

Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students
of

Western Connecticut State University
Danbury, Connecticut

by

An Evaluation Team representing the
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
of the
New England Association of Schools and Colleges

Prepared after study of the institution's
self-evaluation report and a visit to the campus on
September 29- October 2, 2013

The members of the team:

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This report represents the views of the evaluation committee as interpreted by the chairperson. Its content is based on the committee's evaluation of the institution with respect to the Commission's criteria for accreditation. It is a confidential document in which all comments are made in good faith. The report is prepared both as an educational service to the institution and to assist the Commission in making a decision about the institution's accreditation status.

COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

New England Association of Schools and College

Preface Page to the Team Report

Please complete during the team visit and include with the report prepared by the visiting team

Date form completed: September 23, 2013

Name of Institution Western Connecticut State University

1. History Year chartered or authorized 1903 Year first degrees awarded 1906

2. Type of control: ☒ State ☐ City ☐ Other; specify: _____
☐ Private, not-for-profit ☐ Religious Group; specify: _____
☐ Proprietary ☐ Other; specify: _____

3. Degree level:
☒ Associate ☒ Baccalaureate ☒ Masters ☐ Professional ☒ Doctorate

4. Enrollment in Degree Programs (Use figures from fall semester of most recent year):

	Full-time	Part-time	FTE	Retention ^a	Graduation ^b	# Degrees ^c
Baccalaureate	23	6	23.5	77.8%	8.7%	23
Graduate	4365	790	4551.0	74.3%	44.4%	975
	70	370	216.1	65.4%	74.2%	174

(a) full-time 1st to 2nd year

(b) 3 or 6 year graduation rate

(c) no. of degrees awarded most recent year

5. Number of current faculty: Full time 208 Part-time 378 FTE: 346

6. Current fund data for most recently completed fiscal year: (Specify year: 2013)
 (Double click in any cell to enter spreadsheet. Enter dollars in millions; e.g., \$1,456,200 = \$1.456)

Revenues

Tuition	\$40.690
Gov't Appropriations	\$86.338
Gifts/Grants/Endowment	\$8.804
Auxiliary Enterprises	\$13.084
Other	\$2.607
Total	\$151.523

Expenditures

Instruction	\$53.900
Research	\$0.559
General	\$42.219
Auxiliary Enterprises	\$11.042
Other	\$9.409
Total	\$117.129

7. Number of off-campus locations:

In-state 1 Other U.S. 0 International 0 Total 1

8. Number of degrees and certificates offered electronically:

Programs offered entirely on-line 1 Programs offered 50-99% on-line _____

9. Is instruction offered through a contractual relationship?

☒ No ☐ Yes; specify program(s): _____

10. Other characteristics:

Introduction

Throughout the Evaluation Team's visit all members of the Western Connecticut State University (WCSU) community were welcoming, cooperative, and candid. All of the approximately 265 individuals who were part of the visit were aware of and many had participated directly in the development of the Self-Study Report. The WCSU leadership group (17), Regents (3), external stakeholders (10), faculty (70), staff, (75) students (75) and alumni (15) were knowledgeable about the purpose of the Team's visit.

The full Evaluation Team met with campus leaders, Regents, faculty, staff, students, and alumni at an informal dinner before the visit. This informal exchange provided a valuable personalized introduction to the shared mission and purposes of WCSU and a sense of the collegial culture of the University. It was clear to the Team that the President of the University is well respected and that the community has a high degree of confidence in the senior leadership team to manage both the challenges and opportunities that shape the future for the University.

During the formal visit, Team members had a conference call with President Gregory Gray, the newly appointed head of the Connecticut System Office, and met in person with two members of the Board of Regents. The Regents are the the state-wide governing body for the state universities and community colleges in Connecticut. The Board members described the process by which they are still forming policy and procedures. They are currently shaping a statewide strategic plan for this segment of public higher education through a consultative process, which they will complete by the end of this academic year. Both of the Regent members in the meeting were knowledgeable about WCSU's mission, accomplishments and challenges and pledged their support to work actively to ensure the University's future growth and development.

Extensive meetings were also held with campus leaders on a one-on-one basis and in groups. They are a cohesive, competent group with a strong sense of shared purpose in empowering their students to succeed. They are energized by recent new additions to their group and are proactively working together on critical strategic initiatives that will advance the University's mission. Communication across executive areas is open and candid and there is a strong determination to meet and exceed goals. They were also responsive to the Team's request for additional information to clarify reports or to address issues of concern.

The Team met with faculty leadership to discuss their curricula and program strengths, their aspirations, and to hear their concerns. They also described how shared governance on the campus is effectively implemented. The Team also held an open forum with faculty in which topics like learning outcomes assessment, program development, student success, limited resources, and enrollment and retention goals were discussed. All faculty participants in the visit exhibited a strong sense of commitment to the goals of the University and to the needs of the students. The Team found their passion for what they do, their commitment to their students and their community a great strength.

In addition, members of the Team met with deans, department heads, graduate program coordinators, administrative staff, support staff, student leaders, and alumni. There was effective dialogue and a willingness to share their aspirations and their concerns and a strong sense of collaboration and problem solving. Every group expressed willingness to work across service boundaries and roles to accomplish the mission of the University. Students in the open forum offered both concerns and suggested solutions to day-to-day problems and services. Most students were enthusiastic about their experiences and clearly empowered by their success.

The Evaluation Team found the WCSU Self-Study Report and the other data/materials provided to be sufficiently comprehensive and an accurate description of the University and its programs. A review of documents and electronic data resources by the Team prior to the visit, with clarifications gleaned through the interviews during the visit, provided the information to shape the evaluative statements contained in the eleven sections of the report, which address the NEASC Standards for Accreditation.

This evaluation of Western Connecticut State University is a comprehensive evaluation following a progress report accepted in Fall 2006 reporting on the institution's success in implementing student learning outcome assessment and fully implementing the doctorate in instructional leadership; and a fifth year interim report submitted and accepted in 2008 that updated the items of the interim report as well as addressed the process of implementing a comprehensive planning process, better integrating part-time faculty into the academic life of the institution, and progress with meeting its goals for the six year graduation rate.

1. Mission and Purposes:

Since its founding in 1903, Western Connecticut State University has evolved into a comprehensive institution serving the intellectual, creative, and professional development needs of its students and community. The University's mission statement clearly states its commitment to these goals and is specific about its emphasis on a strong liberal arts foundation; strong skills in communication, problem-solving and critical thinking; opportunities for experiential, cooperative and internship experiences; providing a strong background in information technologies; access to strong interdisciplinary programs; encouraging and actualizing a strong community engagement; and taking a personalized learning approach.

The Team sees concrete evidence that these emphases are being actualized in the academic and student services programming (as described in Standards 4, 5 and 6) and notes here as examples of larger mission driven enhancements --opening of the new Science building in 2005 to support and enhance quantitative and scientific leaning competencies, and the establishment of the Visual and Performing Arts School in 2006 to expand the breadth and quality of the Arts offerings. Also significant are the first Fulbright scholarships (5) at WCSU; the achievement of NCATE accreditation for education programs; the addition of an Ed.D in Instructional leadership to meet a community need; 100% pass rate on nursing state boards; and the recent adoption by the Senate of a tiered competency-based model for

general education. There is also evidence of a growing number of students able to pursue discipline related internships.

In addition, the campus mission expresses a deep commitment to public service, which was evident in the many partnerships and programs directed at the social, cultural, economic development and educational needs of their community. External stakeholder testimony during the visit was strong and positive about the ways WCSU engages with them, using their intellectual resources and expertise to make measurable differences. The stakeholders at the visit included several elected officials, business leaders, prominent alumni, and education and non-profit leaders. They expressed concern that limited state resources might impede the University's ability to offer the intellectual leadership and provide the faculty and student resources that currently make such a difference to them.

The Team highlights that the campus commitment to public service is quite broad ranging from local tutoring and non-profit internships to raising funds to build wells in Zambia. The Team was impressed with the scope of activity that the campus undertook to assist the community to deal with the impacts of the Sandy Hook School tragedy. The Team notes that the campus was recognized in 2013 on the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll.

The Team saw that the Mission statement is supported with a clearly articulated set of principles and values to guide implementation. The language of these principles—*empowering, facilitating, active scholarship, productive participation in a global society, diversity, and mutual benefit*—as well as the values of *quality and continuous improvement, integrity, and respect for others*-- were easily and comfortably expressed by various constituent groups in a wide array of discussions and were often seen in action across many key areas of activity.

The Team finds that the Mission of WCSU is clear, coherent, and consistent. It is focused on the success of students and the growth and development of the community. As evidenced by our questioning of various constituents, and as reported in the recent Faculty/Staff survey, 90% of faculty and staff are familiar with the Mission statement and its emphasis; 88% agree that it is used to provide a basis for future planning; and 80% understand it guides evaluation of campus activities. We note one area of concern, which is how mission and staffing is linked (only 71% of faculty and staff feel the linkage is strong). While we understand that resource constraints may be fueling this perceived disconnect, we encourage a closer look at this issue.

Consequently, we believe the Mission is well understood by all constituents and is consistently stated in all documents and on the campus web site and on many of the reports prepared by the campus. The Team sees evidence that the campus regularly assesses how it can best remain true to its mission. These activities demonstrate how mission informs strategic planning and guides campus choices and decision making on many levels.

We do note that the language of the mission statement has not changed for many years and we anticipate that as the next cycle of strategic planning begins, the campus will need to reaffirm, perhaps restate, or enhance the core dimensions of this statement. Various

constituents have expressed a desire to reevaluate the content and relevance of the mission and to make its language more compelling so that it might more effectively highlight the unique character of the institution.

Institutional Effectiveness: The process of mission, strategic goals reevaluation was very inclusive and useful in the 2004-2007 period and may provide insight on how to move forward from the NEASC self-study process to undertake the anticipated 2013/2014-mission/planning activities.

2. Planning and Evaluation

Planning: Based on the self-study and confirmed by our on-campus interviews the Strategic Plan guides WCSU in actualizing its mission and vision. The planning process is inclusive and transparent as represented by more than 650 stakeholders participating in the Values and Vision Initiative (2004-05), subsequent Action Teams (2005-06) and unanimous endorsement of the Strategic Plan by the University Senate, a body representing all professional employees (2007).

The WCSU community is regularly updated on goal progress and planning adaptations through the President's Annual Reports, a dedicated planning website (<http://www.wcsu.edu/strategicplan/accomplishments-0607.asp>), semester opening meetings, and through the University Planning and Budget Committee (UPBC), a standing committee of the University Senate. The operationalization of the vision statement, strategic goals and plan monitoring is integrated into day-to-day operations, employee performance evaluations, and academic and administrative departmental reports. A Spring 2012 Survey highlights that more than 7 out of 10 faculty and staff agrees that WCSU uses its mission, vision and strategic plan to inform staffing, budget, technology and enrollment goals.

The changing higher education landscape in Connecticut has prompted a review of the vision statement and goals and subsequent actions (2011-13). The self-study and on-campus interviews confirm 3 primary factors impacting planning progress and a re-visitation of the vision and goals: declining direct state funding; declining student enrollment; and a changing state governance structure. Strategic Assessment Teams are formed (2011) and examining the vision and progress of each goal in this new environment. The Strategic Assessment Team process will also provide a platform to expedite the next strategic planning cycle. Teams identified 4 areas critical to enterprise sustainability - retention, enrollment, communications, and process re-engineering with action plans in development (2012-13).

The strategic plan has been a dynamic blueprint providing both flexible and realistic short and long-term strategic directions and tactics for WCSU. New internal and external realities require WCSU to build upon the successes of the current strategic plan and fast-track the development of a new planning process, set in the context of the Board of Regent's evolving plan. This plan should strive to better reflect the financial position and viability outcomes identified by the Strategic Assessment Teams.

The Team's interviews with senior administration have confirmed WCSU's practical approach to planning and goal setting in a time of economic and demographic challenges.

Evaluation: While WCSU has moved forward on its strategic planning, the ongoing assessment and evaluation of academic and student programs has also emerged and been strengthened. WCSU has retooled the academic program review process to facilitate evaluation every 7 years and now includes assessment of program viability and alignment with the strategic plan. There is a multi-year schedule for academic program review and the Team suggests that in future reports to NEASC the campus outline how the results of the reviews are being used to enhance academic offerings.

Student Affairs conducted a comprehensive study of each department using the Council for the Advancement of Standards. Each department has highlighted findings and developed an action plan to improve service. A report on service improvement outcomes could also provide useful information.

It will also be important that assessment of all administrative departments becomes more active, systematic and ongoing to produce meaningful feedback to their departments on the performance of its services, thereby allowing each department to improve its programs and processes.

The University's Assessment Plan provides a framework for data collection, analysis, and reports on student learning in every degree program. The Assessment Committee provides on-going monitoring of the Institutional Assessment Plan. Each academic department provides an annual report that outlines evidence of program learning outcomes that articulate the fulfillment of the institutional mission. Keeping progress moving expeditiously on academic outcomes assessment will be necessary, especially to complete the majors work and to translate the tiered competency-based general education model into a measurable set of outcomes

Through information collected from surveys of recent graduates, BCSSE, and NSSE an assessment team has evaluated WCSU's student-centered focus (Strategic Goal 5). The data and analysis confirmed the belief that the current First-Year Experience was not productive. A new program has been developed based on this research and analysis and will be implemented in fall 2013 as an online first-year experience in most courses completed by first year students to improve effectiveness and student retention.

WCSU maintains an Office of Institutional Research and Assessment to provide decision support in responding to essential questions. The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment provides data, topical research, and analytical support for WCSU decision-makers in order to help support informed planning and decision-making as well as administers numerous student surveys such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The office compiled most statistical information reported in the Data First Forms and assisted in the analysis and interpretation of the data.

Based on the self-study and confirmed by campus meetings with faculty and staff, the Team identifies that WCSU could benefit from strengthening capacity in institutional research to allow for more systematic data analysis, synthesized and cross functional reports, and more user friendly formats. This increased capacity would allow for more data-informed decision-making and strategic counsel in enrollment management, program evaluation, strategic planning, and outcomes assessment.

Institutional Effectiveness: The Team is impressed with the initiatives on-campus and in individual departments to improve WCSU's success in planning and evaluation. It was difficult to identify any specific process through which WCSU examines its overall effectiveness in planning. WCSU could benefit from greater emphasis in the areas of institutional research and assessment capacity.

3: Organization and Governance

The institution has a system of governance that facilitates the accomplishment of its mission and supports institutional effectiveness and integrity. Through its organizational design and governance structure, the institution creates and sustains an environment that encourages teaching, learning, service, scholarship, and appropriate research and creative activity. It provides support adequate for the appropriate functioning of each organizational component.

The President of WCSU exercises active leadership of the institution through regular communication with the administrative team, with the University Senate and the Student Government Association, and through wide accessibility to the University community through both formal and informal avenues. The President represents the campus at the Board of Regents and with the legislature.

Within WCSU, the University Senate and its attendant committees operate to provide an effective system of shared governance involving administration, faculty, staff, and students. Academic proposals for course or program changes originate with faculty and proceed through an orderly process involving the department, relevant committee (Committee on Undergraduate Curriculum and Academic Standards [CUCAS], or the Graduate Council), University Senate, and the President in consultation with the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs. Faculty are highly involved in institutional governance by virtue of their participation in the University Senate and its numerous standing committees.

The University Senate is broadly representative of the college community, with one member of each academic department, one librarian, one counselor, two administrative faculty, and two representatives from the deans and vice presidents. The committees oversee relevant areas of shared governance – from academic leave, to promotion and tenure, to physical working conditions – and carry out their duties with active participation and membership as delineated on the University website. Senate agendas are set by the Agenda Committee and are well communicated within the University community. Meetings of the University Senate are open to all members of the community, including

students, and are regularly attended by the President of WCSU, Provost, and administrators. Elections of committee members are conducted through specified and clear procedures. Overall, the internal shared governance of the institution is broadly participatory and of high credibility.

Student voices are a factor in institutional decision-making. Student participation in governance is active and is structurally ensured through seats on the University Senate, Enrollment Management Committee, CUCAS, Assessment Committee, Committee on General Education, Graduate Council, Information Technology Committee, Student Life Committee, Media Services and Library Policy Committee, Physical Working Conditions Committee, Parking Appeals, and advisory committees for several centers such as the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching. The constitution of the Student Government Association (SGA) clearly articulates the membership, rights, powers, and composition of the SGA. During the site visit, students praised the institution for affording them ample opportunity to be heard and to participate in the University's decision making. An example cited by students was the establishment of a crosswalk at the Midtown campus. Students spoke warmly of the responsiveness of the University, its officials, and the faculty.

An appropriate administrative structure exists by which the President can lead the institution. The senior leadership group functions as a collaborative team and seeks to solve cross-institutional issues with dialogue and problem-solving approaches. Each Division manages its own set of programs and services to meet the campus mission and strategic goals.

The academic division reports to the Provost, who reports to the President. The Provost is able to assert leadership in major initiatives and is actively involved in a wide range of University priorities. Examples of Provost initiatives include budget reallocation, prioritizing school goals, Math Emporium, assessment, recruitment and retention efforts, and the integration of technology and teaching. The reporting lines within Academic Affairs promote decision-making in the interests of the academic mission. Within the academic division, the four schools – Visual and Performing Arts, Professional Studies, Arts and Sciences, and Business – are led by deans and house all of the academic departments, academic programs, and faculty. In addition, a division of Graduate Studies provides some centralized resources for marketing and administration.

Institutional bylaws are extremely thorough, readily accessible, understandable, and comprehensive. All committees and policies of relevance to faculty are compiled in the Faculty Handbook, while the relevant collective bargaining agreements for faculty and staff are available online. There is currently no regularly scheduled, formal process for reviewing the University's organizational structure and system of governance, but recent changes attest to its flexibility, such as a change to a more streamlined manner in which minor course changes are approved and a change in the time period between academic program reviews. Faculty and staff reported a shared understanding of the institution's mission with the administration.

WCSU is one of four Connecticut State Universities(CSUs) and is part of an 18-institution higher education system that includes the University of Connecticut, community colleges, and Charter Oak, the state's online institution. Governance of WCSU has been through a period of upheaval and change outside of its control over the last few years. Previously, a Board of Trustees served as the governing board for the Connecticut State Universities. In 2010, the Connecticut legislature established a single Board of Regents for Higher Education to oversee a combined, 17-institution system (ConnSCU) consisting of the CSUs, the 12 community colleges, and Charter Oak. This restructuring of the Board and the establishment of a combined system present challenges for Board oversight and mission differentiation.

The Board consists of 19 members including appointments by the governor or the legislature and members of the Student Advisory Committee, and includes four non-voting state commissioners. The Board is chaired by one of its members. The bylaws, membership, committee structure, and duties of the Board of Regents are clearly stated and easily accessed on the Board website. The Board's charge is appropriate and includes tuition and financial aid policies, review and approval of new programs, searches for university presidents, review of the missions of the institutions, and a strategic plan for the 17-institution system.

The chief administrator of the Board is the President of ConnSCU, who supervises the ConnSCU System Office. The President of the Board administers, coordinates, and supervises the activities of the board and has the authority to (1) implement policies, directives, and rules of the board, (2) implement goals, (3) build interdependent support among the member institutions, (4) balance central authority with institutional autonomy, and (5) facilitate cooperation and synergy among the 17 member campuses. The President of WCSU reports to the President of the Board. The first President of the Board served from 2010-2012, and an interim President served from 2012- 2013, when the current President, Dr. Gregory Gray, was appointed. Early indications are that the Board and Board President intend to provide WCSU sufficient autonomy and freedom to make decisions that are in the best interest of WCSU and its students.

The Board's code of ethics specifically bars all members of the board from entering into a contract for a fee with any of the member institutions or the board itself, thereby precluding a financial interest in WCSU. The board conducts regular public meetings that are scheduled in advance for the entire year and are promoted to the individual campuses. Four standing committees are charged with oversight of their respective areas – Academic and Student Affairs, Audit, Finance, and Administration – in addition to an Executive Committee. Two advisory bodies provide input to the board from their respective constituencies: the Student Advisory Council and the Faculty Advisory Council. Board meetings are open, and members of the respective campuses, particularly the vice presidents, regularly participate in committee meetings. The Board President has reached out to WCSU and will be attending a meeting of the WCSU University Senate. Thus, to date the structure and activities of the Board appear to promote communication with the campuses, including WCSU, and the board itself.

Board strategic planning will be a priority in the coming year. Two special committees have been appointed to focus on Information Technology and Strategic Planning. The stated goals of the Board are first-year and overall student success, affordability and sustainability, innovation and economic growth, and equity. The Board is working toward a plan that will focus on strategic goals for the system that encompass student learning, institutional effectiveness, and centralization of resources where appropriate. In collaboration with institutional vice presidents, metrics by which to gauge institutional effectiveness have been identified and include: enrollment; transfer articulation and success; on-time graduation; number of degrees, especially in high-need areas; post-graduation outcomes; racial/ethnic and gender equity in student achievement; and employer attitudes.

The Board is considering a new Budget Allocation Model that would tie state appropriation to institutional effectiveness, but the method of determining resources from institutional performance variables, and the benchmarks that would indicate institutional success, have not yet been established. The Board has instituted a new transfer articulation policy that mandates each institution to develop a competency-based general education core in five major areas that will result in guaranteed admission and junior status without course-by-course transfer. The timeframe is very short and will require completion this academic year, providing urgency to the general education review at WCSU.

Overall, the external governance of the institution has passed a period of turmoil, but much work is needed to bring clarity and continuity to the oversight by the Board. It is hoped that, over the next few years, the Board will establish consistent guidance for WCSU and demonstrate an understanding of the unique character of WCSU and of the different missions of the institutions within ConnSCU.

Institutional Effectiveness: The shared governance system within the institution is well structured, comprehensive, and actively used, and the internal governance process has strong credibility. The new Board of Regents has yet to establish consistent procedures and guidelines for institutional effectiveness that are needed for WCSU's own decision making.

4. The Academic Program

Introduction, Undergraduate Education and the Major or

Concentration: Western Connecticut State University offers a strong array of programs, several with national, specialized accreditation. The campus offers 39 undergraduate degree programs and 65 majors, along with 15 master's degrees, three graduate certificate programs and two doctoral (Ed.D.) programs. All programs are offered through four schools: the School of Arts and Sciences, the School of Professional Studies, the Ansell School of Business, and the School of Visual and Performing Arts. The largest undergraduate majors are Justice and Law Studies (515), Psychology (376), and Management (308). The largest graduate programs are the MS in Counseling Education (87) and the MS in Education (84). Enrollments at both the undergraduate and graduate levels have been falling steadily: (5960 in FY10 to 5806 in fall 2013) with a

decline of approximately 8% at the undergraduate level since the 2010 peak; and a 29% decline in graduate programs since 2009 (589 in FY 09 to 482 in fall 2013). There is focused attention on recruitment of undergraduate students, and a recent restructuring of the Admissions office that seeks to proactively address undergraduate enrollment decline. A goal of 4% increase in-state students and 10% out-of-state student increase has been established for fall 2015.

The University identified four programs, Music Education, Justice and Law Administration, Nursing, and Chemistry and Biology, as “signature programs” in 2012. It is unclear to the accreditation team – and many on campus – what impact the designation of signature programs will have on resource allocation, marketing strategies, or enrollment planning. The Team applauds the initiative to identify signature programs but urges the University to provide a fuller understanding of how the designation will advance the needs of the programs and the University. In addition, while WCSU has added several new graduate programs since the last review, the Team is uncertain what emphasis the institution plans to place on graduate education moving forward.

There has been considerable turnover within academic affairs over the past three years. The Provost, Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs, and all of the academic deans have been in their positions less than three years. While the new senior leadership group brings energy, creativity and dedication to the academic programs, the Team is concerned that financial constraints, coupled with the lack of a fully developed enrollment management plan, may make it difficult to strategically manage the portfolio of academic offerings. The Team sees that the Provost is well respected and perceived to be both competent and collegial which provides the campus an opportunity to activate the academic leadership group and their faculty partners to move on key tasks identified: the competency-based measurable learning outcomes for general education; the completion of the learning outcomes for majors; and developing an academically coherent enrollment

management plan. Fiscal constraints are often not quickly resolved, but the energy, enthusiasm, and strategic focus of leadership is a strength and can move the agenda forward so the campus is fully prepared to strategically generate, target and invest new resources.

Based on a review of the catalog, program goals, program requirements and options, and selected syllabi, the Team finds the University’s undergraduate programs to be generally clear and coherent, with standards of achievement appropriate to the degrees awarded and well within the best traditions of academic programs in the respective areas. A clear prerequisite system ensures students have in-depth study at the advanced undergraduate level. Learning goals and syllabi reflect a strong commitment to students’ development of skills in information literacy and technology, which was confirmed in discussions with students.

A revised academic program review process was implemented in 2012, with a shortened interval of seven years. Discussions with academic leadership and faculty revealed that in

the past the academic review had been ineffective and inconsistently applied. The revised process is clearly presented in the Faculty Handbook, departments have been notified of the schedule, and the current academic leadership appears committed to making the academic program review process robust, consistent and meaningful.

The Honors Program is strong and has shown significant growth since 2009, from 120 students to 219 students, while at the same time demonstrating higher achievement levels as the average GPA rose from 3.2 to 3.71. The program is rigorous and well managed, and based on discussions with students, has become a magnet for University recruitment.

In Spring 2012, the ConnSCU Board of Regents for Higher Education approved a new transfer articulation policy that calls for common general education competencies, in alignment with AAC&U LEAP competencies, across all Connecticut state universities, community colleges, and Charter Oak College. In addition, this policy calls for the establishment of a common “pathway” to graduation for each major.

WCSU has one off-site instructional location on the campus of Naugatuck Valley Community College in Waterbury, where two programs (RN to BS and BBA in Management) are offered, primarily in the evenings. The faculty in that program are a combination of regular, full-time and adjunct faculty members. These programs have been in service for approximately 13 years. There is one staff person in residence at Western at Waterbury to support students. All courses required for degree completion are offered on site, and there are limited student services, including advising and registration. Students have access to the NVCC Library and the online offerings of the WCSU library, but the extent to which students use these resources is not assessed.

General Education:

Currently, the general education curriculum for all WCSU students includes 42 credits and is based on a distribution model in which courses are taken as follows: 3 credits in oral communication skills, 15 credits in the humanities, 12 credits in social and behavioral sciences, 10 credits in natural sciences, mathematics and computer science, and 2 credits in exercise science. The general education requirements are expected, but not required, to be completed prior to undertaking the major program.

In response to the new statewide transfer articulation policy, during AY 2012-2013 the University Senate approved moving forward with developing a new general education curriculum that is competency-based rather than a distribution model. When implemented, the new curriculum will accomplish two major objectives: compliance with the new statewide transfer articulation policy and an assessable general education curriculum. The University Senate will choose a framework for the new general education curriculum in AY 2013-2014 and proceed with implementation in AY 2014-2015. While this schedule will match the requirements of the new articulation policy, the institution will need to increase the pace at which the new curriculum is developed and implemented. Nonetheless, compliance with the state’s new policy is essential, and completing elements necessary for implementation will need to be a priority given the hard deadline from the

Board of Regents and the urgency of general education reform to meet assessment requirements and student needs.

In addition to the work being done with the rest of the general education curriculum, the University has been experimenting with improving its First Year Experience and has settled on a single cohort model focused on a “University 101” course and first year competencies. It is being implemented this fall and data for evaluating its effectiveness will be collected.

Graduate Education:

WCSU offers 17 graduate programs, including two doctoral programs; an Ed.D. in Instructional Leadership and an Ed.D. in Nursing Education. The Ed.D. in Nursing Education is new and jointly offered with Southern Connecticut State University. As such it will be reviewed in a separate visit later this year. The oversight of the graduate programs has changed in the past year. There is no longer a graduate dean, and academic administration of the Division of Graduate Studies now falls within the portfolio of the Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs, while student services are provided primarily by the Associate Director of the Division of Graduate Studies. This is a recent reorganization and there is concern that the institution has not articulated a clear strategy or plan for how graduate education will be further developed or supported, or how the decline in graduate student enrollment will be addressed, issues that should have focused attention in the context of academic and enrollment planning.

All graduate programs at WCSU require at least one of the following for the degree: a comprehensive examination, a capstone course, or another culminating experience in which the student demonstrates successful learning. The Ed.D. in Instructional Leadership uses a cohort model that requires both a comprehensive exam and a dissertation.

In the December 21, 2006, report, the Commission asked the University to give emphasis to its success in developing and implementing specific measures to evaluate the success of the doctoral program in Instructional Leadership. The Team met with the Provost, the Associate Provost, the Graduate Coordinator and an alumna of the first cohort of the program to review the program’s progress. Graduation rates for the first three cohorts are 78%, 76% and 86% respectively. A survey of graduates shows significant career growth, such as teacher to assistant principal or principal to superintendent, following graduation. The Team examined the process for outcome evaluation and found strong evidence of student success, careful assessment, and caring faculty. The University is to be commended for its efforts to build a strong and rigorous program that is thoughtfully and effectively evaluated and managed.

Integrity in the Award of Academic Credit

At the undergraduate level, all programs meet the 120 credit requirement, and several programs exceed it, including Elementary Biology (126), Music: Jazz and Classical Voice (127), Elementary Education: English, English Writing, and History/SS (128) and Music

Education (131). There are discussions currently occurring between the academic administration and the relevant departments to find ways to appropriately reduce the credit requirements for some of these programs in order to provide students the opportunity to complete their degrees on time and minimize student debt. All graduate programs require a minimum of 30 credits.

The institution has chosen to adopt the federal definition of the credit hour where one credit hour equals one hour of classroom time and two hours of student work outside class per week for a 15-week term. In discussions with faculty, they demonstrated an understanding of the University's policy for credit award and how it related to their courses. The Team's review of course schedules and syllabi for a cross-section of WCSU's course offerings, including online and hybrid courses, found the assignment of credit reflective of the University's policy. Examples of courses being offered in multiple formats confirmed consistent learning outcomes and expected student achievement across all formats. In addition, an examination of selected online courses in Blackboard Learn confirmed that online courses were sufficiently rigorous. However, the review also showed variability in quality and rigor. The institution is aware of this issue and is developing an "orientation to online learning" seminar as well as instituting measures to increase oversight of online courses. For courses taught at different levels in the same discipline, sample syllabi showed evidence of progressively complex and specialized student work.

Transfer students made up 36.5% of this year's entering class. As such, evaluation of transfer credit is a real and pressing issue. Successful implementation of the new state transfer articulation policy will be a critical component in supporting enrollment management and the timeline is short (implementation in 2013-2014). However, once the transfer articulation policy is fully in place, it will provide for consistent, efficient processing of transfer credit and a clear path for students transferring from the community college system with regard to both general education and major requirements.

Assessment of Student Learning:

Assessment: The University has made substantive progress in developing a culture of assessment. The programs with specialized accreditation tend to have more mature assessment plans, although some programs that do not have an option for accreditation still have relatively well-developed assessment programs. Two examples of programs with well-defined and implemented assessment plans are the psychology department and the doctoral program in instructional leadership. Programmatic learning goals have been developed and published for all major programs; however, not all programs have completed assessments, analyzed findings and made related program improvements. While there is a University Assessment Committee, faculty members in areas where assessment is relatively new and not guided by specialty accreditation expressed a need for University-wide systemic support in order to enhance their shared community understanding. Departments employ a variety of approaches to assessment, ranging from the ACT Major Field Test to the development of capstone experiences.

However, because the University is in the early stages of developing a new, competency-based general education curriculum, there are no learning goals or assessment plan developed in general education at this time. The institution is acutely aware of the need to do so, and there appears to be significant faculty understanding of the process with interest in improving student outcomes through assessment. However, the short time frame available for implementing the new state policy regarding transfer credit creates extreme urgency in moving forward.

An analysis of a cross section of syllabi also shows that the institution has embraced a robust use of course objectives and generally ties those objectives to course assessments. Current syllabi were considerably stronger than syllabi from 2011 and 2012 following the creation and implementation of a syllabus template. However, while the majority of syllabi showed alignment of content and learning outcomes, and many tied course assessments to course objectives, there was still a great deal of variability within the sample reviewed. The University is to be commended for its progress in this area, but the Team encourages continued monitoring and to improve in this area.

With respect to the E Series, the University selected the first option, based primarily on program review and specialized accreditation. Chemistry, Counselor Education, Education, Music, Nursing and Social Work currently hold specialized national accreditation. In addition, three additional areas, Business, Theater Arts and Visual Arts, are seeking specialized accreditation. As reflected in the self-study, the E forms indicate that the University has realistic learning objectives published in the catalog for each undergraduate major and graduate program.

Standard of Student Achievement and Measures of Student Success: The Team's review of syllabi and available assessment plans along with discussions with faculty, deans and the Provost and Associate Provost, indicate that WCSU has in place standards of achievement appropriate to the degrees it awards. Course and program outcomes for programs are more rigorous and advanced at each level. Confirming evidence was found by comparing course readings and other assignments reflected on the syllabi of a cross section of courses at both introductory and advanced levels within degrees as well as across different degree levels.

Understanding How Students Are Learning: WSCSU administered the NSSE survey in Spring 2011 and Spring 2013, but while results were circulated to various constituencies across campus, there was limited dialogue or analysis of the results. As noted in Standard Two, while institutional research produces a great deal of data and is responsive to specific requests made, there is not a demonstrated capacity to provide faculty and senior leaders the level of analysis and synthesis of data and the various instruments used that are required for more informed decision-making. The Team encourages the institution to continue gathering data, but also to develop meaningful analyses that can be used by faculty to improve understanding of the students' learning processes.

The Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) provides faculty with a number of resources to assist faculty in understanding how WCSU students learn. Discussions with both faculty and academic leaders indicated that CELT is an effective and popular resource for faculty members to improve teaching effectiveness.

Institutional Effectiveness: WCSU is focused on providing high-quality, student-centered, effective academic programs, as evidenced by the success of a broad group of programs having achieved national specialized accreditation. The faculty and administration are committed to continuing to develop a culture of assessment and data-driven evaluation with much energy devoted to this goal by the Provost, Deans and faculty. Dialogue is open and clear on programmatic goals to be achieved. Improving student-learning outcomes and sustaining academic program breadth and quality is a primary focus of the leadership and faculty of the campus.

5. Faculty

Full-time faculty at WCSU hold appropriate terminal degrees in their respective fields and the roles and responsibilities of all faculty (full-time, part-time, adjunct) are articulated in The Faculty Handbook, University Academic Policies and in the CSU-AAUP Collective Bargaining Agreement. Faculty salaries at WCSU are adjusted to some extent from the statewide norms to meet market and appear to be competitive in most fields. The process for faculty recruitment is clear, conducted openly, and consistent with the collective bargaining agreement and Human Resources/EEO Policies. The faculty tenure review process is outlined in the CSU- AAUP Collective Bargaining Agreement. All the team's interactions with campus leadership, faculty and students support the view that faculty are actively engaged in their teaching and advising work, and most maintain an active creative and professional activity/scholarship portfolio.

Teaching and Advising: Teaching is a primary focus at WCSU, and as the Self-Study reports, "Fulltime faculty members are contractually obligated to teach, advise, assess students, develop curricula, conduct research, engage in creative activity, participate in professional development activity and participate in shared governance, all of which contribute to the systematic understanding and implementation of effective teaching and learning processes" (p. 43). In terms of their teaching load, fulltime faculty must teach a "Twelve (12) workload credit per academic semester [which] constitutes a fulltime faculty teaching assignment (24 per year)" (Self-Study, p. 44).

The faculty consistently expressed strong commitments to their students' success and many have been involved in the work of developing learning outcomes and assessment. The faculty demonstrates commitment to the institution through their effective teaching, as reported in student course evaluations, learning outcome assessments, and completed academic program reviews. They also are recognized for achievements in other professional and creative responsibilities, as indicated in faculty vita and awards. Beyond that, they demonstrate active participation in shared governance. As the Self-Study reports, approximately half of the full-time faculty (118 out of 228) are active participants in a variety of committees (i.e. ad-hoc and standing committees). Meetings with faculty

leadership confirmed that faculty feel engaged and empowered to participate in all important campus decisions.

The Team commends the campus for the positive relationship evident between students and faculty, and the faculty and the administration. It is clear that engaged, shared decision-making is the norm at WCSU. The faculty's participation and perspective are clearly reflected in all aspects of WCSU's mission, vision and goals, as well as its implementation strategies. In light of the fiscal constraints the campus has recently experienced, maintaining this high level of collegiality is certainly a strength.

WCSU has had minor fluctuations in the number of its full-time faculty. According to the Self-Study, the total number of fulltime faculty remained relatively stable from FY11 (228), FY12 (225), to FY13 (228). However, there is a decrease anticipated in Fall 2014 due to enrollment and budgetary considerations. Nonetheless, the Team confirms that as reported in the Self-Study, the total number of faculty still allows the institution to fulfill its mission and purposes effectively.

The CSU-AAUP Collective Bargaining Agreement mandates that part-time instruction be limited to 21% of total teaching load unless special circumstances exist. At WCSU many departments have exceeded this level, and as the Self-Study reports extreme special circumstances at WCSU called for the employment of 399 adjunct faculty in FY13. As reported in the Data First forms, this is a 9.6% increase in the number of part-time faculty (from 364 in FY10 to 399 in FY13). The number is projected to remain stable in FY14. The Team also notes that while part-time faculty "longevity [at WCSU] gives students a sense of faculty consistency," they are not guaranteed fulltime positions, nor does the use of part-time faculty address the need to prioritize filling vacant lines in specific departments to meet teaching and advising needs.

The Team found evidence in the Data Sheets provided and in reports from Deans and faculty that economic conditions, imposed campus and state-wide hiring freezes, and retirements have over time created an imbalance in some departments and programs between fulltime and part-time faculty, and in some departments between fulltime faculty and the number of student majors. This has led many fulltime faculty members to take on duties and responsibilities beyond those normally expected in teaching, research, and service. The large number of part-time faculty also affects advising since they do not advise students or serve on committees. This means that aside from all other responsibilities expected of fulltime faculty, if they are part of large departments without the appropriate number of faculty commensurate with the number of majors, the advising loads can double and sometimes even triple

Due to the hiring freezes, many faculty have also taken on overloads to address gaps in their curriculum. Many programs, according to faculty, are suffering from low enrollments because they are not able to offer all courses required in their programs. While some of these gaps are dealt with by hiring specialized part-time faculty, at times it is not enough to cover all offerings in a particular program. In addition, specific accreditation requirements for some majors, limit the number of courses that can be taught by part-time faculty.

The Team believes that the concerns expressed by faculty also surfaced in the Spring 2012 Faculty-Staff Survey. According to the Self-Study, "...faculty agree that the four-course-per-semester (or equivalent) teaching load is acceptable for providing time for quality teaching, advising, and evaluating students; however, less than half of the faculty agreed that the workload allowed adequate time for research and scholarship" (p. 48). As a result, one of the projections for Fall 2013 is that CELT will conduct a workshop to "resolve the perception among some faculty that the four-course teaching load is sufficient to teach, assess, and advise students, but too great to allow adequate time for research and scholarship" (Self-Study, p. 52).

The efforts to address concerns of faculty regarding meeting all their responsibilities should be applauded and confirms that WCSU is a responsive institution that listens to issues raised. And it is also a step in the right direction in order to balance workload demands as an overall review of the impacts of hiring freezes needs to be undertaken.

In the 2004 report from the NEASC Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, WCSU was asked to review how it was integrating part-time faculty into the academic life of the institution. In order to address this concern, WCSU has begun the process of better integrating part-time faculty into campus life. Initial efforts have been made by the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT), which provides workshops for adjunct faculty and who developed an "Adjunct Faculty Orientation Manual" in Fall 2013. However, in conversations with deans, faculty leadership, and regular faculty, there does seem to be some inconsistency in the ways that part-time faculty are integrated into departments and the institution as a whole. While some faculty stated that certain schools at WCSU invite part-time faculty to meetings and events, other departments/schools stated that they do not extend the same courtesy because many of their adjuncts either work elsewhere and are not available, or because they are not familiar with the specific requirements in their respective majors, and thus do not feel they can incorporate them fully. The majority of faculty agree that more needs to be done with and for part-time faculty. While more workshops offered through CELT are a beginning, the institution may need to look at other ways to incorporate part-time faculty who in some departments/programs outnumber the full-time faculty 3 to 1. The Team notes that some institutional support may be required because the departments with the greatest number of part-time faculty may not have the fulltime personnel resources or support staff needed to do this effectively.

The dedication and work ethic of both the full and part-time faculty have sustained WCSU during these recent challenging budget times, but it is important that the campus develop a concrete plan for addressing both the full and part-time imbalance issues and the issue of engaging the part-time faculty more in the life of the campus.

Scholarship, Research and Creative Activity. As reported in the Self-Study, "The active pursuit of scholarship, research, and creative activity is essential to the mission and purposes of the institution, which articulate that effective and excellent teaching and learning require that faculty be active, engaged scholars and practitioners in their

disciplines” (p. 51). However, it was clear during conversations with faculty that there is no institutional or departmental definition or interpretation of what WCSU understands as scholarship, research and creative activity. While each department is directed to define what their specific disciplines consider appropriate scholarship, research, and creative activity and make the definition clear in their departmental bylaws, there is inconsistent evidence of this definition. The lack of clarity can negatively affect faculty who are eligible for tenure and promotion. Clarification on this matter is important so that faculty under review understand their responsibilities and at the same time are adhering to the requirements stipulated for evaluation and assessment in the agreement and are meeting departmental standards.

According to the CSU-AAUP Collective Bargaining Agreement and the Faculty Handbook faculty can request release time for research, and course development. Also, WCSU provides faculty development funds and there are CSU-AAUP Research Grants available. WCSU must be commended for its efforts to provide support and opportunities for faculty to pursue all forms of professional development activities. However, through the review of materials collected for the Self-Study, there is no evidence of analysis regarding faculty workload or adequate data about release time related to scholarship and professional/creative activity. When asked, some faculty expressed confusion regarding the criteria used to determine which faculty were granted release time, and others stated that some departments were more likely to get releases because of their fields. What was consistent in conversations with faculty was that more transparency in providing data and analysis to all constituents will be important to continue fostering the strong relationship between faculty and the administration.

Institutional Effectiveness: Western Connecticut State University has given attention to the support needed by faculty as they fulfill their teaching, advising, and scholarship responsibilities. There is ongoing feedback from faculty through established governance structures and informal conversations with senior leadership. There is also regular formal feedback in Faculty/Staff surveys, which are reviewed, discussed and acted upon as needed. A more comprehensive workload analysis to inform planning and an effort to define scholarly activity and standards will be useful.

6. Students

Admissions: Western Connecticut State University clearly defines the students it wishes to serve and takes seriously its mission to be an accessible, responsive and creative intellectual resource for the people and institutions of Connecticut. Of the total undergraduate population of 5806 HC, in 2012, 93.5% of fulltime undergraduate students were from Connecticut with 18.1% from Danbury. New York students represented 5.3% with 1.2% enrolled from other states and countries. Commuters represented 67.6 % of undergraduate students. The University has a comprehensive admission program that is both orderly and ethical with information readily available electronically and in print. Admission policies are clear, and the standards for admission ensure that the qualifications of students are compatible with institutional objectives.

Enrollment at the University has grown since the last NEASC report in 2007-08 and peaked in 2010. Since then, there was an overall decline in undergraduate enrollment of 3.4% in Fall 2011, 4.3% in fall of 2012, and 2% in 2013. WCSU has become slightly more selective in first time freshman admissions, accepting 59.7% of applicants versus 62.4%, 63.4 % and 62.2% in the three prior years. The SAT composite of first year freshmen declined slightly by -1.85% between 2009 and 2011. Transfer student applications increased 1.4% from 2009-2012; accepted students increased 4.5%; but enrolled students decreased by -2.9% between 2009 and 2012. To address enrollment concerns, in the spring of 2013 the University hired a new Director of Admissions and restructured the Enrollment Management Team directing them to increase first year student enrollment by 4% in FY14 and 4% in FY15, and out-of-state enrollment by 5% in FY14 and 10% in FY15.

Information and Technology facilitated four days of meetings to start a Re-Engineering Project to determine how to better serve students from the time they express interest in WCSU to the time they become alumni. Included are recommendations to improve marketing, recruitment and enrollment efforts. Admissions, which traditionally focused on full-time undergraduates, will also look at other student populations, for example graduate students. Admission's "best practices" have been identified and are being implemented. The Communication Team was charged with being more innovative in communicating with prospective students.

The SAT-optional program introduced in 2012 is being expanded to address the changing demographics in Connecticut and will target students likely to be successful at WCSU based on high school GPA. In addition, social media marketing, direct mail advertising, fall and spring Open Houses, Accepted Student Days, bus trips to urban areas, a student shadow program, two high school counselor lunch programs and campus tours are proactive recruitment efforts.

There are enrollment challenges. Future demographic projections predict a decline in the number of high school graduates in Connecticut. Decreased financial support from the state has made it difficult to maintain all support services to students. The number of staff in the admissions office (5) remains low compared to WCSU's identified peers. The University recently added one staff member in Admissions, making the total staff (6) and possibly adding more staff in the future as recruiting efforts expand. The University has acted quickly to address enrollment challenges but certainly needs to evaluate and monitor overall effectiveness.

The University offers placement tests in mathematics, Writing, Chemistry and Foreign Language. The University uses the results of these tests to determine course placement, and academic support work that may be needed. In 2010, 30% of first year students placed into developmental math and 13% were in developmental writing. Recently, developmental offerings declined dramatically when the state mandate forbidding state colleges from offerings developmental courses was implemented.

In the fall of 2012, an Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs was hired in part to coordinate graduate program development and recruitment. This change will engage the four Deans in program evaluation and will coordinate recruiting efforts. Graduate students, primarily part time students, declined from 366 FTE in 2009 to 285 FTE in 2013, a decrease of 25.1 % FTE.

Retention and Graduation: From the S-Series forms, WCSU demonstrates that it validates student success with retention and graduation rates. Graduation rates improved from 35% in 2008 (the last NEASC Report) to 42% for the current six-year rate, but this remains a concern when compared with WCSU's self-identified peer institutions' 51% graduation rate. Retention rates for first-year students were 69% from 2011 to 2012. Retention rates improved to 74.8% in 2013. For historically underrepresented students, retention rates were 69.9% in 2012 and increased to 77.3% in 2013.

In addition, WCSU uses data to identify approaches to improve retention and graduation rates and has taken steps and made recommendations to improve student success. The NSSE Survey identified the importance of co-curricular activities to students. WCSU identified characteristics of students most likely to persist to graduation and know that first year students who complete at least 24 credits with a 2.0 GPA are likely or much more likely to persist to graduation. The Retention Team found that only 52% of seniors reported that their primary source of academic advising was their assigned academic advisor and have taken steps to strengthen their relationships.

The Educational Achievement and Access Program, a five-week residential summer program, provides underrepresented students with the opportunity and support they need to enroll in college and persist to graduation. On average, 35 students are enrolled annually and are provided individual support. The graduation rate of the Fall 2006 cohort was 2% higher than the overall graduation rate and 11% better than a similar academic peer group. Retention rates for male and female athletes from freshman to sophomore year (80% and 85% respectively) are higher than the overall retention rates for non-athletes (66% for males, 72% for females).

The University has been quite active in taking steps to understand the up and down graduation rates as well as issues regarding retention. WCSU has taken steps to increase student support and establish and improve existing programs that impact retention, graduation rates and student success. These issues need ongoing attention and work. Tracking student success after graduation has been decentralized to academic departments and thus this information is inconsistent. A recommendation has been made to centralize the collection of alumni information for consistency purposes and to better use information to assess learning outcomes and to inform program improvement activities. The University measures the success of recruited student populations regularly.

Despite recent decline in state support, WCSU has made a commitment to student success. Several new and existing programs have been developed and improved. The University is in the process of hiring a data researcher to mine the data and conduct appropriate analysis. The University needs to move forward with further development of these programs and

based on assessment, determine which programs made a difference in student success and have more effectively engaged students in academic support programs. For example, The First-Year Experience Program was launched in Fall 2013 and focused on helping students better navigate the University. The University has launched MAP-Works, a program that identifies students at risk and hopes to achieve a 4% increase in retention. Academic support centers will open in fall 2013 and the Learning Commons will provide tutorial and advising in the School of Business. A creative new approach called the Math Emporium is addressing academic support needs in math. The Math Emporium provides self-paced tutorial assistance. The writing lab and computer science clinic offer academic support. Currently students are assigned an academic adviser in the advisement center, or if the student has declared a major they are assigned a faculty adviser in their colleges. A Dual Adviser program is being considered that would assign all students an adviser in both the advisement center and in their college. This program hopes to break down the current conflict that appears to exist between the advising center staff and faculty advisers. A new degree audit system will be implemented to assist students and advisers in monitoring academic progress and consideration is being given to an assistant director of academic advising to coordinate this program. Information about academic advising and academic progress are available, and policies are clearly stated and administered in a fair and consistent manner.

The University also recognizes the importance of out of classroom activities to improve student engagement and create a sense of community/belonging thereby increasing retention. In addition, capital improvements to residence halls, making more single rooms available and moving to Academic year contracts are efforts underway that could impact retention. The expansion of counseling services is being considered. Efforts are underway to involve parents in student success efforts and the response has been positive.

Student Services: The Student Affairs mission and vision statement reflects the University mission and builds on the values and vision work initiated by the President. The goal for Student Affairs is to create a more student-centered, service oriented campus: to increase student retention, focusing on new leadership and collaboration with Academic Affairs. The University has an impressive array of student support programs focused on student success and the Division's long-range plan has established a clear set of objectives to meet future goals. The Student Affairs staff is a mix of seasoned and experienced professionals and staff beginning their career in student services. Professionals have master's degrees and several have terminal degrees in their field. The staff should be commended for their dedication to students and efforts to meet student needs. However, there appears to be a shortage of staff making delivery of services to students at times difficult.

Programs to support the needs and goals of Western's students are numerous. The Career Development Center (CDC) assists students with career planning and job searches, conducts workshops and operates a cooperative education program, career fairs, etiquette dinners and other events. The Center evaluates its effectiveness through student and employee evaluations and is generally rated very positively. Staff size has remained the same while enrollment has grown significantly in the past two decades. The CDC will

continue to use social media and new online software to continue addressing the needs of students.

Orientation is offered to entering first-time students (including transfers) each June and again in the fall. The one-day June orientation focuses on class registration, meeting faculty and students and taking care of a myriad of details paving the way for a smooth transition in the fall. In the fall, a 4-day orientation focuses on transition issues and social activities. Finally, a new program “Voices of Students” introduces students to a wide-range of scenarios they may experience on campus and introduces them to a series of programs offered during the fall term. Parent programs have been introduced into the orientation program and parents have responded very positively.

One-third of all undergraduates reside in on-campus residence halls. The University provides an array of programs and services including mental health counseling services, health services, co-curricular opportunities through numerous student organizations and activities, leadership through the Hancock Student Leadership Program, recreation, intramurals and inter-collegiate athletics. Students are involved in campus governance, through the Student Government Association (SGA), Inter Residence Hall Association (IRHA), the Greek Council and are included on numerous University committees and governance committees including the Connecticut State Board of Regents. Programs also focus on WCSU’s commuter student population through the Commuter Student Association and “Commuter Connections” a program to engage these students in the life of the campus.

Disability Support Services are provided through the Office of Accessibility Services. The office works with over 400 students each semester providing reasonable accommodations, advocacy, and academic support, assistive technology, writing assistance and where appropriate alternatives to foreign language. The staff is active providing workshops to faculty and participating in orientation and admission programs. Office space has been improved and recognizes the growth of this critical program. Several concerns were identified regarding making policies clear and complete. These policies are being reviewed and updated and are being put in place in 2013. Staff will focus on academic related student coaching and refer students in need of non-academic counseling to the counseling center.

Financial aid at Western is provided through a well-organized, clearly defined program. Awards are based on criteria that are available electronically and in print. The University has emphasized need-based aid and has chosen to set aside more than the 15% of tuition that is required to be set aside by the governing board. All financial aid increased from FY10 to FY11 but then declined by 10.1% from FY11 to FY12 as enrollment decreased. Efforts have been made to secure additional financial aid support through the University’s Development Office. In addition, two additional staff were hired and a third person was hired to coordinate all veterans programs.

The University offers support to students through health services (primary health care) counseling services (mental health care) and substance abuse prevention services

(CHOICES). CHOICES works with the greater Danbury community to identify at-risk students and provide assessment, screening and intervention services. Spiritual support of students is offered through campus ministries. Student Health 101 is offered to all undergraduate students as part of wellness outreach and is a cooperative effort of Recreation, Health and Counseling Center and CHOICES. The caseload in the counseling center remains high not only in number of students seeking support, but also in the range of problems they bring to the center.

WCSU has a rich history of division III intercollegiate athletics. Eight women's teams and 6 men's teams represent a wide variety of sports. Current participation opportunities for women --41% --are not reflective of the enrollment of women at Western, which is 54%. This issue is related to enrollment decline and increased participation rates in football, but the imbalance will need to be addressed. The fiscal responsibility for intercollegiate athletics rests with the University and funding for this program is part of the University's budget process.

The safety of students is of primary importance at WCSU and the campus police are an integral part of the community. The University has an emergency management plan. The police are part of the University's threat assessment team, work closely with CHOICES, and various offices to present community awareness and safety initiatives and actively participated in over 50 personal safety and educational programs in 2012.

University policies and student rights and responsibilities are published in the student handbook. This information is readily available to students electronically and in print. The conduct process is clearly defined, is inclusive of students and has taken an educational approach to resolving inappropriate student behavior. The staff meets with students after the conduct process is complete to follow up with the student.

The University has clearly defined policies regarding the confidentiality of student records, the release of confidential information and the safety and security of information. The privacy rights of students are defined by the Family Educational and Privacy Act, are clearly defined and followed.

The Division of Student Affairs assesses the effectiveness of its programs and services using the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), satisfaction inventories, quality of student life surveys, and self assesses using the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS). Programs and services are altered or improved based on data and feedback and an analysis of funding of programs and services to identify where reallocations or new funds would be effective and timely. Among the concerns identified were frustration about the lack of funding for recreational programs, frustrations with the shuttle services provided by the University between the Midtown and Westside campuses. In addition, staff expressed concern about the lack of clarity in the plan for student services at the Westside campus when the new performing arts center opens.

Institutional Effectiveness: WCSU uses an array of evaluation and assessment instruments to determine its effectiveness in serving students. The University has improved

graduation rates, identified areas of concern, developed plans and strategies to address the issues of retention and enrollment. Students expressed a genuine appreciation of faculty and staff and the student affairs division of the University. They described the strong sense of community at WCSU. 89% of recent Western graduates report being satisfied or very satisfied with their experience at WCSU and 89% would recommend WCSU to a prospective student. The excellent array of top-notch opportunities for student engagement at Western assures the effectiveness of the University in meeting the needs of its students and enhancing their opportunity for success.

7. Library and other Information Resources

Resources and Access: Western Connecticut State University manages information resources through the two libraries: The Ruth A. Haas Library on the main campus and the Robert Young Library on the Westside campus, which currently supports the degrees offered by the Ansell School of Business. The Information Technology and Innovation Department (IT&I) supports Libraries, and both the Libraries and the IT&I department work collaboratively with Media Services to deliver resources, technology services and information literacy instruction to support the campus-learning environment. The Library Division and the IT&I Department both have recently appointed new senior leadership and the Team recognizes the new energy and enthusiasm they bring to meeting the campus' information resource needs.

The library subscribes to the most common high quality databases to support the academic needs of WCSU and provides resources in a variety of formats appropriate to specific disciplines. The move to more online journals and electronic reference sources will ensure currency in these resources and open space to repurpose for student use. The library's collections are augmented by access to the resources of the other CSUS libraries as part of the ConnSCU system and membership in the Connecticut Library Consortium. The faculty and students indicate that the collections and services offered by the library meet their instructional and learning needs.

Members of the Library and Media Services Policy Committee praised the library's responsiveness to faculty suggestions for additions to the print & online collections and online database resources. New forms of media material are especially appreciated, along with suggestions for policy changes (e.g., loan periods and fines for faculty) suggested by the Committee.

The librarians' participation in the design and implementation of the new Learning Commons in Young Library was singled out for special praise by faculty. Westside students expressed enthusiasm for the new space and the information literacy help received from librarians. Several students commented on the value of librarians collaborating with faculty to offer classes on library use and the research process, again identified the need to incorporate a module on information literacy into the First Year Experience

The Team noted that in 2013 the Library faculty and staff adopted a mission statement that formalizes their commitment to "provide high quality academic library services and to

ensuring access to collections in a variety of formats,” with “Information resources designed to meet the curricular, intellectual, and professional needs of students and faculty (that) are intended to enhance the learning outcomes and teaching environment of the University.” This mission statement is posted on the website along with the library policies, services and collections.

Having this mission statement to drive future strategic planning in the library was reassuring to the Team who noted that the WCSU Mission Statement and Strategic Plan should include the library as integral to the academic life of WCSU so that resources needed and the services required will be given appropriate consideration. The library reported that it had not had input in the budgeting process, and the library faculty and staff expressed no knowledge of the overall University budget or the budget allocations for salaries, benefits and library materials. This lack of awareness makes it difficult for librarians to understand fully the financial state of the University or to develop their own resources plans in a realistic context. The Team therefore commends the administrative leadership for its decision to open the budgeting process and to allow units to have a voice to express their vision and financial needs.

The Team does note, however, that in talking to faculty and students that the library is for them a highly visible and valued partner in the educational process. In light of the declining usage information presented in the self-study, it would be beneficial for the library to have a strategic plan or operational plan to provide a road map for expanding usage. At present it is unclear how priorities are set and how decisions are made. The library’s interim director is eager to move forward to develop a shared vision for the library and create a plan to guide decision-making that may require some job restructuring.

As with other academic units, budget cuts and loss of faculty and staff positions create workload issues and have a negative impact on services offered, e.g., library hours are greatly reduced and the Westside campus library is open only 4 days a week. The Team acknowledges the support that allowed the education librarian position to be filled. This will provide better library service for the education department in general and the new doctoral program in particular.

Information and Technological Literacy: Information technology is clearly an integral part of the WCSU educational and administrative environment. The WCSU Mission Statement emphasizes the importance of information technology and advanced instructional technologies to support a dynamic curriculum; information technology is integrated throughout the Strategic Plan and has a high profile website.

The IT&I unit has new leadership and is eager to support the academic needs of the University. The media services department collaborates with the library on projects and is represented on the Library and Media Services Policy Committee. At the present time IT & I funds are focused on student enrollment and security, but the CIO makes it clear that when these areas are stabilized the IT&I unit will provide additional support for the academic side of technology. A possible consideration to support online delivery of courses and programs would be the addition of an instructional design specialist.

The Team agrees that the decline in library information literacy instruction indicated in the self-study is cause for concern. Although both students and faculty mention their appreciation for the services and assistance provided in this area, they clearly want more services. From the strategic plan and the description of plans for the first year experience program, it appears that the institution interprets the concept of information literacy in the narrow sense of technology literacy and a wider range of information literacy options for students and faculty should be provided. The recent relocation of the CELT and the Writing Center into the library will provide more opportunities for collaboration on an information literacy program among the library, IT&I and other academic support units.

A culture of assessment is not yet present in the library's evaluation of services and information literacy learning outcomes needs to be implemented. The library's interim director is knowledgeable, enthusiastic, well respected by the faculty and eager to move the library forward with a new vision and new initiatives.

University wide changes and changes in the library profession offer an opportunity for the library to develop a new strategic plan by setting priorities, identifying essential services and functions and deciding what could be eliminated in order to accommodate the new teaching and learning pedagogies in higher education without excessive additions to the librarians' workload. The library, the IT&I Department and Media Services are positioned to keep up-to-date with the leading trends and provide a cutting-edge information resources experience for the University.

Institutional Effectiveness: The addition of a well-structured assessment program for user services will provide useful feedback for evaluation and decision-making with respect to information and literacy services. Developing a more formalized information literacy program with specific learning outcomes will enable the library to document program success and provide information to continue to improve the student experience.

8. Physical and Technological Resources

Western Connecticut State University (WCSU) has 30 buildings with 1.9 million square feet of assignable space over two campuses comprising nearly 400 acres. Classrooms, offices, residence halls, student centers, and other facilities are located on both the Middtown campus and the Westside campus; these campuses are approximately 4 miles apart and are serviced by a shuttle system.

Major new buildings completed in the last ten years added 263,000 square feet of assignable space at a cost of \$74.2M. WCSU also constructed two large parking garages (one on each campus) at a cost of \$18.8M. The Middtown campus saw completion of a 65,000 square foot Science Building that opened in 2005. The Westside campus has benefited from the construction of a new Athletic Stadium (2004), the Centennial Residence Hall (2004), and the Westside Campus Center (2008). Construction of the \$97.6M Visual and Performing Arts Center (VPAC) on the Westside campus began in 2011 with occupancy in 2014. This new facility will have a dramatic impact on the development of the Westside campus. The addition of a large amount of new space

stemming from the new Science Building and the anticipated completion of the VPAC provides the opportunity to reallocate space for other needs. Reallocation of functions from one campus to another (e.g., the VPAC functions to the Westside Campus) will result in other service facilities needs such as additional dining and parking. Other outstanding needs identified during the Team visit include a desire to expand and enhance recreation centers at each campus.

The institution's physical resources are commensurate with institutional purposes and serve institutional needs. Review of facilities indicates that management, maintenance, and operation of facilities are performed in a manner to sustain and enhance institutional purposes. Facilities are constructed and maintained in accordance with legal requirements as well as a concern for environmental impact and are attractive and well laid out forming a traditional academic setting (consistent with the "private college experience at a public price" that has been a branding message of WCSU).

WCSU utilizes Sightlines LLC to undertake periodic facilities assessment. Relevant findings of this analysis include:

- WCSU facilities are relatively more complex than peer institutions' facilities; this is particularly so for the Westside facilities.
- WCSU has a smaller proportion of facilities identified as "High Risk", from a facilities condition perspective, than peers.
- Over the past six years (FY2007-FY2012), three quarters of capital spending has been on new space as opposed to existing facilities; capital investment on existing facilities is significantly below peer institutions and below stewardship targets.
- Capital maintenance "backlog" has increased about \$20/GSF since FY2007.
- There are significant differences in "Net Asset Value" of specific WCSU facilities; of twenty-two buildings assessed, eleven facilities were rated very high in the 80%-95% range (100% NAV is essentially "like new") while seven facilities are identified to be below 50% NAV (with a corresponding description: "Major buildings components are in jeopardy of failure. Reliability issues are widespread through the building.").

Funding for capital projects has varied significantly year-to-year based predominantly on state allocations. Recent large capital investment is driven primarily by costs associated with the construction of the new Visual and Performing Arts Center. Major renovations have occurred over the past decade impacting 207,000 square feet at a cost of \$22.4M. Planned renovations for the next five years will cover 202,289 square feet at a projected cost of \$56.2M (subject to funding approvals). WCSU space usage is guided by a 2007 update of the institution's capital master plan. Partially in response to recognition of recent decreases in student enrollment, a task force was created in FY2013 that is anticipated to lead to hiring of a professional master planner, through the Regent's Office, to create a revised master plan for WCSU.

As noted in the Self-Study, "Unlike the previous Master Plan, which emphasized the creation of additional space, the focus will be on significant renovations of current space

and, in some cases, replacement of buildings.” In 2013, the WCSU President charged various teams to address four priority issues and four signature programs. Further, student retention is a high priority for Western, and physical and technological resources have been directed to support that priority including creation of an impressive Math Emporium as well as a Learning Commons facility both opening in Fall 2013. It is anticipated that the physical resource planning process will support these priorities, address support issues caused by having two campuses, and will be linked to the financial plan.

WCSU funds capital projects from four primary sources: participation in the system-wide CSUS 2020 bond program, which plans to allocate \$1 billion to WCSU and its sister Connecticut comprehensive universities over a ten-year period; and participation in the Connecticut Health and Educational Facilities Authority (CHEFA) bonding program; use of reserve funds; and use of current-year operating funds.

Although plans may possibly be impacted by the state’s current fiscal situation, the CSUS 2020 and CHEFA bonding programs anticipate (subject to financing approvals) the following future capital investments:

- Completion of Visual and Performing Arts Building in FY2014
- Midtown campus police station in FY2016
- Founders Hall renovation, which WCSU uses at Naugatuck Valley Community College, in FY2016
- Litchfield and Newbury Residence Hall renovations in FY2016/FY2018
- Westside campus parking garage in FY2016
- Higgins Hall renovation in FY2017
- Berkshire Hall renovation design work in FY2019

WCSU technological infrastructure supports the fulfillment of the educational and administrative mandates of the University. The department responsible for overseeing this infrastructure and services adopted a new name in February 2013: Information Technology and Innovation – IT&I (formerly University Computing). As noted in the Self-Study, “This new name is not simply cosmetic: it more accurately captures the department’s tasks and goals and better aligns it with the university’s mission and vision.” This name change also reflects a culture change to enhance focus on innovation (e.g., business process mapping information process redesigns).

Program and services provided by University Computing/IT&I are informed by the 2008-2012 Information Technology Master Plan with most of the initiatives identified in that plan completed over this planning cycle. Major systems include the Banner College Enterprise Resource Planning system as well as the Blackboard Vista and Learn learning management system.

Classroom technology is upgraded on a rational basis as established by the WCSU Information Technology Committee. A four-year refresh program has recently been put into place for computers (it was noted that some “catch-up” is still underway). Classroom and other teaching spaces support teaching methods appropriate to the discipline and the teaching and learning process. Other initiatives have included the installation of

SmartBoards, mainly in support of education programs; Raiser's Edge, in support of Development operations; and a print management system, resulting in printing reductions of nearly 20%. The institution utilizes various systems to plan, administer, and evaluate its programs and services.

Total expenditures for technology have remained relatively constant over the past few years. Future IT&I projects will be informed by a planned Spring 2014 student, faculty, and staff satisfaction survey. This is will be used as the basis for developing a new Information Technology Strategic Plan.

Of particular note, in Fall 2012 "the University detected a significant security vulnerability in one of its technology systems" that was addressed expeditiously in order to "minimize reputational and financial risk". The institution took decisive action to address the particular concern (at a significant "data vulnerability incident expense" cost) as well as other potential vulnerabilities. Partially as a response to this incident, data and information security is a high priority of WCSU, the CSU system, and the State.

Three identified ongoing IT&I projects reflect the University's "dedication to security and technology innovation":

- Data recovery plan (Fall 2013)
- Implementation of new security policies and standards (2014)
- Long-term network re-architecture and equipment upgrade (2015)

These initiatives and new policies and procedures will enhance the integrity and security of data and the privacy of individuals. The University's response to the data vulnerability situation demonstrates its commitment to addressing inappropriate use of its technology systems and resources.

Institutional Effectiveness: WCSU undertakes ongoing evaluation of its physical and technological resources. These evaluations are used to inform investment decisions that address current needs as well as future plans consistent with its mission, strategic plan, and financial capability. WCSU investment in its physical and technological resources have supported its branding message of offering a "private college-like" experience. The university's response to the data security issue identified was appropriate and effective.

9. Financial Resources

Western Connecticut State University (WCSU) is one of four institutions comprising the Connecticut State Universities (CSU) system. These four institutions were governed by a Board of Trustees (BOT) until 2012 when the Connecticut legislature established a Board of Regents for Higher Education (BOR) to replace the BOT with their authority spanning the seventeen Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (ConnSCU). Standard 3 addresses this governance change; as it pertains to this section, an important component is that the BOR is responsible for establishing tuition costs, student fees, and financial aid

policies, and must approve new classes of positions and selected major contracts, primarily related to information processing, for these institutions. WCSU has experienced recent financial challenges due to reductions in state appropriations. The Team notes that these reductions did not occur immediately after the economic crisis, as most other state public higher education system's experienced, but rather began in fiscal year 2012. From FY2011 to FY2013, state appropriation support has decreased by 11% from \$45.8M to \$40.8M. As a percent of WCSU annual budget, state support has decreased from 41.5% in 2007 to 35.9% in FY2013 and FY2014. This decrease in state funding included mid-year rescissions in state support and has also coincided with a large increase in imposed retirement plan-related fringe benefit costs that will have ongoing financial implications for years to come.

Exacerbating this situation has been a corresponding decrease in student enrollment over this same three-year period; from FY2011 (Fall 2010 FTE) to FY2014 (Fall 2013 FTE), total undergraduate and graduate enrollment has decreased by just over 10%. This has resulted in decreases in both operating and non-operating revenues over this three-year period (FY2011 actual to FY2014 projected) of approximately \$5.5M, while operating expenditures are projected to increase \$5.1M over this same period. This has resulted in GAAP-based net income prior to consideration of capital appropriations deteriorating over this period; changing from -\$4.0M in FY2011 to a projected -\$14.6M in FY2014 (the current fiscal year). Further, financial pressures will continue to intensify over the next few years due to a labor agreement reached in Fall 2011. As noted in the Self-Study, "Under the agreement, wages were frozen for FY12 and FY13 in return for a commitment to provide raises in FY14-FY16 and protect the job security of most full-time incumbents. The raises will range from about 3% to 5% annually, depending on specific union affiliation and current pay level."

Historically (discounting the last few years), the University has generally experienced steady annual increases in both student enrollment and state support. Despite recent financial challenges, the institution is financially stable as demonstrated by financial statements indicating Total Net Assets (FY2014 projected) of \$246M. However, of Total Net Assets, \$229M is permanently restricted (predominantly property, plant, and equipment), with no indicated temporarily restricted net assets, and unrestricted net assets of \$17M; a relatively modest balance for a \$120M+ operating budget. On a GAAP-basis, unrestricted net assets over total expenditures represented a ratio of 21.0% in FY12; this ratio fell to 14.5% in FY13. Despite revenue reductions associated with state and student revenues sources, a review of audited financial statements indicates that "Change in Net Assets" has been positive every year since FY2011 and significantly so most recently. This gain in net assets is predominantly due to the state's general obligation funding of major capital projects that serve academic and administrative purposes.

Review of expenditure trends reveals that, through FY2013, WCSU significantly increased funding for (IPEDS-defined) Instructional areas, as well as program accreditations initiatives, reflecting a focus on support of the academic enterprise. WCSU has also invested significantly in student financial aid; the institution's tuition and fees discount rate forecasted for FY2014 is 23.2%.

From a BOR spending plan (non-GAAP; essentially cash budget) perspective, WCSU has been successful in ending each fiscal year with a positive “Net Surplus after Transfers” result. This is commendable performance upon recognition that recent fiscal years have required multi-million dollar adjustments to balance the budget. Further, as noted in the self-study, “The University held \$33.4 million in reserve as of June 30, 2012, including a ConnSCU required unrestricted fund balance equal to 7% of the current year’s operating budget.”

Tuition and fee increases have been relatively modest. Despite this, as shown in the Data First tables, approximately 60% of undergraduate students graduate with debt. Between FY10 and FY13, the average amount of debt for students leaving with a bachelor’s degree increased by 52% (from \$12,402 to \$18,850).

Over the past three years actual enrollment has not achieved forecasted levels with budget-based projections off by 3% in FY12, 4% in FY13, and by 3% in FY14 (based on Fall 2013 FTE total enrollment versus originally budgeted enrollment). Looking to the future, WCSU enrollment will likely be impacted by a 10.8% forecasted decline in graduating Connecticut high-school seniors between 2012 and 2022.

The need to respond to unachieved enrollment targets has necessitated institutional cost reductions. From FY2011 to FY2013, according to the Self-Study, WCSU responded to shortfalls by “reducing the number of fulltime positions in other (non-faculty) areas, holding some funded positions vacant, identifying operating efficiencies, and holding the line on operating expenses.” As noted in provided documents, full time faculty positions have been reduced by 6.6%; staff positions have been reduced by 6.8%, while student FTE enrollment has declined 6.8% from FY11 to FY14. While reductions have been commensurate, the reduction in faculty will likely impact the Self-Study noted “goal of supporting a range of high quality academic programs and seeking program accreditation supported by increasing the number of fulltime teaching faculty”. Of the new full time faculty positions added between FY2007 and FY2011, half have been eliminated through reductions made since FY2011. Reductions in staff have predominantly been through attrition. This has resulted in certain departments “struggling” to accomplish responsibilities with fewer staff and an expressed concern about an apparent lack of strategic consideration of staff reductions. Further, it was reported, that use of extended interim appointments (often two to three years) has also impacted stability of operations.

WCSU has further responded to recent reductions in state support and student enrollment by recognizing the need, as noted in the Self-Study, “to prioritize its academic programs. To foster excellence and control expense, Western must be more selective in identifying the academic programs in which to invest.... In 2013 four signature programs were identified to invest in and promote for FY14 and FY15.” This decision is an example of the institution’s ability to take decisive action to ensure maintenance/advancement of educational quality and services for students.

The University undertakes multi-year financial planning including, as noted in the Self-Study, a specific FY2012 review to better understand the implications of “underpinning financial assumptions... to facilitate creation of multiple scenarios identifying the implications of changes in key variables such as state support, tuition and fees, enrollment and retention.” Using a newly developed five-year modeling tool, the Financial Rebalancing Assessment Team determined in 2012 that if recent trends continue, the University would experience serious financial challenges.

The WCSU Strategic Plan Assessment Team (Spring 2012) focused on “Rebalancing the Financial Model” summarized the situation that WCSU faces:

WCSU strategic plan from 2007 rested, at times implicitly, on a number of assumptions about enrollment, student preference, state support, and other factors, that no longer hold true. Using a newly developed five-year modeling tool for WCSU’s finances, the Rebalancing Committee determined that if recent enrollment, state support and other trends continue, WCSU will no longer be financially viable. It will face successive years of significant deficits, forcing staff and service reductions. These in themselves will prevent any further realization of the strategic plan’s vision of providing the best of a private liberal arts education at a public-education price point.

The Rebalancing Committee identified WCSU’s key economic drivers and developed a modeling tool that projected WCSU finances over a five-year period with three scenarios ultimately presented: a base case scenario that simply extended recent trends with no intervention; a middle case in which WCSU makes incremental changes; and a third scenario assuming significant changes. The model results were summarized as follows:

Base Case Scenario: \$32M reduction in Net Position through FY17. “This model result would exhaust discretionary reserves by FY15.”

Middle Case Scenario: \$4.6M reduction in Net Position through FY17. “This incremental change case represents a version of “muddling through” the adverse enrollment, state funding, and costs trends that we face. It would pare down faculty ranks and reduce most staff levels. There would be no resources available to advance our strategic goals.”

Major Change Case Scenario: Essentially no reduction in Net Position through FY17. “The major change case shows that WCSU must grow revenue and limit expense growth in order to remain a thriving institution. Even with many significant changes on the revenue side, WCSU remains in deficit through FY17, when it might be able to align salary increases to approximate rise in CPI. Only when this level of cost containment is realized, does WCSU begin to generate enough revenue to grow services and staff. Without accompanying growth and tuition and fee increases, however, this cost containment is not sufficient.”

Along with various other assumptions, the Major Change scenario will require significant increase in enrollment through FY2017. Reported planned increases in funding for enrollment management/ branding initiatives would support this objective.

While WCSU does not hold debt directly, the institution participates in two major bonding programs: 1) the State of Connecticut general obligation bond program that funds academic and administrative facilities, and 2) the Connecticut Health and Educational Facilities Authority (CHEFA) which funds auxiliary and student-focused facilities including residence halls, student centers, and parking garages. While CHEFA debt is recorded on the balance sheet of the system office; WCSU is responsible for annual debt service for a portion of CHEFA funds used to finance projects on its campus. While a typical debt burden ratio analysis could not be performed, an estimation of “Assessment Burden” (assessments for debt from operations) would appear to be approximately 4.7%; this ratio would be within standard debt burden ratios targets of below 5%.

WCSU has professionally-qualified finance staff and ensures integrity of its finances through prudent financial management and organization. Its budget process is well organized with substantial involvement of the University Budget and Planning Committee (UBPC) and other constituent groups. It was noted that recent changes to the budget development process has increased transparency in the development of the operating budget. Further, a pilot program was tested with four areas for FY2014 to implement a more “bottoms-up” process to, what was communicated to be, an historical top-down budget development process. It was reported that institutional budgeting has been predominantly driven by BOT spending plan submittals that have been presented to the UBPC more for information purposes than deliberation. There is great anticipation that the revised budget development approach will provide opportunities for deliberations that have not been available through the historical “prior year incremental” approach.

Internal controls appear to be in place including risk assessment, as is comprehensive financial reporting (shared between the institution and the system level) to various constituents as the basis for sound financial decision-making.

While recent trends have not been positive, the University has demonstrated its ability to respond ably to fiscal constraints and unforeseen circumstances. The University has in place an effective budgeting process to guide resource allocation in support of strategic priorities and in support of its mission. WCSU budget and planning processes permit analysis of its financial condition – identifying both opportunities and constraints – and it acts accordingly. The institution’s financial planning, including contingency planning, is integrated with overall planning and evaluation. Specifically, as demonstrated by WCSU academic programs focused-investment response, the institution reallocates its resources as necessary to achieve its purposes and objectives and has demonstrated ability to implement a realistic plan to address issues.

WCSU has invested in its grants and contracts operations (2012 hire of a fulltime Director of Sponsored Research and Administrative Services) as well as development operations (in support of a comprehensive campaign that commenced in 2012) in order to diversify revenues. The Western Connecticut State University Foundation, incorporated in 1971,

raises funds and manages charitable gifts to benefit WCSU. The institution directs its fund raising efforts towards the fulfillment of institutional purposes; targeting the current campaign to three major areas: student support, innovation and research involving faculty and students, and partnerships with the community. A comprehensive campaign (the second in the history of WCSU) is in the quiet stage with a preliminary goal of up to \$17.5m over five-plus years; a consultant helped direct identification of the campaign goal as well as identification of campaign gift categories and targets. Current annual fund efforts bring in approximately \$900K a year and a few large potential gifts towards that campaign have been identified. It was noted that consistent development efforts have been hindered over the past decade by interim appointments at the top level for over half of this period. While estimates of incremental campaign expenses have been identified (including Raiser's Edge implementation and expanded programs support), it was noted that no incremental University funding is anticipated with additional campaign costs planned to be covered through unrestricted giving.

Historically, as part of the CSU system and now as part of the ConnSCU system, financial statements are produced annually with independent auditor review. While part of a system audit, the financial statements provide sufficient information about the institution's finances to support a determination regarding the sufficiency and stability of the institution's financial resources. Both the institution and the governing board review the annual audits and take appropriate action on resulting recommendations or conclusions. Financial management policies are based on institutional, system, and state requirements and are readily available and based on sound financial practices.

Financial ratio analysis on GAAP-prepared financial statements would provide opportunity for benchmark and trend analysis to answer such basic questions as: Are resources sufficient and flexible enough to support the mission? (Primary Reserve Ratio); and, Do operating results indicate the institution is living within available resources? (Net Income Ratio). Such an analysis could be useful and might be considered by the Board of Regents.

Institutional Effectiveness: WCSU has certainly encountered recent financial challenges requiring it to appropriately assess its current condition and future prospects, develop response plans through an inclusive process, and implement changes necessary to ensure the academic integrity of the institution. While recent years' financial performance has been impacted by reductions in both state appropriations and student enrollment, as well as increased costs associated with fringe benefit chargebacks, labor contract increases, and "data vulnerability incident" (see Standard VIII) expenses, the institution currently maintains financial resources sufficient to sustain the quality of its educational program and to support institutional improvement. As summarized in the Self-Study, "Despite recent financial challenges, Western Connecticut State University remains financially stable and has proven to be both nimble and prudent in responding to fluctuating economic factors, while staying true to the goals and values of its Strategic Plan that guides spending decisions."

10. Public Disclosure

The Team commends WCSU for the extensive information it delivers via the university website and the print and online undergraduate and graduate catalogs. The information provides great detail that allows current and prospective students to make informed decisions about the institution, its educational offerings, policies and procedures. The Website is well organized and easy to read and navigate. It offers information on the history and mission of the institution, its strategic plan and all necessary contact information. WCSU uses social media (Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, live chat and RSS feeds) for alternative ways to connect with a larger community. The University appears to be moving toward digital-only publications, which it explains in the current Annual Report. Downloadable PDF versions of the current Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogs are available; the 2010-2012 Undergraduate Catalog is archived online and available in a PDF format. Both the graduate and undergraduate catalogs contain the WCSU Mission and Values Statements and the academic programs are presented from the perspective of the mission.

The responsibilities and obligations of the University are delineated in “Fulfilling the Mission Principles” on the “Introduction to Western” catalog pages. The catalogs state the responsibilities and obligations of students throughout each section, e.g., the “Rights Reserved Statement,” p.4, “Admission to Western,” p.15 ff. and “Academic Programs and Degrees,” p.15 ff. The Student Handbook provides information on student responsibilities and obligations in Sections IV-VII. Archived digital copies of recent catalogs are linked from the current online catalog page. Print copies of catalogs are available in the WCSU Archives and Special Collections. See the [Finding Aid](#) list online.

The 2011-2012 Connecticut State University System Audited Financial Statement is publically available and contains aggregate financial data for all institutions that are part of the CSU System.

The University publications appear to provide an accurate picture of campus conditions. The online Annual Campus Security Report gives detailed data relating to campus crime and security in compliance with the Connecticut Uniform Crime Report Program and the Cleary Act. The WCSU Student Consumer Information web page has direct links to official online information, ensuring academic consistency with catalog content and identifying many student opportunities such as resources for students with disabilities and study abroad programs. Many publications emphasize community service as part of the academic program, which aligns with the institutional mission.

The WCSU web site and catalogs provide detailed information pertaining to all areas listed in Standard 10.5; for the list of institutions with which WCSU has articulation agreements, all the institutions are listed on the ConnSCU Board of Regents for Higher Education website which is linked from the WCSU website. The Transfer and Articulation agreement was adopted by the Connecticut Board of Regents in March 2012 and applies to the 12 community colleges, four state universities and Charter Oak State College. The Transfer

Students are informed about special transfer arrangements among the Connecticut institutions. (See further discussion in Standard IV)

The online and print catalogs list the names and positions of administrative officers and current full-time faculty with department affiliation, degrees held and granting institutions. Names of adjunct faculty are listed in the catalogs under each academic program without further detail. The catalogs list faculty who are on leave during the academic year. Names and affiliations of members of the Board of Regents are also included.

The Midtown and Westside campuses are considered one location for purposes of academic programs and most student services; WCSU provides a shuttle bus service between the two campuses. Western at Waterbury is a separate location that offers two undergraduate degree programs, but it is unclear whether complete programs are available at this location from the information provided on the website. Clearer and complete program descriptions that include information on the percentage of the degree that can be taken in Waterbury might help prospective students. Services available in Waterbury are described on the website.

Description of the size and characteristics of the student body for the Westside and Midtown campus can be found on the WCSU website. Description of the size and characteristics of the student body is not readily available for Western at Waterbury. The availability of academic and other support services and many of the co-curricular and non-academic opportunities available to students are provided in both print and online publications.

University and program goals are published in the catalogs and on the Web; the Student Consumer Information page posts retention and graduation rates, and rates for further study, and employment after graduation.

WCSU should be commended for the addition of student learning outcomes in the undergraduate catalog as suggested in the 2008 NEASC Fifth Year Report. The presence of learning outcomes is less consistent in the graduate catalog. A few graduate programs provide learning outcomes; an excellent example is the Ed.D in Nursing online program. More often the programs outline the program's mission, goals and objectives along with degree requirements. In its ongoing efforts to shift to outcomes-based instruction, WCSU should ensure that all graduate programs include learning outcomes.

Success of graduates and faculty are documented online and in the university publications, e.g., the Cupola, the Gates, etc. Recent students selected as Fulbright Scholars, the 100% student pass rate for the CPA exam & Nursing Program licensure, evidence student success.

Institutional Effectiveness: Overall, the University offers a current and accurate picture of its academic programs and provides extensive information on which students can base financial, academic and campus life decisions. This information is consistently reviewed and updated as needed

11. Integrity

Western Connecticut State University is committed to ensuring compliance with all legal and ethical standards. The University has the legal authority to grant degrees by the Board of Regents for Higher Education.

The University is committed to integrity and to act responsibly in all their activities and programs. The University supports this commitment through numerous policies and procedures including collective bargaining agreements, graduate and undergraduate catalogues, the Student Handbook both in print and online. All employees are made aware of policies and procedures through the new employee orientation program. In the 2012 Faculty/Staff Survey, 87.6% of respondents believe the University demonstrates integrity. Policies on sexual harassment and policies against discrimination, harassment and retaliation ensure that students, faculty and staff are provided an environment that is welcoming and does not permit discrimination or harassment.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protect student privacy rights. Academic dishonesty, cheating and plagiarism are addressed through policies on academic integrity.

The right to academic freedom is part of the faculty collective bargaining agreement as are the responsibilities that freedom entails. The language of the agreement between the American Association of University Professors and the Connecticut State College System sets forth a set of principles for filing and deliberating about complaints. The collective bargaining agreements for administrative personnel and support staff include standards of conduct as well as procedures to address alleged violations.

The Student Handbook contains policies and regulations on alcoholic beverages, the grade appeal process, parental notification, public forums, demonstrations, marches, protest as well as non-discrimination, affirmative action, and multiculturalism.

The University has fostered an atmosphere of inclusion, dignity and respect for diverse students, faculty and staff. The University is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer. The affirmative action policy is disseminated annually. The Chief Diversity Officer is involved in all searches for faculty, administrative and support staff and the President's Affirmative Action Policy Statement clearly outlines the search process. The affirmative action equal opportunity policy provides a framework for success, as do policies in fairness and accommodations for persons with disabilities.

The University has hosted a number of conferences and workshops to enhance education and professional development and the learning environment. Recent conferences have included a "Creativity and Compassion" conference, a panel discussion on race in America, and a multi-event symposium to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the launch of the Hubble Space Telescope. These programs are compatible with the University's purpose and the university assumes responsibility for these activities.

The University has fostered a strong working relationship with the City of Danbury. Leaders of both communities are supportive of students and both expressed their support of future efforts. The University police department has a mutual aid agreement with the Danbury police department and both departments work cooperatively.

The institution has articulated expectations regarding governance and administration striving to maintain transparency in its interaction with students, faculty, staff and prospective students. Governance of the university is inclusive and involves students, faculty and staff on several university committees. Numerous efforts have been made to communicate effectively with the community including open semester meetings with the President, "Pizza With the President" forums for students, and town hall meetings held during the development of the Long-Range Plan.

The University's grievance procedure and process are effective. Of the grievances filed by members of bargaining units since 2003 all but one has been resolved.

The University is making consistent and significant progress in addressing issues of diversity. The University is able to retain minority faculty and improve female and minority representation at the administrative level, from 13% in 1998 to 21% in 2012, yet faculty and staff do not fully reflect the student population.

Institutional Effectiveness: Through its teaching and outreach, Western Connecticut State University continues to serve the people of Connecticut. The University is committed to non-discrimination policies and practices in meeting the needs of all individuals. The University has well developed policies and procedures to ensure that all members of the community adhere to high standards of ethics and integrity. The University should be commended for actively addressing issues that arise and consistently reviewing their progress on goals related to integrity.

Affirmation of Compliance

To document the institution's compliance with Federal regulations relating to Title IV, the Team reviewed Western Connecticut State University's Affirmation of Compliance Form signed by the CEO. The Team confirms that WCSU publically discloses on its website and other relevant publications its policy on transfer of credit along with a link to Connecticut public institutions with which it has articulation agreements. Public notice of the evaluation visit and of the opportunity for public comment was made by the University on its website and in the News Times in Danbury, CT. Copies of the University's grievance policies for faculty, staff and students are readily available on the website and are reported to be consistently administered. WCSU offers on-line programs and verifies through a secure login and individual assigned pin number student identification. The campus does not make additional charges for student identity verification. The Team's review of the University's credit hour policy can be found in the Integrity of Academic Credit in Standard 4: The Academic Program.

Institutional Effectiveness & Summary

In general, it is the view of the Evaluation Team that Western Connecticut State University is achieving its mission and offering academic programs and services consistent with its stated purposes. It is accomplishing this task under the direction of the newly formed Board of Regents for the Connecticut state universities and community colleges, a highly respected and able President, a new, energetic and competent senior leadership team, a well qualified faculty and staff, with a strong, effective, collegial governance structure. All efforts are focused on serving their students and community effectively.

Although the campus has recently experienced a decline in state resources and a decline in undergraduate and graduate enrollment that presents real challenges, the academic programs and the student services are strong and effectively serving student needs. Students express strong support for the campus and real appreciation for the faculty and staff that work with them. Planning initiatives have been reinvigorated and are focused on ensuring key strategic goals are met and addressing the campus's most pressing needs. New physical facilities—particularly new academic buildings-- are strongly supporting intentional efforts to improve student success and there is palpable evidence of a growing culture of assessment focused on identifying and measuring student learning outcomes and reviewing effectiveness of academic and student services programs. Work remains to continue to improve retention and graduation rates, but the Team has confidence that these issues have focused attention and priority for the campus. We encourage the campus to move expeditiously to complete their academic major assessments and to create learning outcomes and measurable assessments for the new general education competency core. The Team encourages administrative services to undertake the same assessment review. Meeting the service demands of two separate campuses will be challenging so we encourage continuous assessments of the next steps required.

Enrollment management is a central concern for the campus because enrollment decline when linked with declining state support is identified by the University's Financial Rebalancing Committee as having the potential to create serious fiscal instability in the future. While the Team applauds the campus's solid management of recent fiscal constraints and its proactive action on reorganizing the undergraduate admissions function, we cannot ignore the criticality of stabilizing and growing both the undergraduate and graduate enrollment as a key fiscal strategy. Close attention to meeting the enrollment goals set and evaluating the effectiveness of the new strategies must be a priority. Increased institutional research capacity is needed to be able to allow the development of important data to inform decision-making. A more complete faculty workload analysis will also assist in targeting resources to key hires and balancing full-time and part time faculty distribution of assignments.

There is much to celebrate in the University's growth and development since the last NEASC accreditation visit, but there are still many aspirational goals to be achieved. With this in mind, the Team offers the following summary of the most important strengths and concerns.

Strengths

- The University is guided by a clearly stated and widely understood and accepted mission that serves as a living guide to institutional planning and decision-making and is supported by strong administrative leadership and a very effective shared governance structure that encourages inclusive approaches to moving forward.
- The University embraces a “best practices” evidence-based approach to solving problems and enhancing services and is willing to test ideas and explore new approaches.
- The University’s academic programs are highly regarded and continue to grow and improve based on continual assessment of program quality and student outcomes. Faculty and staff quality and commitment to the students is a great asset.
- University facilities have expanded and been enhanced to support academic programs and student services.
- The University used the self-study process, including the Data First and Student Success data forms effectively to review several key aspects of institutional functioning. The reviews conducted as part of the self-study have led to measurable improvements and commitments for improvement in several key areas, including admissions and marketing, academic advising, student services, graduate program development and support, administrative service improvements, library and IT&I Services, a revised and more transparent budget development process, and more robust strategies to improve retention and graduation rates.
- The University’s external stakeholders see WCSU as a valuable partner and strongly support their engagement with them in addressing critical educational, cultural, and economic development priorities of the region.

Concerns

- While the University’s finances have been strong and stable through much of this ten year period, maintaining fiscal stability is now very much linked to the success of the enrollment management strategy. Because recently set targets were not fully met and targets for the next two years are aggressive, it is essential that there is focused attention and careful analysis of results. Also, because the Resource Rebalancing Model identifies three years as a significant benchmark for being able to meet financial goals, institutional monitoring will be essential.
- Assessment is well underway and the Team recognizes the priority this has been given on the campus. The Team’s concern is that while senior leadership recognizes the urgency of completing the major and general education assessment work, the faculty may not be ready to move as expeditiously as necessary.

Communicating clearly and developing a shared understanding and a mutually acceptable working schedule by which all parties can move forward will be important.

- Ongoing attention to retention and graduation rates will be necessary in order to move these rates closer to the identified peer group.
- Supporting a culture of assessment requires accurate and up to date data and information as well as appropriate, accessible analysis and synthesis reports to inform decision-making. The University's institutional research capacity needs to be strengthened so that all the tools and information needed for informed decision-making are readily available.
- The campus plans to begin its next cycle of strategic planning to be congruent with the BOR Strategic Plan for state universities. Since the Board of Regents work is still unfolding and not all policy directions were clear, it will be important to understand more fully how system governance is aligned with, and how it will support and enhance WCSU's plans to move forward.