

Standard I

MISSION AND PURPOSES

Description

John R. Perkins organized a group of civic leaders to persuade legislators in Hartford to build a teacher preparatory school in Western Connecticut. He subsequently became the first principal of Danbury Normal School, which opened in September 1904 with thirty-seven students.¹ Perkins had such faith in the institution that he probably would not be surprised to learn that it has become a university or that by the 21st century, over 6,000 students are enrolled. He would certainly be pleased that the institution has maintained its strength in undergraduate teaching. But it is also safe to say that he would be proud to learn that the school has developed master's programs in a variety of disciplines and that, consistent with its founding values, the institution's first doctoral degree is in instructional leadership.

As Western Connecticut State University has evolved over the past 100 years from its beginnings as a normal school into a comprehensive public university, its Mission has, of course, undergone a number of reviews and revisions, but it is still true to its commitment to educational quality. The current Mission Statement includes specific principles and values that guide the institution in fulfilling its mission, and each of the University's departments has developed complementary statements of mission and purpose.

The Mission Statement is accepted and understood by members of the University community, it is reviewed periodically by the University Senate (made up of faculty, administration, and students), and approved by the CSU Board of Trustees. It appears in the undergraduate and graduate catalogs, the handbook for faculty, the new student handbook for 2003-2004, and many other University publications, both in print and online. The statement reads as follows:

Western Connecticut State University serves as an accessible, responsible and creative intellectual resource for the people and the institutions of Connecticut. We strive to meet the educational needs of a diversified student body through instruction, scholarship and public service. WestConn aspires to be a public university of choice for programs of excellence in the liberal arts and the professions by providing full-time and part-time students with the necessary background to be successful in their chosen careers and to be productive members of society. It accomplishes this by emphasizing:

- A strong liberal arts foundation
- Strong skills in communication, problem solving, and critical thinking
- Opportunities for experiential, cooperative and internship experiences
- A strong background in information technologies
- Interdisciplinary programs
- A strong sense of commitment to public service
- A personalized learning environment

¹ Herbert F. Janick, Ph.D., *A People's University: The Centennial History of Western Connecticut State University, 1903-2003*, 12-13, 24.

Our mission as a public comprehensive university is given life through the principles and values that guide us.

Principles

- Empowering students to attain the highest standards of academic achievement, public and professional services, personal development and ethical conduct is our fundamental responsibility.
- Facilitating learning is our primary function, and it requires that our faculty be active scholars who have a lasting interest in enhancing instruction and that our curriculum be dynamic and include advanced instructional technologies.
- Preparing students for enlightened and productive participation in a global society is our obligation, and is best fulfilled by developing the best possible academic programs and learning experiences.
- Promoting a rich and diverse cultural environment that allows freedom of expression within a spirit of civility and mutual respect is our abiding commitment.
- Strengthening our partnership with the people and institutions of Connecticut is a benefit to both the University and the State and endows our teaching and scholarship with a special vitality and dedication.

Values

- **Quality** in all that we do and a commitment to continuous improvement.
- **Integrity** in the process of teaching and learning.
- **Respect** for the dignity and rights of each member of our University community.

Appraisal

The Mission Statement is consistent with the Connecticut State University System mission:

The four comprehensive universities of the CSU System – Central Connecticut State University, Eastern Connecticut State University, Southern Connecticut State University and Western Connecticut State University – are Connecticut universities of choice for students of all ages, background, races and ethnicities. CSU provides affordable and high-quality, active learning opportunities that are geographically and technologically accessible. A CSU education leads to baccalaureate, graduate and professional degrees, including applied doctoral degree programs consistent with its historical missions of teacher education and career advancement. CSU graduates think critically, acquire enduring problem solving skills and meet outcome standards that embody the competencies necessary for success in the workplace and in life.

The fact that WestConn’s Mission Statement spells out seven specific areas of emphasis is evidence of the institution’s commitment to the assessment of educational outcomes and institutional effectiveness.

By insisting that the curriculum be “dynamic,” the second principle reinforces the idea that evaluation is not an end in itself, but rather a process of review and revision that is directed toward the enhancement of teaching and learning. A “dynamic” curriculum recognizes the importance of offering students educational opportunities that will prepare them for a rapidly changing work environment.

The wording of the Principles also reflects the nationwide shift from an emphasis on teaching to a focus on facilitating learning, and the inclusion of “learning experiences” acknowledges the importance of student teaching, internships, community involvement, and co-curricular activities for students’ intellectual and social growth.

There is evidence of the transition from college to university in the second principle which states that to accomplish the university’s mission, the faculty must be comprised of active scholars. “Strengthening our partnership with the people and institutions of Connecticut” suggests the University’s commitment to a wider community. The use of “continuous” reinforces the notion that improvement is an ongoing process.

The University Planning and Budgeting Committee is working on clarifying and linking the priorities identified in the Mission with the planning process and allocation of resources.

Projection

The mission statement will continue to be the basis on which the institution evaluates its effectiveness. As the results of this process are analyzed, the University will use the information to reevaluate the mission statement, principles, and values.

WestConn will add a phrase to the Mission Statement to cover the addition of the Ed.D. degree as consistent with our historical mission.

The University will ensure that the Mission, Principles, and Values statements appear in all appropriate publications.

Every effort will be made to ensure that the mission continues to drive planning and resource allocation.