, delivery, student learning, and support. The Committee on Distance Education is responsible for evaluating and revising this policy.

Findings and Analysis: Assuring Academic Quality

Distance education: Since the last review, support for online and hybrid learning has focused on increasing resources for faculty teaching in these modalities. A survey of full- and part-time teaching faculty was conducted in 2015 to ascertain specific instructional technology and design needs. The results of the survey helped drive priorities in the areas of faculty support, student support, and the instructional technology requirements. In 2016, an instructional designer was hired to help provide this support. The designer coordinates with the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT), the Committee on Distance Education, the Information Technology and Innovation Department (ITI), Media Services, AccessAbility Services, and the WCSU Libraries to provide professional development opportunities in the areas of instructional technology, online and hybrid pedagogy, and course design. Professional development is offered in multiple formats (on campus, online and via on-demand videos).

The Assessment Committee's website was revised in 2016-17 (Details in Standard 2—Evaluation).

We partner with Danbury and Bethel high schools to deliver an Early College Program. Criteria for faculty eligibility, guidelines for approving courses/syllabi and assessment are established. Faculty liaisons from relevant departments work with high school partners to ensure consistency of curriculum

and evaluation and to review faculty credentials. These partnerships are a part of our commitment to the region, providing low-cost higher education curriculum to talented high school students.

Appraisal and Projection: Assuring Academic Quality

Assessment of majors is in the hands of faculty delivering the program. This is essential to our understanding of shared governance, academic freedom, and faculty expertise. Where appropriate additional accreditations are sought. Where additional accreditations are not appropriate, departments are encouraged to consult national disciplinary associations for guidance on program outcomes.

Our recently revised course-level definitions codify our expectations of the level of independent thinking and critical judgment required at each level. All degrees require work at all course levels.

Investment in instructional design support has driven the development of new feedback instruments for online courses, being piloted in 2018-19. Additional attention to online and hybrid learning will be the focus of the next five years as we work to meet the needs of our adult learners.

Description: Undergraduate Degree Programs

The 2013 Data First forms reported 912 bachelor's degrees in FY 2012 and 22 associate's degrees. Five years later there were 1,084 bachelor's degrees and 14 associate's degrees. Therefore, bachelor's degrees increased by 18.9% and the total of the associate's degrees decreased from 22 to 14. In fall 2017, the one-year retention rate for first-time full-time undergraduates was 73%.

The Connecticut State College and University (CSCU) Transfer and Articulation Policy (TAP) outlines the 60-credit associate degrees offered at Connecticut Community Colleges that are received by the Connecticut State Universities (CSUs) and Charter Oak State College (COSC). These Transfer Tickets, as the designated pathways for 22 disciplines are being marketed, are received at the CSUs and COSC as fulfilling the first 60 credits of a 120-credit bachelor's degree in the specified disciplines. All TAP agreements were developed and approved by qualified faculty representatives from each college or university, endorsed by the relevant departments and reviewed by all appropriate areas of governance.

At the undergraduate level, we foster an environment that supports innovation and growth as evidenced by the following changes since our last visit:

New undergraduate degrees

BA in Interdisciplinary Studies
BA in Digital Interactive Media Arts
BA in Applied Computing
BBA in Cybersecurity

Revised undergraduate degrees

BA to BFA in Musical Theatre (unique in the CSCU system, NAST accredited)
BA in Professional Writing, reduced the number of concentrations from 5 to 3
BA in Communication, reduced the number of concentrations from 4 to 2
BA in Computer Science became a BS in Computer Science

We have revised the following academic policies to clarify standards:

- [The definition of hybrid courses](#) was delinked from course levels and merely focuses on percent of instruction online.

- [Undergraduate course level definitions](#) were expanded to include types of activities expected, and
- [Clear credit hour definitions](#) were developed to differentiate BA, BS, BBA, BM and BFA.

Findings and Analysis: Undergraduate Degree Programs

New programs were developed to meet regional needs. Programs were revised to better serve our students and, in some cases, to follow guidance of disciplinary accreditation. Our revised program review protocol now requires some form of external review, bringing us in line with NEASC standards.

Appraisal and Projection: Undergraduate Degree Programs

The Strategic Plan includes two important components that will impact programs. First, Evaluation of Programs will assess quality, demand, and sustainability. This evaluation is likely to lead to program revisions to ensure we are poised to offer additional hybrid and online courses. Second, an increased focus on student success requires routine reviews to determine barriers to timely degree completion. Decisions about resource allocation for student success are likely to result from this review.

Description: General Education

WCSU launched a new general education program in fall 2016 with 10 competencies—one with three tiers—and a Culminating General Education Experience. The new curriculum separates learning outcomes from specific disciplinary domains with faculty encouraged to embed competencies in appropriate courses. Students may satisfy competencies in or outside the major. To ensure sufficient breadth, students must complete at least 40 credits outside the major. (A more detailed description of this can be found on the [Committee on General Education](#) webpage and in the Reflective Essay below).

Findings and Analysis: General Education

The competencies have been embedded in many areas leading to thoughtful revisions of some major course requirements. For example, students in the education major now have an oral communication goal embedded in pedagogy courses. This revision helped make room for electives and/or depth elsewhere, while making explicit an important skill for future teachers. Similarly, our requirement that students repeat at least three competencies (of their own choosing) encourages them to see how skills in their major discipline may connect to breadth requirements. For example, students in the BBA program are required to take Quantitative Reasoning twice—once in the math department and once in the major—allowing them to see connections that may not have been visible before.

Implementation of the First Year Navigation course (FY) as a stand-alone FY and as an embedded competency has created some challenges. Several members of the faculty have found the embedded version difficult to manage. We are developing additional stand-alone versions, particularly for students who have not declared a major. We will continue to review FY outcomes as we make adjustments.

In addition, Critical Thinking has met with concerns from faculty. There is a sense that the learning outcomes are too broad, and it is difficult to exclude a course from this definition. A faculty workshop is scheduled to discuss and resolve this concern. We will also be following up on the definition of Intercultural Competency, due to some additional concerns about definitions.

The largest challenge has come from departments who argue that the new model undermines liberal arts values. They have proposed larger revisions to the General Education Committee in a document referred to as Appendix E, still under review. Revisions will be achieved through governance processes.

Appraisal and Projection: General Education

As we move into year three of the new curriculum, plans for systematic assessment are being developed. We anticipate that the plan and initial assessments of all competencies will be complete by our decennial review. In addition, we are monitoring the courses approved to ensure sufficient breadth in the general education offerings. It is likely that there will be some revisions to the program as we move through assessments and workshops. These revisions would be a significant development in WCSU's commitment to continuous improvement. In adopting the new program, we have entered into an ongoing conversation about the goals of a general education curriculum and the process of change.

Description: Graduate Degree Programs

The 2013 Data First forms reported 155 master's degrees and 12 doctoral degrees. Five years later there were 137 master's degrees, 5 doctoral degrees, and 4 post-master's certificates. Therefore, master's degrees decreased by 11.6% and the total of other graduate awards decreased from 12 to 9.

The Vision Committee of the Graduate Council took as its charge a rewrite of the Graduate Catalog, using a common template for each program to provide consistency across programs when possible and to highlight important differences such as admission criteria and requirements.

Graduate Studies is now the Office of Graduate Admissions and is part of Enrollment Services, previously reporting to Academic Affairs. Administration of Graduate Assistantships moved to Academic Affairs.

The new graduate programs approved since 2013 include:

- Master of Science in Applied Behavior Analysis
- Master of Arts in Teaching with a Cross-Endorsement in TESOL
- Master of Science in Education, Literacy and Language Arts K-12
- Master of Science in Education, Special Education K-12

Curricular and standards changes in graduate programs since the 2013 review include:

- Changes to admissions requirements in MS in Nursing to require a minimum of two years of clinical practice prior to admission and to add an application deadline date, replacing rolling admission
- Revision of the Master of Arts in History to include three tracks: teaching history, conducting historical research, and an accelerated track
- Revision of the number of credits for the MBA: originally 30-54, now 30-37
- Change to the admission requirement to the MBA to be consistent with our other graduate programs: GPA requirement to waive the GMAT moves from a 3.33 to a 3.0
- Addition of a third concentration, Interdisciplinary Visual Arts, to the MFA in Painting and Illustration

The Master of Health Administration was suspended in 2014 with low enrollments and no faculty fully dedicated to the program. The Master of Arts in Teaching was suspended in 2013 and the MA in Earth and Planetary Sciences was suspended in spring 2017 due to low enrollments.

In fall 2017, the faculty in the Division of Justice and Law Administration and the Dean of the Ansell School of Business, after consultation with the Provost and the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, began the process to discontinue the Master of Science in Justice Administration.

Findings and Analysis: Graduate Degree Programs

Most departments have adequate full-time faculty for graduate instruction. Exceptions include the Biology graduate program, which is currently not admitting MA students. It will be replaced by a new program that shares faculty with Southern Connecticut State University. This will ensure adequate staffing and depth of expertise for students. Some of the most successful programs, such as Counselor Education, need additional resources. Economic conditions over the past several years adversely affected decisions to recruit and employ needed faculty. The program had to limit expansion. Due to its shortage of faculty, Counselor Education has an applicant waiting list.

The suspension of four graduate programs has resulted in two of them being reimagined— Master of Health Administration (MHA) and the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT). The MHA has improved enrollments and a recent tenure-track hire in the Ansell School of Business is dedicated to this program. The MAT will begin enrolling students in fall 2018.

The Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs convened a group of graduate program coordinators to review the application process for graduate assistantships, the way stipends were applied, and the possibility of new assistantships. This effort resulted in the following changes:

- Adapting application to assist Human Resources with their role in this process
- Reworking stipends to reflect levels rather than hours served
- Creating a template to explain the details of the particular assistantship and its level
- Adding several new assistantships

The Housatonic Awards, operated by the Alumni Writer's Cooperative (AWC) and the MFA, bring prestige to the MFA and its success helps with recruitment. Each year, the AWC receives nearly two-hundred submissions for the Awards.

Appraisal and Projection: Graduate Degree Programs

While the total number of degrees awarded has dipped since our last visit, in the last two years enrollment has been moving upward, and we anticipate that graduate education will be a bright spot in our future enrollments. The achievement of accreditation from AACSB will help WCSU to successfully recruit international students to the MBA when the program becomes intentionally full-time.

The MS in Integrative Biological Diversity will launch in spring 2019 with a target enrollment of 10 students. The psychology department is writing the curriculum for a program in Substance Abuse Studies. As we engage in evaluating programs, part of the Strategic Plan to be completed in 2018-19, departments will explore adding and/or reimagining graduate programs that can be sustained.

Since the last visit, Graduate Council has enjoyed sustained faculty leadership, a reframing of the Graduate Catalog, and the creation of the Catalog Committee as a subcommittee of Graduate Council.

Description: Integrity in the Award of Academic Credit

A fully revised and updated WCSU Online Policy from the Distance Education Committee, a Senate standing committee, was adopted by the Senate in 2013. We continue to review our online practices and have recently revised the definition of hybrid courses.

Findings and Analysis: Integrity in the Award of Academic Credit

Our online and hybrid curriculum is growing, and we have invested in more support and training to ensure that these modalities meet reasonable standards. The Distance Education Committee recently

selected the Online Learning Consortium/Open SUNY OSCQR Course Design rubric for self and peer evaluation of our online courses, adding it to the Course Design Institute and the CELT website.

A hybrid version of the Course Design Institute will run during spring 2018. Workshops have focused on training faculty in instructional technologies important to teaching and learning online, including features of the Blackboard learning management system, video capture and streaming, online meeting tools, and available technology tools. A series of workshops was developed with AccessAbility Services to teach faculty how to create accessible course materials.

Appraisal and Projection: Integrity in the Award of Academic Credit

A challenge regarding delivery of distance education is to make a self-assessment survey available earlier in the course registration process. Currently it is only available to registered students when they login to the course website. This may be too late for students to assess their readiness for online learning. We are exploring the possibility of an online orientation to online and hybrid learning to be taken prior to the course, as part of the course, or as entering students.

Standard Five: Students

Description: Admissions

Enrollment Services was formed in 2013 as discussed in the Area of Focus about Enrollment, Retention and Graduation. The composite SAT score (E-BR + Math) for incoming first-year students in fall 2017 was 1081. The Admissions Office enrolls transfer students for both the fall and spring semesters by actively recruiting at the 12 community colleges in the CSCU system as well as the five community colleges in the Hudson Valley in New York. Transfer students must have earned 12+ credits at an accredited two- or four-year institution with a minimum 2.0 GPA to qualify for admission.

Our Education Access and Achievement Program (EAP) provides developmental courses in writing and mathematics during the summer program to help students who are not fully prepared to complete college-level work. If these students successfully complete the summer program, they can be enrolled as full-time students, beginning in the fall semester.

The Graduate Admissions Office works with the graduate program coordinators to recruit and enroll students. The recruitment efforts are not as extensive as undergraduate and tend to be focused locally.

Findings and Analysis: Admissions

The fall 2017 undergraduate inquiry pool of 25,000 students was 40% larger than the undergraduate inquiry pool of fall 2016, resulting in an increased applicant pool. The Office of Enrollment Services has been utilizing student search (list purchases of SAT and ACT names) and digital marketing to expand our market. With faculty and through the Enrollment Management Committee, Enrollment Services works to evaluate the qualifications of the incoming class as they relate to existing standards. Placement tests are administered to some incoming first-time, first-year students in mathematics and writing. In fall 2016, enrollments were at 5826, dropping to 5721 in fall 2017. In fall 2018, the number fell again to 5664 with a net drop in three years of 162 students.

While undergraduate enrollments have not reflected gains since 2014, graduate numbers have increased. Total undergraduate FTE decreased by 5.3% from three years prior to current year (from 4659 to 4413); total graduate FTE increased by 26.6% from 237 to 300.

Appraisal and Projection: Admissions

As stated in the Area of Focus about Enrollment, Retention and Graduation, we expect to see undergraduate enrollment growth for fall 2018 as we recruit in all of New York and New Jersey. We anticipate seeking approval for two more health-related graduate programs in the next year.

Description: Student Services and Co-Curricular Experiences

Since 2013, a reorganization of the Division of Student Affairs includes the creation of a student life group (athletics, residence life, Center for Student Involvement, InterCultural Affairs) and a student “wellness” group (Health Services, Counseling Center, CHOICES, AccessAbility Services). New resources include Offices of Parent Services; InterCultural Affairs; and Student Affairs Assessment.

Summer orientation programs have been extended to include a two-day overnight program.

The Academic Advisement Center (AAC) has moved to the building that houses Admissions, Registrar, Financial Aid, and Bursar to create a one-stop atmosphere for new students.

The Office of Financial Aid and Student Employment created an in-house call center to service a heavy volume of calls during peak times. It is staffed by student workers, supervised by an Assistant Director.

The Office of AccessAbility Services provides accommodations and support services to approximately 400 students with documented disabilities to provide reasonable accommodations, advocacy, academic coaching, assistive technology, writing assistance, and support for foreign language and math alternatives (where appropriate). The office relocated during summer 2017 to better accommodate growth of programs and services as well as increase confidentiality.

During 2017, the Police Department actively participated in over 50 personal safety and security educational programs, including RAD (Rape Aggression Defense) with over 1,100 face-to-face contacts with students, staff and faculty.

In summer 2017, the Career Success Center, formerly Career Services, was reimagined and relocated to attract students, alumni, employers, faculty, staff, and parents, delivering on a strategy of the Strategic Plan to “support career development from admission to post-graduate placements.” The Center’s new strategic approach will be accomplished by helping students to:

- *Discover* career options and opportunities
- *Experience* hands-on, relevant learning, to include jobs, co-ops, internships, volunteering
- *Create* and take charge of personal branding, networks, products of introduction
- *Activate* career options and learn how to replicate this process

By Connecticut General Statute 10a-156a, all institutions of higher education were required to have by January 1, 2014 a trained threat assessment team. Our Behavioral Intervention Team is co-chaired by the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Vice President for Student Affairs. Members include the Director of Judicial Affairs, Chief of University Police, Dean of Students, Director of the University Counseling Center, and Director of Housing and Residence Life. The Counsel for CSU may be consulted as action plans are being developed. The mission of the Team is *to provide a coordinated and rapid response to students whose actions may be early warning signs of disruptive or violent behavior to self and/or others. Team members will implement a response to provide assistance to the individual student while mitigating risk in an effort to keep the Western community healthy and safe.*

Findings and Analysis: Student Services and Co-Curricular Experiences

The chair of the First Year Advisory Committee worked to expand the idea of the student's first year, making a strong case for the institution to understand it as beginning with Open House, extending through Accepted Student Day to Summer Orientation, Fall Orientation and the First Year Course. This has led to increased collaboration between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. We are working to continue this collaboration with the addition of the First Year Peer Mentor Program.

The Academic Advisement Center (AAC) has developed new programs and initiatives to promote retention and student success. These include:

- GEAR UP, an outreach program to prepare students for registration
- SAP Action Plans: Advisors work with students who have not met Title IV Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) to develop a plan
- Student Athlete Advisement Program: Provides intrusive advising for about 100 student athletes

The Career Success Center has launched a number of programs and initiatives to achieve its vision:

- Converted and upgraded capability to a new student/alumni interface called WESTCONN Works (powered by software Purple Briefcase), revamped all documentation and added online tools to enhance scheduling, assessments for career exploration, and integrative event tools
- Expanded all workshops with new on-line applications, created a customized "Career Success 101"

Behavioral Intervention Team: The size of the team allows for quick response. In the three years since its constitution, a response has been required on two occasions. The actions produced good outcomes.

AccessAbility Services continues to revise and implement practices, policies and procedures that are consistent with the ever-changing landscape of disability services. 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.

Oversight of the Department of Recreation, Intramurals and Club Sports has transitioned from the Center for Student Involvement to the Athletics Department.

Appraisal and Projection: Student Services and Co-Curricular Experiences

During spring 2018, an action step of the Strategic Plan, to "adopt a co-advising strategy that partners faculty advisors and the Academic Advisement Center" will be enacted. Two faculty members, one from Arts and Sciences and one from Professional Studies, will develop a plan that can be measured.

The mental health needs of students continue to grow more serious while the staff has been reduced through attrition by one full-time counselor. This year 36% of our students seeking counseling presented with suicidal ideation, representing an increase which is a trend nationally. The introduction of Titanium has been helpful in terms of maintaining records as well as with scheduling students.

Health Services has experienced changes in functions and staffing. Clearance of athletes has been transferred to the Athletics Department, and clearance of nursing students for their clinical semester has been shifted to an outside vendor. With the loss of an Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) a few years ago and the recent retirement of the director MD, Health Services has reorganized and is down from five staff to three with an APRN as the new director. We believe services will meet demand.

During 2017-18, three departments—Housing and Residence Life, Recreation, and the Center for Student Involvement—will use Skyfactor’s assessment portfolio to do an assessment of their services. Use of Skyfactor assessments will be rotated among various Student Affairs departments yearly.

Standard Six: Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship

Description: Faculty and Academic Staff

The number of full-time faculty averaged 216 over the past four years, and the range was 205 in FY 2016 to 222 in FY 2017. The mean credits taught per adjunct is 4.4. The mean head count of adjuncts was 414 over the same interval, and the FTE was 152 (where 12 credits equals one faculty FTE). The adjunct ranges were 379 (FY 2015) to 493 (FY 2017) for headcount, and 141 to 172 for FTE. Our Collective Bargaining Agreement establishes the adjunct ratio of 21%; we work hard to maintain it.

Between 67% and 76% of full-time faculty are either full professors or associate professors, with a low in FY 2017 and a high in FY 2016. The number of academic staff ranges from 14 to 16. These numbers reflect a stable environment since the last visit.

The number of new full-time appointments averaged 20.8 per year over the past four years, with a high of 37 in FY 2017 and a low of 14 in FY 2018. The number of full-time departures, excluding retirements, averaged 10.8 per year over the same interval, with a high of 14 in FY 2018 and a low of 9 in FY 2015. The number of full-time retirements averaged 9.2 per year over the same interval, with a high of 13 in FY 2016 and a low of 6 in FY 2015. The number of tenured full-time faculty averaged 147.5 over the same interval, with a high of 155 (FY 2016) and a low of 136 (FY 2018).

Departments are encouraged to update bylaws to explicitly define scholarly expectations and to include those definitions with Department Evaluation Committee (DEC) Reports. While teaching is the primary focus at WCSU, this does not lessen the importance of creative activity undertaken by faculty.

In fall 2016, the Provost created a series called *Scholars in Action* which consists of three panel discussions per academic year featuring our faculty. The first is a celebration of the Board of Regents Faculty Award winners. The second and third panels are about interdisciplinary connections, focusing on the research agendas of faculty from each of the four schools.

In summer 2017, the Provost compiled a booklet of the creative activity of the faculty during 2016-17 which was distributed at the Fall Opening Meeting. Included are lists of publications, recordings, exhibitions, presentations, performances, and invited talks arranged by school and department. The booklet will be prepared annually and serves as one way to “celebrate and promote the importance of faculty scholarly activities as part of the WCSU brand,” an action step of Goal 4 of the Strategic Plan.

Description: Teaching and Learning

Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT): The Advisory Committee worked with the Director to launch the Provost’s Teaching Award in spring 2017.

The university recognizes pedagogical innovation as a form of scholarship and several faculty members are actively engaged in efforts to determine best practices in their area. Recently our education programs adopted TEACH Live, which provides interactive classroom experiences for aspiring teachers. This approach is now being piloted for future administrators. The Nursing programs have new simulation labs to support their training. Faculty in the sciences have been employing clickers and

problem-based learning strategies, and our psychology faculty have been working with exam-wrappers to improve outcomes in psychology statistics classes. Faculty have the opportunity to apply for funding for retraining and several used these funds this year to explore new pedagogies in their field.

Findings and Analysis

Salaries have remained flat over the past several years due to negotiated concessions as a result of the budget crisis in the State of Connecticut. The March-April 2017 issues of *Academe* provide “The Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Professions.” Nine Category IIA public and private Connecticut institutions were compared, along with one nearby SUNY IIA college. WCSU ranked eighth of eleven in Full Professor and Assistant Professor average salary categories.

Pooling of tenure lines: In 2013, there was a practice of replacing tenure lines as retirements and resignations occurred. In 2017, there was a decision by the President’s Cabinet to pool the lines and make decisions based on the greatest need and the greatest potential for growth.

Appraisal and Projection

Currently, WCSU is able to hire qualified faculty to support its academic programs. The salary stagnation is a concern, but the quality of the teaching environment continues to meet high standards. With support for innovation, professional development, and relatively small class sizes, we have a lot to offer. As retirements continue, we will monitor the recruiting situation.

Standard Seven: Institutional Resources

Description: Human Resources

Human Resources policies and procedures are listed on its website, at the following link: <http://www.wcsu.edu/hr/policies-procedures/>. All of these items are up to date and changed immediately whenever necessary.

Although there have been wage freezes during the last few years due to the state’s economic challenges, employees will be receiving annual increases of 5.5%, beginning next year. These increases, along with the generous benefits package, provides evidence that compensation is adequate to attract and retain qualified administrators, faculty, and staff.

Findings and Analysis: Human Resources

In light of our fiscal challenges, university leadership has worked closely with our unions and other constituency groups to temporarily redeploy resources to other departments when needed and reclassify individuals, permanently or temporarily, who have absorbed added duties due to attrition.

The total number of employees averaged 1,013 over the past four years, ranging from a low of 990 in FY 2017 to a high of 1049 in FY 2016. 59% of all employees are full-time workers. On average, instructional staff constitute 59% of total staff.

Over the past four years, the mean headcounts of *non-instructional* employees are: 94.0—Service Occupations; 72.0—Office and Administrative Support; 47.2—Community, Social Service, Legal, Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports and Media; 39.8—Management Occupations; 36.5—Computer, Engineering, and Science; 34.5—Business and Financial Operations; 34.5—Natural Resources, Construction, Maintenance; 28.5—Student and Academic Affairs; 15.2—Librarians; 7.2—Library Technicians; and 6.0—Healthcare Practitioners and Technical.

A Welcoming Committee was instituted in the last year with mentors being assigned to all new employees upon their date of hire. Also, prior to the new hire's first day of employment, they are sent the following website link: <http://www.wcsu.edu/employeeguide/>

With recent fiscal challenges, Human Resources has been concerned about morale. Additionally, an action step of the Strategic Plan is to "schedule more frequent all-faculty and faculty/staff meetings to facilitate communication and engagement." In response, the university created a Social Committee of twenty employees from all areas of the university to plan two social events per semester. Events have included: Coffee & Chocolate Fountain, Ice Cream Emergency, and a picnic following the Fall Opening Meeting. The committee has received positive feedback about the events.

Appraisal and Projection: Human Resources

The Human Resources Department (HR) is currently engaged in digitizing record keeping and processes to be completed in fall 2018. Converting personnel files to a digital platform, will better protect them from possible fire and water damage, as well as theft.

At the same time, an ad hoc committee was formed with University Senate representation to develop a process to convert the materials for Promotion and Tenure applicants to a digital platform. The committee has tentatively recommended Blackboard for this purpose. By using Blackboard, applicants would have the ability to submit materials in an entirely new way (i.e. links to videos, articles, books, music). Also, it would give members of the Promotion and Tenure Committee the ability to view the materials off-site. If the University Senate approves the process, we anticipate launching it in fall 2018.

Description: Financial Resources

The Vice President for Finance and Administration oversees all aspects of the institution's Budgeting, Accounting, Purchasing and Financial Reporting. The fiscal policies and procedures ensure the integrity of the finances. The university's budget process includes reviews by upper management and the Board of Regents (BOR). The Fiscal Affairs Department produces monthly reports that compare actual expenses to the budgets and are reviewed by accounting and the various university department heads.

Findings and Analysis: Financial Resources

The President's Cabinet reviews the current financial situation along with enrollment trends and projections on a monthly basis and allocates the resources where they provide the best services for the students to increase enrollment and improve retention.

Appraisal and Projection: Financial Resources

The revenue projections continue to be a challenge since the state of Connecticut has reduced support for higher education. Revenue from enrollment growth has been declining due to lower enrollments. WCSU has been able to increase the tuition and fee rates to generate revenue. With recent hiring freezes/delays to offset budget shortfalls, we must continue to reevaluate positions before filling them. When open positions arise, these are reevaluated and funding is reallocated based on student demand.

To increase enrollment, WCSU initiated a pilot program in fall 2017 for the seven neighboring counties in New York which was expanded in fall 2018 to include all of New York and New Jersey. (See Area of Emphasis One: Goals for Enrollment, Retention and Graduation for details.)

The university has unrestricted reserves that are available to help balance fluctuations due to contribution variances resulting from state budget challenges. These reserves are also being used to implement the New York/New Jersey recruitment/enrollment tuition initiative.

The university has updated its Master and Strategic Plans. These are used as guides for spending decisions for capital spending and to guide evaluation of spending when developing operating budgets.

Description: Information, Physical, and Technological Resources

The Library's current vision and mission statements, adopted in March 2014, drive all departmental initiatives, including developments in space utilization, patron services, resource acquisition and discovery, and campus participation.

Physical Resources: See Master Plan summary in Standard 2.

Technological Resources: Microsoft Office 365 was shifted to a cloud-based deployment, affording a secure method for data storage, email communication, and an expanded collaborative toolset.

The Communication and Media Arts Department moved its live student-produced election coverage broadcasts to a new on-campus video production studio. The Vidyo videoconferencing system was discontinued in favor of WebEx, a system-wide initiative, now used by the Nursing Ed.D. program.

Classrooms are now being refreshed with lamp-less projector technology and integrated audio systems, further streamlining and enhancing our classroom technology.

A \$3 million wireless and wired network upgrade was completed in 2017 and brings a state-of-the-art Cisco network, increasing bandwidth and providing for a more stable and secure network. The upgrade to VOIP telephony will be finished in April 2018.

Support is augmented with Presidio Managed Services for network/telephone monitoring and with Blackboard Support for after-hours Help Desk support.

The Pharos (print management system) and Raiser's Edge (software to manage fundraising, monitor income and expenses, and generate reports) projects were both completed and are in use today.

Findings and Analysis: Information, Physical, and Technological Resources

Beginning in 2014, the Library has systematically reconfigured spaces to accommodate partner services on campus, creating multipurpose environments. Selected examples include:

- Relocation of reference collection, creating study space on main floor of Haas Library; careful weeding of collection at Young Library to create additional soft seating and group study space
- Establishment of a space for the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching in Haas Library
- Installation of Einstein Bagels, a dining option outlet, on main level of Haas Library
- Creation of the Writing Center in Haas Library
- Creation of the Tutoring Resource Center in Haas Library

Patron services: The library faculty continue to evolve direct services to students based on observed student behaviors and needs and review of the professional literature. Examples of changes include:

- Participation in the development and delivery of the Information Literacy Competency in the general education curriculum which has furthered involvement of library faculty in courses
- Transition to a single service point (removal of separate reference desk)
- Increased involvement in instructional design and open educational resources support with the addition of an Instructional Designer housed in the Haas Library

Circulation statistics for physical material continue to decline precipitously, mirroring a national trend in academic libraries.

Resource acquisition and discovery: After several consecutive years of budget rescissions and givebacks, the library materials budget is now lower than it was in 2007-08. Increases in database and serials costs, coupled with annual reductions in the library budget have necessitated a dramatic decrease in monies available for monographs (electronic and physical), media, and other one-time purchases. Even with the limited budget, however, a robust allocation formula predicated most specifically on total enrollment per major, graduate course offerings, and accreditation requirements, continues to be applied.

In 2015-16, the Library participated in a major project to migrate to a new library management system and discovery service with all 17 Connecticut State Colleges and University (CSCU) libraries; the system went live in January 2017. The new discovery layer provides a much-improved search and retrieval experience for patrons, and the library faculty and staff continue to learn the back-office functions to harness the advanced power of the state-of-the-art system. Also, the project expanded access to resources found in all 17 libraries, as opposed to just four in the prior system configuration.

The Library currently has three vacant faculty lines, two of which were not approved to fill and the third one – rewritten as a Student Success Librarian – frozen due to the current fiscal crisis. There is some optimism this latter position will be approved in the near future. We were able to recruit and hire the institution's one Instructional Designer to work more closely with instructional faculty.

Due to fiscal restraints, IT&I is operating at a six-year replacement cycle. Fortunately, advancements in technology (solid state drives, faster processors, increased RAM, increased storage capacity), enable hardware to meet the needs of our users for longer periods.

IT&I has engaged with Connecticut Business Systems to provide print management services which has further saved money, reduced printing, and reduced waste.

In addition to regularly replacing standard classroom and faculty technology, we have purchased two advanced Cisco telepresence classrooms for distance applications, purchased innovative technologies such as Microsoft Surface Hubs, virtual reality hardware/software, Nao robot, and provided all of our Honors students with Apple iPads.

Two high tech classrooms were also added to support appropriate pedagogical environments:

- The Language Resource Center was implemented using 21st Century Classroom funds in 2016. This is equipped with high-end language teaching software and brand new hardware.
- The Communication and Media Arts program has a new Video Production Studio with many upgraded technologies incorporated into this teaching facility providing our students an experience with equipment they will encounter in the professional field.

IT&I has completed a survey that was distributed to all faculty, staff and students and prioritized the transformation of the Help Desk and redesign of the entire website as a result of that feedback.

IT&I engaged with a third party to assess and make recommendations for improving our website. A design/theme was selected and a content management system has been deployed, giving departments the ability to manage their own content.

In summer 2017, we transitioned to a new Help Desk system (Samanage). We appointed a full-time IT staff member to manage the area and we expanded our Help Desk hours. We also contracted with Blackboard Support, providing weekend and evening support.

A \$6 million wired/wireless network upgrade was completed, giving the university a reliable network.

Appraisal and Projection: Information, Physical, and Technological Resources

The director and library faculty are focused on aligning efforts with the Strategic Plan. Efforts include:

- Delivery of supplementary content to students in their BlackBoard course shells
- Greater involvement in First Year through participation in any future peer mentoring programs
- Increased attention to supporting and expanding the adoption of open educational resources (OER)
- Greater involvement with majors after consultation with academic departments

The Strategic Plan has as an action step to “add a feed to the WCSU home page that regularly rotates stories that highlight accomplishments and activities of our students, faculty, staff, and alumni.” This will be achieved through the overhaul of our websites, based on input from a recent branding review.

In terms of physical resources, efforts over the next 10 years to sustain service delivery to improve enrollment and retention are:

- Construction of a new Business School
- Expansion of the O’Neill Center
- Expansion of the Westside Athletic Center (Stadium)
- Reprogramming of the existing Midtown Student Center to create a new academic building
- Renovations to Old Main Administration to improve infrastructure
- Renovations to Newbury Hall to create a hybrid living facility

IT&I continues converting Financial Aid processing, Bursar and Registrar functions to digital processes. The next phases of the Banner Modernization and Standardization project will complete these tasks.

Standard Nine: Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure

Description

Expectations for behavior of both students and employees are codified in the university’s mission, values and vision. Foundation members sign an ethics statement. Student behavior is governed by the Student Code of Conduct revised since 2013 and approved by the Board of Regents. WCSU employees are bound by the state code of ethics and by conflict of interest rules.

Findings and Analysis

Our annual Affirmative Action Plan documents the effectiveness of non-discrimination and equal opportunity principles. In 2012, female and minority representation was at 21%; it remains the same in 2017. Our faculty and administrators do not fully reflect the diversity of our student population.

Four complaints have been filed with the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) since 2014. Three cases were dismissed and in the fourth case CHRO released jurisdiction and it was settled by the parties. Between fall 2013 and fall 2017, the following number of grievances has been filed by each bargaining unit: Administrative & Residual- 1; AAUP- 1; Clerical- 1; Police- 0; Maintenance- 6; and SUOAF- 14.

Human Resources continues to have a good working relationship with each of the bargaining units, and often is able to resolve issues before they are filed as a grievance. Even though the number of SUOAF grievances is very high (14) compared to other bargaining units, most of these grievances have been filed by individuals who argue they are working out of class. Many of these situations resulted in reclassifications or assignments to temporary additional duties pay. This happens when budget constraints result in unfilled positions, with that work still needing to be accomplished.

In the last Self-Study, we reported a need to update the Emergency Notification System which has been accomplished. We can now accommodate extended visitors, such as contractors, who would not be classified as student, faculty, or staff in Banner.

Appraisal and Projection

The Office of Diversity and Equity launched the first Diversity Council in December 2017. Its members will develop initiatives to recruit and retain underrepresented minority groups at all levels of the university. Members will also identify partnership opportunities with the business community and assist the Office of Diversity and Equity to identify key trends, changes, and developments in business.

While the website is comprehensive, there is a need to provide updates and greater consistency and ease of navigation. The branding effort with EFK Consulting will provide templates for greater consistency. IT&I is working to provide important updates.

The Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogs are now fully online. Undergraduate and graduate program sheets are available online. Undergraduate program sheets with Four-Year Plans are being updated to include the new general education program requirements.

The Ad Hoc Committee on the Faculty Handbook, a committee of the University Senate, has provided recommendations which have been approved by the Senate. The work to streamline the document based upon these recommendations will be completed by the Office of Academic Affairs.

Reflective Essay: Educational Effectiveness

In the last four years, we have engaged in a strategic planning process which produced new mission, values, and vision statements as well as five strategic goals to be completed by 2020. As the campus was developing the goals, a new master planning process was initiated. A design team, commissioned by the CSCU system, brought expertise about specialized facilities (arts and science labs) and interviewed constituents from all parts of WCSU. Enrollment goals, new curricula, and better use of spaces to support commuter and residential students informed decisions to create the Plan.

To preview, our discussion about what our students gain, how they are assessed, how assessment is measured, and what constitutes satisfactory levels of achievement is framed by the goals of our Strategic Plan. We conclude by indicating how we are positioned to realize our vision.

What Students Gain as a Result of Their Education

In this first of four sections, we will focus on the recently restructured general education program, the First Year Competency within this program, assessment, library services, orientation, and career services in terms of the first two goals of the Strategic Plan. Throughout the strategic planning process, the intention has been to have these two goals—one about curriculum and one about support for its delivery—resonate one with the other. Initiatives are co-coordinated, with planning teams comprised of faculty, support services, and student affairs.

Description

Goal one of the Strategic Plan is to “create, strengthen, and enhance programs and curricula that are responsive to the needs of a diverse community of learners.” The process to achieve the new general education program is outlined in the Area of Emphasis about Assessment.

The change from a distribution model to course-embedded competencies has achieved a greater commitment to the general education outcomes by the faculty in all four schools. In the prior program, Arts and Sciences contributed most of the courses to the general education curriculum. Now there are competency course designations in all four schools. The three-tiered writing requirement has encouraged more writing in disciplines. The Culminating General Education Experience was included in the framework, in part, because of WCSU’s long-standing commitment to capstone experiences in the major. Now, students understand this experience as the culmination of their learning in *and* across disciplines. We anticipate that this increased participation in delivering general education will improve understanding of and commitment to its value in the undergraduate experience.

Critical to the success of our diverse student population is the addition of a first-year navigation course (FY) to the general education curriculum. In our current model, courses designated as FY may appear in any discipline, sometimes in stand-alone FY courses, sometimes embedded in existing courses.

In 2015-16, we piloted the FY outcomes in 14 courses. Through our faculty workshops, instructors and departments redesigned additional courses to meet the FY outcomes. In 2016-17, we offered 60 FY courses, ranging from .5 to 3 credits. Major-specific courses were offered in Biology, Communication, Pre-Secondary Education, History, Marketing, Math, Music, Pre-Nursing, Professional Writing, Psychology, and Theatre Arts. Non-major courses were offered in Communication, History, Humanistic Studies, Philosophy, Psychology, and Writing. For fall 2017, we scheduled 49 courses, several with multiple sections to make a total of 66 FY-designated course sections. We continue to recruit new offerings and anticipate a continued expansion across all disciplines in the years to come.

To support the decentralized approach to FY, we have developed a repository of assignments to which all faculty have access and to which all may contribute. With over 100 assignments, syllabi, and tips contributed by instructors of First Year designated courses, faculty have a great resource from which to develop their courses. The assignments and activities emphasize group work (belongingness), confidence building, and self-advocacy. The videos created by student interns are also featured in the resource as springboards for discussion.

The repository also serves as a central information point for instructors, including research on high impact teaching strategies, updates on the FY Program progress, announcements to be shared with students, and national FY resources. The Blackboard component for all FY courses includes information for students about academic resources and campus services.

Having reviewed the success rates of students in the FY program in the last year, and in line with the Strategic Plan, a team of faculty involved in teaching FY have been assembled to develop an FYPlus for those students who are at the highest risk of ending up on academic probation. While the FY provides information about navigating the university and developing habits of mind to be successful in the college classroom, our students also need assistance to successfully apprehend the content of some courses. In fall 2017, an ad hoc committee of the various areas that offer tutoring was gathered to develop a systematic plan for access and support of these important resources. In addition, faculty liaisons have been selected to help bridge the gap between our professional and faculty advisors.

All courses in the new general education curriculum have learning outcomes that must be included in the course outline and on the course syllabus. Central to the philosophy of this curriculum is that a liberal arts degree reflects habits of mind and modes of inquiry that can be developed in any discipline. By putting these common learning outcomes on all syllabi, students are encouraged to see that, while subjects vary, reasoning well is transcendent. (The complete list of competency definitions and learning outcomes is on the Committee on General Education website. The document is entitled: [General Education Competencies Defined](#). Summaries are included in the undergraduate catalog.)

In separating outcomes from disciplines, we have seen some thoughtful implementation of this curriculum. Though many competencies land in predictable places, new connections between modes of inquiry are being made. For example, Everyday Chemistry addresses both Scientific Inquiry (SI) and Critical Thinking (CT). Students are exploring hypothesis development and testing, while at the same time examining how our culture talks about science beyond the investigation. In bringing these two competencies together, the chemistry faculty have made clear the distinctions between SI and CT, and broadened the conversation about science. Organizational Behavior (in the Management program) now directly addresses CT. Students in the Business program have often felt a separation from the liberal arts components of their degrees. Making CT visible in their major, by way of shared learning outcomes, strengthens their connection to the critical thinking strategies that they also encounter in their courses outside of the major.

WCSU made a conscious decision to allow students to select competencies in disciplines of interest to them and avoid setting credit numbers in any particular discipline. The definitions themselves force some breadth of experience, but it is important to note that we require students to take 40 credits outside of the major, to ensure that no one can satisfy all competencies in their major or a single discipline. We also require students to repeat three competencies, in addition to the required writing tiers. This encourages students to see a competency from multiple disciplinary perspectives.

A brief scan of the disciplines where competencies are embedded demonstrates the breadth of curriculum students are likely to encounter.

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| First Year Navigation (FY) | Biology, Communication, Education, Health Promotion Studies, History, Marketing, Music, Nursing, Psychology, Social Sciences, Writing |
|----------------------------|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| Creative Process (CP) | Art, Communication, English, Humanistic Studies, Philosophy, Psychology, Theatre, Writing |
| Critical Thinking (CT) | Chemistry, Communication, English, History, Humanistic Studies, Management, Philosophy, Political Science, Social Work, Spanish, Theatre |
| Health and Wellness (HW) | Health Promotion Studies, Psychology |
| Intercultural Competency (IC) | World Languages, Education, History, Humanistic Studies, Marketing, Non-Western Cultures, Philosophy |
| Information Literacy (IL) | Communication, Education, English, Health Promotion Studies, History, Management Information Systems, Philosophy, Political Science, Social Work, World Languages and Literatures |
| Oral Communication (OC) | Art, Communication, Education, Humanistic Studies, Philosophy |
| Quantitative Reasoning (QR) | Computer Science, Finance, Mathematics |
| Scientific Inquiry (SI) | Astronomy, Biology, Chemistry, Meteorology, Physics, Psychology, Social Work |
| Writing Tier 1 (W1) | WRT101 Composition I only |
| Writing Tier 2 (W2) | Biology, Communication, Education, English, History, Humanistic Studies, Justice and Law Professions, Philosophy, Social Work, Sociology, Spanish, Writing |
| Writing Tier 3 (W3) | Most majors |
| Culminating General Education Experience (CE) | Most majors |

The impact of this change will not be fully understood in terms of outcomes until we've had a full rotation (students graduating who entered under this model) in 2020. However, early signs are that students are having less trouble completing their general education curriculum than they were in our older, distribution model approach. There were two main challenges with the old model: 1) There were no learning outcomes so it was difficult to predict what would be in or out of a category. For example, if you needed five humanities courses, and history is a humanities discipline, students (and faculty) were often tripped up when some history courses were included and others were not. 2) The search for general education courses was a challenge because they were not pulled out as a category at registration. Now students can search by the competency designations.

Disciplinary preferences are likely to emerge, but it is too soon to tell. Our early adopters (Philosophy and Humanistic Studies, for example) have seen an increase in enrollments, but this may only be about being first. As all departments complete their plans for general education offerings, we will be better able to observe the larger impact.

A review of our E-Series documents shows that WCSU has moved from an attitude of compliance to a broad commitment to assessment. All of our degree programs have SLOs, which can be found in the undergraduate and graduate catalogs. All departments have assessment plans and many programs have implemented changes to curriculum based on those assessments in the last five years.

Sample changes at the undergraduate level since our decennial review:

1. Computer Science added a Major Field Test to their assessment plan and aligned their outcomes with ABET standards.

2. Biology added a cognate requirement in statistics for all biology majors, to address a gap in quantitative reasoning skills.
3. Music developed an enhanced version of the first-level music theory course to support incoming students with little sight reading background.
4. Business added MKT210 Global Environment of Business as a result of low scores on a global and cultural understanding assessment.
5. Nursing changed NUR105 Medical Math from an elective to a requirement to support student success in later courses on research and in pharmacology.

In addition, nearly all of our professional programs have disciplinary accreditation, and most of our traditional liberal arts programs are aligned with national standards of their disciplinary bodies. We believe that these alignments ensure that our students have curricular experiences that represent best practices and current thinking in the discipline.

Sample changes at the graduate level since our decennial review:

1. The MBA adopted several schedule changes to support better sequencing for students and added a required course in Leadership to support the learning outcomes focused on leadership and teams.
2. The MS in Counselor Education embedded the sample questions from the Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Exam (CPCE) in classes throughout the program to support improved outcomes on the exam, which is a key assessment tool for this program.
3. The Ed.D. in Instructional Leadership increased the number of writing assignments and adopted a common rubric to strengthen the consistency in expectations across courses.

In addition, we have reimagined our Master of Arts in Teaching to include training for English Language Learners in all areas, with an optional TESOL certification. This meets the needs of our adult learners and the regional demand for English Language instruction. For the MBA, we reduced program prerequisites from 27 to 7 credits, opting for learning modules in key areas. This, coupled with scheduling that allows students to complete the program in one year, has helped us to respond to the needs of adult learners and lay the groundwork for international recruiting.

Goal two of the Strategic Plan is to “develop and implement processes, facilities and support services to meet the needs of a diverse campus community.” The Library has systematically reconfigured several spaces to accommodate partner services on campus, creating multipurpose environments that meet the academic needs of students and faculty. These include additional study space in Young and Haas Libraries, creation of the Writing Center and the Tutoring Resource Center in Haas Library, and the construction of space for the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) in Haas Library.

An expanded New Student Orientation was developed to further the co-curricular goals of the program. Objectives include:

- Acquainting new students and their families with the mission, programs, and services of WCSU
- Informing students and their families about campus services and resources that will enhance students’ academic success and overall college experience
- Providing students and their families the opportunity to interact with other students, faculty, and staff of WCSU
- Helping students to begin to feel connected to the WCSU community and feel confident and excited about their college choice

The orientation schedule was redesigned to include more students and allow more time for interaction and engagement. We increased faculty involvement and revised our methods for delivering academic

information; we expanded training of Student Orientation Leaders; and we revised the parent programming to maximize the dissemination of information and their own engagement.

Finally, we added a session for all students attending Orientation, conducted by the First Year Coordinator and the Registrar. The session included an overview of the academic requirements of all degrees, including general education requirements, definitions of several common terms, and the path students must take to graduate in four years.

As orientation and FY continue to evolve, we will continue to support strong collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs to ensure consistent messages and efficient use of resources. This is likely to lead to some staffing and organizational changes in the next five years.

The Career Success Center, under new leadership beginning in fall 2017 has added the following programs to further assist students with job placement:

- Acquired and integrated a brand new suite of online tools to engage and help students plan for and maintain the career path: Optimal Resume, Candid Career, Am I Job Ready/PAN Soft Skills, Brand Yourself, Focus 2 (Assessment and Career Planning), Liquid Compass (Health Care Jobs), Vault (Career Intelligence) and Buzzfile (Job Research)
- Implemented a university-wide “Experiential Education Working Group” to engage faculty and staff with ways to promote and make transparent opportunities for experiential education
- Created and marketed career support programs in partnership with a major employer in Danbury and alumni which focused on improving skills for minorities in technical fields, soft/essential skills, as well as the practical components of resumes, interviewing, branding, and career advice
- Extended lifetime access services to alumni; increased Career Success Center accessibility by adding two-campus support and daily “Walk-in hours”

Findings and Analysis

The restructured general education curriculum is meant to foster flexibility for students, allowing them to pursue quantitative reasoning skills in math, science, psychology, or finance as an example. It also gives greater clarity to the purpose of the curriculum by ensuring that there are common and assessable learning outcomes for all of the general education curriculum.

Initial review of FY outcomes included a pre/post survey to measure students’ levels of confidence and topics of concern and a pre/mid/post series of reflective assignments. Both the surveys and the reflective assignments revealed the same primary factors of concern for our students: time management, stress/life balance, and the need for better study skills. Students were also concerned about getting involved on campus and managing money.

These assessments have led us to initiate the development of more workshops on these topics, with the goal of having peer mentors direct students to those workshops. This is currently being developed and will be implemented in another year.

Additional analysis of the first FY cohort shows that students who completed an FY in the fall with at least a C (or P) were retained at a 9% higher rate than those who did not complete an FY. Of that group, 90% finished the year with a GPA above 2.0 and earned 24 or more credits at a 10-15% higher rate than those who did not successfully complete the FY. We found similar results for the second fall cohort.

These findings have helped us focus our efforts on the structure of the planned FYPlus for at-risk students. For all students, the addition of peer mentors is meant to support both a sense of belonging and participation in student support services. For the at-risk population (B- or less average in high school), enhanced advising supports are being deployed.

The reorganization of the Library has led to a campus hub of activity. The central location of both research resources and student support services (with the benefit of a coffee shop) is improving the visibility of these services. We are better organized for student success than we were in 2013.

A survey of orientation student participants showed an overwhelmingly positive response to the experience. In both years, over 90% of students reported agreeing or strongly agreeing that they felt confident in their decision to attend WCSU. We are now working to strengthen the carryover from Orientation to Welcome Week, now called LEAP (Learn, Engage, Adapt, and Plan), in the fall.

In 2018-19, the entire university will be engaged in evaluation of all programs (academic, managerial, and administrative). To prepare, an Evaluation of Programs Committee has spent the last year developing appropriate criteria for evaluation. These criteria are currently being reviewed by the University Senate. After we have arrived at appropriate criteria, chairs, directors, and deans will be tasked with reviewing their offerings. At the end of this task, we hope to have a clear map of programs that should be revised, grown, or retired. In anticipation of this exercise we have developed templates regarding enrollment, retention, and graduation rates by degree. This information provides a baseline from which to situate our understanding of student demand and stumbling blocks in terms of degree programs. Taking the same steps to review co-curricular offerings, centers, and academic support systems will help WCSU move from reaction to planning.

Assessment of Student Learning

Description

The general education learning outcomes ensure that there is a shared curricular goal for general education, something that did not exist at WCSU five years ago. Planning for systematic assessment of these competencies is now under way. Thus far, we have held one retreat to share experiences of teaching the competencies in year one of the general education curriculum. Focused on approaches to assessing each competency, faculty identified two competencies that need further review: Critical Thinking and Intercultural Competency. A follow up workshop on Critical Thinking is scheduled for May 2018. At the same time, W1, W2, and QR rubrics have been developed through the General Education Committee and the Math and Writing departments. We anticipate first assessments in fall 2018.

In the majors, the strongest indicator of the successful adoption of SLO and assessment plans can be seen in the increased number of accredited programs at WCSU. Since our last visit, our Theatre program has been accredited by NAST; we have had site visits and anticipate a positive result from CEPH for Health Promotion Studies, NASAD for our Art programs, and AACSB for Business. None of these efforts would have been successful without the development of SLOs that align with national and international standards and our ability to demonstrate students' achievement in meeting them.

In those areas not pursuing disciplinary accreditation, assessment plans are also in place and several departments have revised learning outcomes in the last five years. Through the program review process, Psychology aligned outcomes with the American Psychological Association, Communication with the National Communication Association, and Computer Science with ABET. Each has made

changes in curriculum to ensure alignment with SLOs. For Psychology, changes have been made to the assessment instrument, and they have embedded Supplemental Instruction in their statistics sequence. Communication added a discipline-specific writing course to their major and adjusted the levels of theory and research. Computer Science became a BS and then a new BA in Applied Computing was developed to meet the needs of students for whom theoretical computing is too abstract.

Most impressive was the transformation of our CAEP/NCATE accredited education degrees. For many years our students have struggled with Praxis exams. Faculty from Arts and Sciences and Education worked to embed Praxis review into the curriculum and establish a Praxis Study Center. The results for elementary education this year were:

1. Elementary Ed Multi subject Math went from 70% pass rate to 100%
2. Elementary Ed Multi subject Reading went from 90% to 100%
3. Elementary Ed Multi subject Science went from 70% to 89%
4. Elementary Ed Multi subject Social Studies went from 70% to 89%
5. Foundations of Reading pass rate is 94%
6. Music Education pass rate is 100%

Findings and Analysis

While we are still in the early stages of the general education curriculum, the very process of arriving at these definitions has achieved two important outcomes for the university. The first is a spillover effect to the majors. In revising courses with SLOs for general education, several departments reviewed their SLOs in the major as well. This has led to greater consistency in learning outcomes in the majors than was present five years ago. A second example of change can be seen in a revision of our Curriculum Approval Process (Sharepoint) to include an easy pathway for revising course outlines to include learning outcomes. This suggested revision was developed because chairs were asking for instruction about how to record these changes. The University Senate approved the change.

The second is in defining the Culminating General Education Experience (CE). While the university has not yet approved a list of statements about the difference a WCSU degree can make in a student's life, the CE definition (generally assigned to major capstone courses where disciplinary success is also measured), is a start toward that claim. We prepare students to navigate myriad sources of information, synthesize arguments and draw conclusions, and communicate those ideas to others.

In the majors, our assessment practices are strong and have been made more visible in the department annual reports and the program review process. Linking general education to the major through the Culminating General Education Experience offers an additional reinforcement of the need for consistent review of our outcomes. Close scrutiny of the SLOs suggests that we still have work ahead. While we are doing a lot of good work, many departments would benefit from some coaching on the writing of stronger and yet more concise learning outcomes. This refinement is likely to strengthen the assessments as well. Planning for this coaching is on the horizon for 2018-19.

Measures of Student Success

Description

As discussed in Section One of this document, we have not yet met our retention (78%) and six-year graduation targets (50%), but we have made progress in the last year and anticipate continued improvement in the next five-year cycle. Since 2014, one-year retention rates for first-time full-time

students ranged from 73% to 76% (averaging 74.3%); six-year graduation rates ranged from 42% to 49%, with an average of 45.5%.

Over the past two years, the six-year graduation rates for transfer full-time (non-first-time) students increased from 45% to 54%, and the six-year graduation rates for transfer part-time students increased from 28% to 42%. (IPEDS Outcome Measures Survey is only two years old.)

We can examine the subsequent enrollment and degree attainment of students who transferred out (without earning a WCSU degree). Of the first-time full-time bachelor's seeking students entering six years ago, 28% transferred out, including 19% who received a degree from a different institution. Similarly, 18% of the transfer full-time bachelor's-seeking students transferred out, including 10% who received a degree from a different institution.

Over the past four years, percentages of students employed in Connecticut approximately nine months after receiving degrees averaged 71.3 for bachelor's degree and 66.9 for master's degree recipients. Those percentages understate the true employment rates, because they do not include those who are self-employed and employed outside Connecticut (WCSU sits on the New York border and regionally there are many who commute to Westchester and New York City).

Findings and Analysis

Reflecting on the steps we have taken to improve our outcomes, we are excited to see we are moving in the right direction. Although it is too soon to measure its full impact, the First Year program, revised general education program, and publication of Four Year Plans appear to be inching our undergraduate retention rates upward. For years we have moved between 73-74% first-year retention rates, but these efforts are meant to get us to a steady 78%. We hope to see a strong impact on six-year graduation rates in the next two to three years (2-3% improvement). In addition, the implementation of Degree Works is simplifying advising and has the potential to reduce errors in planning by students and faculty.

Acting on initial results from the FY, we are developing the FYPlus program, adding peer mentors to FY classes and defining enhanced advising strategies for those at risk of falling through the cracks. The impact of these efforts will be visible in a few years, but the larger story is that we are working with data to make changes to what we do. This is truly a sea change at WCSU and points to a better future.

At the graduate level, our retention rates also fluctuate in the 70-80% range (90% for the Ed.D. programs) and graduation rates fluctuate depending on the program, but average around 65-75%. The shifting focus of our graduate degrees from on-ground to hybrid and toward more professionally focused programs is likely to yield shorter time-to-degree completion. We have not yet set targets for this but will review it in the next evaluation period.

The success of our accreditation efforts are also points of pride. They support our claims of excellence, which is important for our students and our future. As recruiting becomes more competitive, we must be able to substantiate our claims and disciplinary accreditation helps us do so. We anticipate increased applicants to our graduate and undergraduate business programs (1-2%) with the AACSB announcement, and the ongoing accolades for our nursing and arts programs are helping us to establish a reputation for quality in the region.

The recent re-imagining of the Career Success Center should help us improve our job placement outcomes as well. Tracking these outcomes is somewhat hindered by our proximity to New York (we

don't have access to data there); in-state placements are 71% for undergraduate and 69% for graduate. Our goal is, of course, 100%, but realistically our plans are to increase engagement with the Career Success Center. At a university like WCSU, we find that many students cannot participate in internship opportunities because they are already working. The next steps include helping working students connect their studies to their work lives to differentiate themselves in a job pool and establishing a course to better prepare students for the job application process. The steps taken so far have increased student engagement with the Career Success Center, but we are not yet satisfied with the results.

Satisfactory Levels of Student Achievement on Mission-Appropriate Student Outcomes

Description

Western Connecticut State University changes lives by providing all students with a high quality education that fosters their growth as individuals, scholars, professionals, and leaders in a global society.

This mission carries with it two special obligations. The first springs from our desire to “change lives.” This bold claim reflects our commitment to access for all students. In our admissions standards, providing both traditional and alternate pathways for students, we demonstrate our commitment to access. In establishing the first year program, and reimagining our student support programs, we continue to reflect on our results and strengthen our supports to meet the needs of students from varied backgrounds. The last five years have been characterized by transitions in curriculum and student support structures to help us create a positive learning environment meant for all students. We anticipate that these supports will help us improve our retention and graduation rates.

The second obligation is in our commitment to quality. This commitment has been demonstrated in strengthened assessment plans, defined outcomes for the general education curriculum, and successful applications for disciplinary accreditation in several areas. We have also added or revised several degrees to align with new disciplinary trends and clarify pathways for students.

Many of our programs focus on connecting the classroom to the field. In the education programs, we have revised the curriculum to add time in schools earlier in the four-year cycle. In Health Promotion Studies and Social Work, students complete full-time internships. Nursing, of course, has always been clinically oriented, but our upgraded SIM labs enhance knowledge application.

Internship opportunities exist in all majors, though they are not as consistently used throughout the university. However, in nearly every major, students have the opportunity to do research, and many participate in presenting that research on campus at Western Research Day (WRD), and professional conferences. Whether in the classroom, the field, or through our many discipline-oriented clubs, we are working to engage our students in applying their knowledge.

This is particularly appropriate to a university serving first-generation college students. The point of reference for these students is the career after college. Our task is to help them see the value in the full liberal arts experience. These applied experiences help us make the case for the entirety of the undergraduate experience, not just the career-focused pieces.

Like much of higher education, we have experienced declining enrollments in our traditional graduate liberal arts degrees (Biology, English, Earth and Planetary Sciences, History, and Mathematics). We have responded by suspending enrollments in three graduate programs with the hope that they can be

reimagined for greater success. We do not serve our graduate students well with low enrolled courses. The hallmark of excellence in graduate education is collaboration with peers. While the decision to suspend enrollment is a difficult one, we anticipate some reimagining of our offerings that will lead to more robust enrollments.

At the same time, we continue to respond to student and state demands for professional programs. We recently revised our Master of Arts in Teaching programs to include a TESOL option and added an MSED in Special Education to meet regional needs. We anticipate two more graduate programs in the next year that are responsive to the opioid crises and other health issues. These new programs have been well researched with external stakeholders contributing guidance to the design of the degrees.

It should also be noted that some of our existing programs are transforming in response to student needs. In particular, we are finding some of our advanced and degree completion programs are moving to a greater proportion of online course-work to support the work/life balance of our students.

Finally, the enrollment and staffing patterns in Biology have led us to a new model for graduate programs. We have recently approved an MS in Integrative Biological Diversity that allows faculty from WCSU and SCSU to contribute courses and research mentorship to this program. We anticipate adding to our portfolio of graduate programs using this approach. It is a way to ensure depth in disciplinary knowledge without any one institution bearing the full cost of instruction.

Findings and Analysis

To meet enrollment and fiscal challenges, WCSU has become much more strategic in planning curriculum. Where there are opportunities to take the lead on meeting regional employment needs, we are meeting with industry representatives to get a good look at their needs and our fit with those opportunities. WCSU is actively seeking partnerships with other CSCU institutions that allow us to meet the needs of traditional and non-traditional students. We took the lead on this with our Ed.D. in Nursing and our newest program in Biology. We are currently exploring a partnership with Charter Oak State College to better support returning adult learners.

As has been stated earlier in the document, the campus is preparing to evaluate all programs on campus once the template is approved by the University Senate which is likely to be in fall 2018. For WCSU to continue to deliver on its mission to provide “a high quality education” we must use data more intentionally and be transparent about what is sustainable to the end of creating a culture of self-reflection, regional engagement, and excellence in all that we do.

Appraisal and Projection

As we consider our mission in relation to the four areas discussed: what our students gain, how they are assessed, measures of success, and satisfactory levels of achievement, we would conclude that we serve a diverse population of students and work to provide support such as the First Year, tutorial services, and academic advisement, peer mentoring, and career counseling. From students in need of focused support, to honors students in pursuit of unique research experiences, we have invested in meeting those needs. With robust support systems in place, and opportunities to apply learning through research, performance, or internships, our faculty concentrate on encouraging and rewarding the curiosity that produces excellence in the classroom and throughout the institution.

As we aspire to greater educational effectiveness, we know that will be achieved by continuing to develop a culture of assessment, providing challenging curricula that meet the needs of the region, with decisions about change informed by data.

Institutional Plans

In the Reflective Essay, we focused on efforts to deliver the mission and achieve the goals of the Strategic Plan. As we consider the next five years, we will be guided by our vision which is to be “widely recognized as a premier public university with outstanding teachers and scholars who prepare students to contribute to the world in a meaningful way.”

To that end, our efforts will be focused in improving outcomes for all students, while continuously reflecting on the quality of our academic programs. We will develop and implement a systematic assessment plan of the general education program, to ensure that all students are meeting the learning outcomes. We will also pursue additional disciplinary accreditation where appropriate and meaningful.

Our plans to improve digital communication will broaden the reach of our messages, yet we are also working to increase awareness of our successes in local and regional communities. Our students and faculty are achieving great things—from the Fulbright and scholarships to prestigious graduate programs for our students to CDC and NSF Grants and celebrated scholarship among our faculty—and we need to get the message out. Telling these stories will be a particular focus in the next five years.

Changes to the physical plant also inform clarity of purpose and continuous improvement. With the renovation of Higgins Hall, all faculty in the Macricostas School of Arts and Sciences and the School of Professional Studies will be located on the Midtown Campus, and all Ansell School of Business and School of Visual and Performing Arts faculty will be located on the Westside Campus. We will also have added to our informal gathering spaces to encourage student and faculty engagement.

While there are challenges to funding additional renovations, it should be noted that despite a lack of availability of state funds for the next project, WCSU has reallocated resources to relocate and renovate our Midtown Student Center. This will help us create a more vibrant central quad, with gathering spaces on the first floor of all associated buildings. This decision was a direct result of greater communication and focus within President’s Cabinet and guidance from the Master and Strategic Plans.

As a largely commuter campus, co-locating a coffee shop, research and information literacy support offered by the library faculty, FY, and tutoring supports has helped students to more easily access these critical student success resources. Our plans for the next five years are to solidify these partnerships between directors through the development of a new academic leadership position in the library.

We hope to develop and implement the FYPlus in the next year. We are scrutinizing our data to better support our diverse community of learners, helping to improve retention and six-year graduation rates.

For our graduate program in Integrative Biological Diversity, we anticipate participation from CCSU and ECSU in the years to come. This model will begin with students simply earning the degree from WCSU and taking courses at sister universities, to provide greater depth and diversity of courses. In the future, we anticipate a joint degree with SCSU and exploration to develop a system-wide graduate school. We are experimenting with this degree to see if we might preserve teaching and learning opportunities in programs with lower demand than the more professionally oriented disciplines (education, nursing, and business) and increase opportunity for advanced research for students and faculty.

While exploring partnerships to deliver graduate programs, a new partnership with Charter Oak State College allows us to enhance offerings for undergraduate students and grow opportunities for adult learners. This system-wide thinking promotes a sustainable financial model that allows us to invest in new programs in a cost effective way.

While we don't anticipate a great deal of online programming at WCSU, we are finding the need for more options and several degrees are becoming hybrid by design. We do anticipate an increase in these modes of delivery. While most of our students prefer coming to campus part of the time, they are finding the convenience of online courses essential to their success.

The partnerships and additional online programming will lead to some substantive change applications in the years to come. Right now we are laying the groundwork for productive programs.

In sum, we believe in the power of higher education to support upward mobility and societal change. Ensuring that we can provide these opportunities in a context of changing demographics and dwindling state support for higher education is the focus of our Strategic Plan and the work of the next five years.

Appendix

- a. Affirmation of Compliance
- b. Audited Financial Statement
- c. Auditor's Management Letter
- d. Interim Report Forms
- e. Making Assessment More Explicit (The E Series) Forms