

STANDARD II

PLANNING AND EVALUATION

Description

Planning

The University has a long tradition and history of planning guided by and directed toward the fulfillment of its Mission. The planning process has steadily evolved over the years. Ultimately subject to approval by the University Budgeting and Planning Committee and the University Senate, which recommends to the President, the strength of the planning process derives from broad participation, a comprehensive tracking database, and a realistic commitment to implementation.

Since 1990, the National Association of College and University Business Officers' (NACUBO) strategic planning model, which emphasizes process and a more realistic perspective on how to use resources to manage change, has been utilized. In order to implement this model more effectively, the University Planning Committee was merged with the University Budget Committee in 1992 to form the University Planning and Budgeting Committee (UPBC) so that planning and budgeting are linked. The UPBC remains the standing committee of the University Senate charged with the planning/budgeting process. The first plan produced under this system was the Western Connecticut State University Strategic Plan for 1992-1997.

When a new Chancellor of the CSU System took office in August 1994, he introduced focused planning, with two- and six-year projections to coincide with the biennial budgetary process of the Connecticut legislature. The planning process at WestConn follows this model while respecting the role of governance. Planning proposals require approval by the University Planning and Budgeting Committee, the University Senate, and the President. The current WestConn Plan is for the years 2000-2003; a proposal for 2003-2006 has been developed, brought before the UPBC, and will be presented to the Senate.

The President asks the Vice Presidents, the Dean of Human Resources, and the Executive Assistant to the President for Multicultural Affairs and Disability Services to submit a list of priorities for their areas. After discussing the recommendations with them, the President edits and focuses the priorities, and develops a Letter of Priority, consistent with the Strategic Plan, to be submitted to the Chancellor. The Chancellor and the President meet to review the Letter and other information that may be helpful to the Trustees in making spending plan decisions in the context of the overall picture of the University.

While the focused strategic plan has provided general guidance, emphasis since 1997 has been on data-driven planning for specific areas and operations. This type of planning was greatly facilitated by the establishment at WestConn of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment in 1996.

The plan extends to all areas of the University: academics, student life, information technology, the physical plant, finances (including fundraising), and external relations (for more specific information on WestConn planning in these areas, please see Standards IV, VI, VII, VIII, IX, and X, respectively).

Academic Planning: In 1997, a working committee made up of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the School deans, and officers of the University Senate, began a new approach to academic planning. Data fields were provided to departments by the Director of Institutional Research and Assessment. A list of questions was developed by the committee, and each department was asked to respond. The UPBC met to review the departmental planning documents.

The committee defined five categories to be used in establishing priorities:

- Expansion: Student enrollment and interest and regional requirements indicate a need for additional faculty and support.
- Maintain/Potential Expansion: Based on current information, programs should be maintained at their current levels of support. These programs should be reviewed each year for the next three years, however, since...their departmental plans [indicate that] opportunities for expansion in the short term are strong.
- Maintain: Resources permitting, programs will be maintained at current levels of support for the next three years. However, departments may request additional UPBC review during the academic planning period if there are rapid enrollment shifts and/or changing market needs.
- Revitalization: Programs in this category need to be revitalized and/or transformed in order to meet emerging needs. However, departments may request additional UPBC review during the academic planning period.
- Continuing Review: Departments are encouraged to review staffing needs and configurations on an annual basis. Positions vacated during the academic planning period will need additional review.

When consensus was reached by the *ad hoc* committee regarding recommended placement of programs in the categories listed above, the recommendations were forwarded to the departments for their review, response and/or rebuttal. The responses were reviewed by the UPBC. The UPBC prepared an Academic Planning Document (1998-2001) that was submitted to the University Senate for approval. The document was approved by the Senate, sent to the President for his review, and was approved by him. An updated plan was completed and approved for 2001-2004. A third update (2004-2007) is being prepared.

During the planning process, there was general agreement to separate general education issues from specific departmental growth issues. In FY 2001, permanent faculty lines were added in the departments of Mathematics, English, Psychology, History, and Social Science. An additional position was given to the Social Science, Mathematics, and English departments, and a “floater” position was assigned for overloads. Five general education lines were authorized in FY 2001 to cover course needs generated by System-mandated increase in enrollments. (“UPBC – Planning Report: Academic Years 2001-2004”)

Of the lines listed below in the summary table, all the positions are tenure track; 12 of the 14 are completely new.

Department	1999	2000	2001	2002
Mathematics	1	1	1	0
English	1	1	1	0
Psychology		1	1	0
History		1	1	0
Social Science		2		0
Communications & Theatre Arts	1		1	

To meet needs created by growth in enrollment, new faculty lines have also been added in the following areas: Management Information Systems (1); Justice and Law Administration (2); Management (2); and Nursing.

Planning for new graduate programs is done by the academic departments. (For additional information on new graduate programs, please see Standard IV.) Since 1993, ten new graduate programs and options have been developed in response to regional needs, and a number of others have been modified. Some options and concentrations have been eliminated. (For additional information on academic programs, please see Standard IV.) Since 1997 all new program development has been consistent with the academic planning process.

Student Affairs Planning: The Student Affairs division has developed a four-year Strategic Plan (2001-2005) with eight major goals that complement the University's Mission, Principles, and Values. (For more information, please see Standard VI.)

Technology Planning: The University's Information Technology Committee (ITC), a standing committee of the University Senate, developed the institution's three-year plan to upgrade, modernize, and expand technology in classrooms and labs. The Committee, which has representation from each of the three Schools, as well as appropriate departments (Computer Science, Libraries, Media Services, and University Computing), reviews student and faculty computing needs on an ongoing basis. The plan is consistent with and complementary to the System-wide technology plan. (For more information, please see Standard VII.)

Institutional Advancement: The division of Institutional Advancement has also completed strategic planning documents complementary to System-wide planning and to the University's Mission, Principles, and Values. This document has been folded into a University-wide draft Strategic Plan.

Financial Planning: The annual Spending Plan is the financial component of the University's Strategic Plan. In March of each year, the System Office sends information about the anticipated funding for the coming fiscal year and guidelines for developing the Spending Plan. The guidelines, developed in consultation between the chancellor and the University's president, ask for information about the achievement of objectives, particularly in the area of learning outcomes. Specifically, the University is asked to provide information about enrollment, student retention and graduation, affirmative action/diversity, development, revenues, administrative costs, student satisfaction/learning, consumer satisfaction, faculty and staff motivation, progress with Banner (administrative computing) implementation, tuition and fees, and new programs. The annual Spending Plan, developed by the Office of the Vice President for Finance and Administration, is routinely reviewed by all the vice presidents, the UPBC comments in March (as of 1998), and then the document is sent to the president. The plan is submitted to the CSU System Office in April. The CSU System submits a budget for legislative approval. The plans, with the Chancellor's recommendations, are sent to the Board of Trustees (BOT), which makes allocations to each institution's president, who in turn allocates money to the vice presidents of each division.

Facilities Planning: WestConn's planning process is based on the institution's Campus Master Plan (1995), which identifies capital projects designed to enable the University to meet its academic goals and objectives. A new master plan is in the initial stages of development. The master planning process is designed to evaluate options for growth and development, such as new construction, renovations, additions, or the adaptive re-use of existing buildings. The Campus Master Plan, the University's Planning & Engineering Office, the Campus Design Review Committee, and the CSU System Office, cooperatively create a framework for the development of capital projects at WestConn that is consistent with the University's teaching mission and strategic plan. The University has a construction and renovation schedule through the year 2008. (Additional information on facilities planning may be found in Standard VIII.)

Evaluation

Evaluation was mandated by Public Law 93-201, which required the University to submit biennial assessment reports, with the first due in 1994, and the second in 1997. The process was less than satisfactory, however, and in 1999, the legislature enacted Public Law 99-295. This law requires CSU and other units of public higher education to develop accountability measures to be reported annually to the Department of Higher Education. Six broad goals were identified:

- Enhance student learning and promote academic excellence
- Join with elementary and secondary schools to improve teaching and learning at all levels
- Ensure access to and affordability of higher education
- Promote the economic development of the state to help business and industry sustain strong economic growth
- Respond to the needs and problems of society
- Ensure the efficient use of resources

Accountability was not new to the University. The Board of Trustees had established several initiatives (the presidential evaluation process, for example), and had a number of concerns, including improving retention rates and the six-year graduation rate, increasing enrollment levels, and the implementation of a strategic plan. The Board was also involved at that time in the development of University budgets through the spending plan, as well as in establishing goals for affirmative action and diversity and fund-raising system-wide.

The CSU System was part of a national consortium developed by the American Productivity and Quality Center (APQC) to benchmark the assessment of student learning outcomes. Four WestConn representatives attended meetings to design the study. The team identified institutions with best practices in assessment and visited them. Over a period of several months (November 1997-June 1998), the team produced a report, "Assessing Learning Outcomes: Consortium Benchmarking Study. Best-in-Class Report."

The legislation related to accountability was modified somewhat in 2000, but the CSU System still has basic accountability goals, and the four sister institutions have developed performance (accountability) measures to address these broad goals. The universities are expected to be consistent in the way they report performance measures.

The Assessment Committee, a standing committee of the University Senate, has actively encouraged all academic departments with degree programs to develop assessment plans. The first efforts were

collected and evaluated in the second half of 2001. The Committee submitted a report to the University community in December 2001 that summarizes the evaluation process for assessment plans and lists selected good practices from the departmental reports. The Committee has continued to work with academic departments, and all have now submitted at least a preliminary evaluation plan; a few have made considerable progress in implementing the plans and in using data to improve instruction.

The Committee has identified three key aspects of assessment that should be addressed: (1) a set of learning objectives that are specific and measurable; each learning objective should be a clear statement of what competencies a graduate of that program should possess; (2) a plan (preferably a timetable) for gathering information on student attainment of the learning objectives; and (3) a process to apply the findings in order to make decisions regarding changes in curriculum and/or instruction.

When a department proposes a new or modified program in the major, it must provide an assessment plan in the materials presented to the Committee on Undergraduate Curriculum and Academic Standards (CUCAS). New graduate programs are required to provide an assessment plan to the Graduate Council. In addition, a number of graduate programs have advisory committees that serve an evaluative function.

Faculty evaluation is conducted in accordance with the collective bargaining agreement between the AAUP and the Board of Trustees for the Connecticut State University System. The process is detailed in the *Faculty Handbook*. Staff evaluations are conducted in accordance with guidelines established in the appropriate collective bargaining units' agreements.

A number of other mechanisms are in place to assess the effectiveness of the University's programs and departments, including external accrediting agencies: the New England Association of Schools and Colleges; the Connecticut Board of Governors for Higher Education; the Connecticut State Department of Education; the American Chemical Society; the National League for Nursing; the Council on Social Work Education (Baccalaureate level); and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. Each of these accrediting bodies requires a self-study and a site visit. The most recent accreditation reports, responses, and accreditation decisions are available in the team workroom.

All of the University's evaluation efforts are directed toward fulfilling its stated Mission, Principles, and Values.

Appraisal

Planning

The CSU System Office, under the current leadership, has become increasingly involved in planning on the four campuses. This involvement has had an impact on the way WestConn conducts planning and sets priorities, an effect experienced by our sister campuses as well. Some faculty and staff have expressed concern about how plans get implemented. The complexities introduced by the involvement of the System Office, which in turn is responding to increasing demands on the part of the legislature for accountability reporting, further complicate matters. Efforts to communicate information about the process are not always entirely successful.

Academic Planning: Academic planning at WestConn changed considerably after the establishment of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment in 1996 (replacing the Office of Institutional Research). Reliable data collected and disseminated by this office have enhanced planning throughout the University. Longitudinal analyses of student subgroups, together with annual surveys of alumni and students provide valuable information in the planning process. At the direction of the Board of Trustees, enrollments at WestConn have grown considerably over the last ten years, and the student population is increasingly diverse, so accurate data and analyses are crucial for planning. In the Fall 2002 Faculty/Staff Survey, 94% of faculty respondents agreed with the statement “The academic planning process involves faculty through departments and governance.” However, in response to the statement “In WestConn governance, there is adequate communication among university constituencies,” only 45% of the faculty and 48% of the non-teaching staff responded affirmatively, which suggests there may be a communication gap.

While the additional positions in departments responsible for general education courses were essential to deal with Board-mandated increased enrollments, the fact that general education had been factored in separately in the Academic Plan led to some frustration. This is particularly the case with departments that had been designated for expansion but have had to delay hiring because of budget restrictions and the need for lines in general education.

Student Affairs: Some areas of need identified in the division’s new Strategic Plan have been addressed. For example, the division has purchased additional hardware and software, and staff have received training. Handbooks and other materials for students have been added or revised and improved, and vacant positions, including Dean of Student Affairs and a Director of Health Services, have been filled. Efforts were made to enhance WestSide services for students, but recent cutbacks in student payroll have meant that coverage had to be reduced.

Technology Planning: The University Senate singled out the Information Technology Committee as a model for committees that are focused on issues requiring special expertise. The ITC has been a major asset to planning and implementation of technology and technology training at WestConn, particularly in the area of instructional technology. Teaching faculty, library faculty, and the staff members in University Computing and Media have worked collaboratively on a number of projects. Additional personnel (e.g., an instructional technology specialist) would make it possible to do more.

Institutional Advancement: The Centennial Campaign is underway, with a fundraising goal of \$4,000,000. During the “silent phase” of the campaign, over \$3.5 million was raised, and the University received its first \$1million gift (the Jason and Ellen Hancock Student Endowment Fund). A \$1.1 million gift from Constantine and Marie Macricostas will be announced early in the Spring 2003 semester. The University has hired a full-time Director of Alumni Affairs, and a number of new programs have been developed for WestConn alumni. Both Institutional Advancement and the Office of Grant Programs (in the Division of Academic Affairs) will play important roles in finding external money to support new initiatives.

The University has made considerable progress toward developing assessment plans aligned with state accountability measures. Some plans are now generating information that can be reviewed and utilized for program enhancement. In the Fall 2002 Faculty/Staff Survey, 60% of the faculty respondents answered affirmatively to the statement “WestConn’s assessment process facilitates improvement of instruction and learning in your program.”

The University has put a great deal of effort into evaluation. There have been presentations on assessment in the University Senate, workshops have been offered, and discussion groups were

sponsored. Members of the Assessment Committee, particularly the director of Institutional Research and Assessment, have done outreach and education sessions for faculty.

The process of developing departmental assessment plans has not always been smooth. For example, the Assessment Committee had to issue a clarification of its original instructions. The Assessment Committee's report contains the original criteria (12/11/00) and the clarifications issued the following year (12/3/01). Members of the Assessment Committee have been invited to some department meetings to talk with faculty about evaluation plans.

The Committee continues to see learning objectives that are not easily measurable. Plans are sometimes vague about how they will measure the attainment of objectives. For example, it must be clear how portfolios are selected, what instructions students will receive prior to assembling their portfolios, and what criteria will be applied in evaluating portfolios.

Although departments were instructed to append assessment plans and/or updates to their annual reports, some did not include assessment information.

Student Affairs: The chair of the Assessment Committee in the Division of Student Affairs has worked closely with the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment to develop surveys of both current students and alumni.

The Student Affairs Assessment Committee will review the survey responses of resident and commuter students during the Spring 2003 semester and make recommendations for change where appropriate.

Projection

Planning

The demand for accountability is likely to increase over the coming years, particularly if economic recovery in the state proceeds slowly. In what is likely to be a relatively unstable financial situation, a thorough integration of planning and evaluation at every level will be crucial to the successful realization of the University's Mission, Principles, and Values.

A draft Strategic Plan to cover the years 2003-2006 has been presented for UPBC approval and will be reviewed and revised as appropriate.

A revised procedure for campus facilities planning and a timetable for the spending plan have been proposed by the UPBC.

During the past ten years, the University has experienced significant growth in its programs, enrollments, and facilities. Over the next few years, it is likely that there will be a number of retirements among key executive personnel, faculty, and staff. Their successors will be responsible for consolidating gains, implementing new programs, overseeing new construction, and developing fiscally responsible, accountability-based plans for the institution's future.

Operating in an atmosphere of state-wide economic crisis is not new to the University, but the current situation comes on the heels of a period of unprecedented growth and rising expectations. Increasing enrollments have meant increasing demands for services, and it will need to be very clear to the University community that the institution is addressing those needs on the basis of established priorities and planning guidelines, especially in the case of hiring decisions.

It is important that there be clear communication among the University's various constituencies about planning and the allocation of resources.

Some needed positions have been filled (both vacancies and new lines), and many are in process. The University has been authorized to fill 100% of faculty vacancies.

A new facilities plan will be developed in the coming year. The immediate future will bring a new residence hall and a student center to the Westside campus, and a new science building to the Midtown campus. The financial obligation to maintain the new facilities will need to be addressed in creative ways.

The Centennial Campaign is expected to meet its goals, and the University will continue aggressive fundraising efforts in order to reach the endowment goal established by the System Office: \$20 million by 2010.

Allocations for hardware, software, and training are likely to be less generous. However, the CSU System is committed to Banner and Campus Pipeline (the portal system). WestConn will need to plan carefully in order to bring about the successful implementation of new and updated software.

Evaluation

The Assessment Committee, CUCAS, and the Graduate Council will continue to articulate expectations for annual updates to assessment plans. Members of the Assessment Committee will continue to work with departments on their plans for assessment of student learning.

The demand for web-based surveys and focus group studies will continue, and in all likelihood, will increase.

Efforts will continue to bring university and departmental planning into alignment with the Connecticut legislature's performance indicators and the CSU System Office objectives.