

**Western Connecticut State University**

**Assessment Committee**

**Annual Report, 2005-06**

Submitted by Jerry Wilcox, Chairperson

The Assessment Committee met six times during the year: September 22, October 20, November 15, February 23, March 30, and April 27. Members included M. Steinberg, R. Drozdenko, R. Kutz, W. Cramer, M. Leahey, A. Zink, W. Ball, E. Durnin, V. Kenausis, L. Weinstein (resigned in January) and J. Wilcox. Guests included R. Stewart, C. Hawkes, L. Vaden-Goad, A. Morton and F. Tesch. No student members were appointed. In addition to the meetings, numerous documents were circulated among the members, including paper copies and electronic attachments to Lotus Notes emails. Minutes of the first two meetings of the fall semester appear in an appendix to this report. Many of the issues raised at those meetings are ones with which the University has struggled for years.

The major topic of the year was the need to prepare a report on campus-wide implementation of the assessment of student learning outcomes. The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE) of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) mandated the report when it granted WestConn reaccreditation in March 2004. NEASC initially requested the report on August 15, but was persuaded to extend the deadline to October 15, 2006. Interim Provost R. Stewart requested all departments with degree programs to submit their annual assessment reports by May 15. J. Wilcox assembled the reports in June and July and composed a summary for NEASC. A draft of the report is expected to be circulated among faculty and staff before it is submitted to NEASC.

Special commendations are in order for the hard work of the Assessment Coordinators: Ron Kutz (A&S); Marge Steinberg (SPS); Ron Drozdenko (Ansell); Fred Tesch (Division of Graduate Studies, Fall 2005); and Brian Clements (Division of Graduate Studies, Spring 2006). Dr. Stewart met with the Coordinators as a group and with selected department representatives. Dr. Stewart provided supplemental funds for training and other resources.

Other topics discussed during the year included: (1) CSU Assessment Grants; (2) Revision of the Busy Person's Guide to Assessment (BPGA); (3) Review of A&S and SPS preliminary assessment reports; and (4) TK20 and other assessment software. Note that the revised BPGA is included as an appendix in the draft report to NEASC. CSU Assessment Grants will continue to be available for at least one more year. Recipients of 2005-06 grants were expected to present their work at the April 28, 2006 meeting. The chairperson noted that it will be WestConn's turn to host the Four Campus Assessment Conference on April 27, 2007. The topic of General Education assessment was raised, but no recommendations were made. During review of the A&S and SPS preliminary assessment reports, several recommendations for improvement were made. In some cases departmental representatives were present; in other cases a committee member conveyed the recommendations to the appropriate department.

Because of the absence of a quorum at the meeting on April 27, no election for chairperson was held. J. Wilcox agreed to convene the first meeting of the 2006-07 year.

## Appendix

### WCSU Assessment Committee

Minutes, September 22, 2005

Members Present: Abbey Zink, Fred Tesch (for Ellen Durnin), Ron Drozdenko, Wes Ball, Jerry Wilcox, Marge Steinberg, Margy Leahey

Visitors Present: Carol Hawkes, Linda Vaden-Goad, Allen Morton, Roy Stewart

1. Jerry Wilcox called the meeting to order.
2. Ron Kutz volunteered to take minutes for the meeting.
3. Wilcox led a brief discussion of department assessment coordinators; the point was made that it's important to have a mix of new and experienced faculty leading department's efforts in assessment. Concern was expressed regarding work load for any non-tenured faculty in that position and the need for departments and the DEC/P&T to value their contribution. Tesch, as the former P&T chair, emphasized that it was up to department DECs to make clear (and to document) an individual's contribution to the department's assessment effort.
4. Wilcox raised the issue of electronic portfolios as a concept; he hopes to have Diane Goldsmith from CT Distance learning consortium (CTDLC) make a presentation at WCSU. Hawkes indicated that such portfolios won't be imposed on anyone—they would need to come from departmental initiative—but they may be a good tool for keeping records electronically. Wilcox indicated there was not much in the assessment literature on using electronic portfolios for assessment; he believed that Truman State has used them for some time. On Tuesday, September 27<sup>th</sup>, he will bring some of their documentation to the e-portfolio luncheon.
5. Wilcox and Hawkes reiterated that the Fall 2006 University Interim Report to NEASC must have a report for each degree program on their assessment activity and progress. In particular, evidence of data gathering and “closing the loop” are needed for each department. A statement that assessment is being done won't be adequate. Vaden-Goad reported on the College of Arts & Sciences progress: A&S has 14 departments, 13 with degree programs, plus the advisement center. Each has assessment rubrics and timetables; most collected data during spring semester and are analyzing it this semester. She expects to have one round of data by end of Fall, with closed loops/revised rubrics/etc. in all areas. A&S will do a monthly update by area. Wilcox indicated that it was helpful to have the departmental reports electronically, including the assessment grid. He shared the grids for Chemistry & English/Prof. Writing as examples of well-done grids.
6. Provost Stewart shared some of his considerations regarding assessment: Every time he has looked at priorities, assessment ends up high on list. Learning outcomes assessment seems to be here to stay and is a critically important task. Dragging our heels won't make it go away. This committee and the subject are critically important to WCSU. In terms of budget, assessment relationship will put proposed projects high on his priority list. We need to pay continuing attention to assessment—particularly “learning outcomes” assessment. He'll help where ever he can. Wilcox: The importance of reassigned time came up in committee, especially for those who actually compile the data and write the reports. Department chairs need to document the effort and size of the task for the DEC. Stewart: we must be careful to convey the message that assessment isn't “extra, outside of our normal duties.” It needs to be part of the fabric of what we do. Hawkes related our earlier

discussion re DEC recognition; Stewart indicated that it needs to be a department-wide effort. Drozdenko: can we bring in a consultant to review our work? Stewart: yes, he'd be willing to support this type of activity. Wilcox indicated he would like nominations for such a consultant. Stewart: we need to decide where we want to be and get a consultant to respond to our needs, not bring in someone who has a general message already established before they see us. Hawkes: we had a consultant previously that dealt with such general issues, but next time, we want them to look at our documents and respond specifically to our efforts.

7. Wilcox and Hawkes met with the college and graduate coordinators; Hawkes reported on the meeting. It was a very productive meeting. A concern was raised at the meeting that there was not a sense of urgency about the task; we need to work on this. A second issue was that all 4 coordinators had been to NEASC conferences, and now we need to concentrate locally. Tesch: getting people other than the four coordinators to such conferences should be our goal now; we need to spread the commitment. Wilcox: the CSU assessment conference for this school year will be in April in CCSU, the last Friday in April. We should try to get a good contingent to that. Steinberg asked for feedback on the number of objectives needing covered in the 2006 report; some departments have a short list of objectives, but what's the "ruling" on those who have long lists. The committee agreed that our understanding is that movement on some objectives is enough. Reporting on a question that had been raised at the coordinator's meeting, Hawkes reported that we will need the departmental reports by end of May; June will be too late. Regarding graduate surveys, Wilcox has done numbers on our degree recipients; we have 12000-plus degree recipients since 1990; the system office has surveys of recent graduates and we can get some comparisons with other CSU systems regarding job placement. A 2-3 page senior survey (say, after a luncheon) near graduation might be a good way to gather some exit data. A few multiple choice and a few open ended (favorite learning experience; what would you want an entering student to know) seems appropriate. One positive question and one negative tend to get useful responses. Leahey: isn't one problem that we don't have any central location that keeps graduate data? Most departments don't have contact data, even though students are most likely to respond to them. Wilcox: the Registrar's office is getting better at keeping such data; 1990 onwards seems to be quite good (addresses 90% mailable). Wilcox: should we ask departments to share with us what they consider exemplary alumni efforts and assessment efforts? It would be nice to start getting some of the reports ahead of time. Now's a good time to talk about actual results. Tesch: "senior surveys" ignores graduate programs. For the programs with few graduates per year, it's going to take a while to get reliable data. The February survey should include graduate program graduates. Wilcox: the pre-med program would be a good example of small output, high result program that's kept good information on its graduates; perhaps graduate programs can learn from them.
8. Wilcox asked what other issues we might want to consider for today – general education, e-portfolios, the Busy Person's Guide to Assessment? Drozdenko: what are our expectations for progress -- data this term, close the loop in Spring, at least one measure must be a direct measure of student learning? Also, in regard to program objectives, do general, rather than specific, objectives count? For example, how about communication & problem solving? We have it as an objective, but it might be hard to connect that to our program. Wilcox: objectives need to be within the discipline, to show utilization of knowledge/skills within the program. In your example, you should measure communication or problem solving skills within Management. This connection should be clear within the department's report.

9. Regarding possible changes to the Busy Person's Guide: Morton asked if it can have some examples; it is currently very generic. E.g., the guide cites student-faculty collaboration on a paper as an example of an assessment datum—where would that go? We need more examples throughout. Hawkes suggested we use examples from WCSU. Wilcox recalled that, in the first draft, in 2000, we had an addendum with examples, but at that point, no one had “closed the loop.” We might be able to provide more complete examples now. Hawkes noted that the assessment coordinators could submit examples. It would be good to get them from our own people. If we have something to bring to the October meeting, get it to Wilcox a few days ahead and he will share it.
10. The meeting time of the committee was discussed, with no acceptable time found; 1:30 Tuesday or 12:30 or 1:30 Thursdays seemed the best. Wilcox will send an e-mail with proposed times for October and November.
11. Steinberg asked how much aggregate data should go in the report. For example, can we summarize “we reviewed the data.”? Hawkes: NEASC will want some numbers, so we need to include some. See Appendix A of the Busy Person's Guide for a format; we need to attach an analysis also. NEASC wants to ensure that we actually did it.
12. Wilcox: We will discuss General Education assessment next time.

Adjourned at 1:40

Ron Kutz, scribe de jour

### **WCSU Assessment Committee**

Minutes, October 20, 2005

People Present: Jerry Wilcox, Abbey Zink, Ron Drozdenko, Marge Steinberg, Ron Kutz, Margy Leahey, Wes Ball

1. Minutes of the previous meeting (Sept. 22) were approved.
2. Discussion of The Busy Person's Guide to Assessment. The general consensus was that departments could modify it as they saw fit, however, they should try to use the general format, just so that Jerry and Carol could easily figure out how to write up the school's submission for accreditation.

Ron Kutz discussed the Math Department's issues with this Guide. We all then discussed the use of the term “program completers” in the Appendix A. We decided that we should change this term to “potential pool” or something that was a little more client-friendly.

Under Part II, Capstone Project, we agreed to expand this subject heading to include Testing, Capstone, or Internship. Departments could add whatever concept terms they saw fit for culminating experiences.

Jerry suggested that if departments had assessment instruments that were flawed, they should report on that and thereby refine their whole assessment process. Also, departments should note exemplary practices and attach those instruments to their appendices.

We discussed putting really good departmental guides on the ERES and possibly make them “chat enabled” for feedback.

Advisement Center: Do we need an assessment here too? They should have statistics and retention figures as well as peer mentoring information.

TK20: We discussed this computer software that interfaces with Banner. Wesley Ball asked why we are not using this software now. A discussion ensued about the costs of using this program.

We discussed the assessment conference at CSU on April 28<sup>th</sup> and also the process for applying for CSU Assessment Grants. There is money available from Chancellor Cibes for individual and group projects (up to \$ 3,000 per department or \$ 1,000 per individual faculty member). WestConn is expected to host this systemwide conference in April 2007.

General Ed. Assessment: Jerry discussed the different web sites that had info on assessment. He gave us a copy of a guide with several examples of web sites with good practices. We agreed that each one of us would look at a site and report on it for our next meeting! If we figure out the “best practices,” we can then convey them to the Gen Ed. Committee.

Laurie Weinstein