Standard X

Public Disclosure

Description

Western Connecticut State University is committed to transparency and full disclosure, to its students, faculty, and staff, as well as the general public. Printed and virtual documents provide extensive information about the University's Vision, Mission, Strategic Plan and all processes surrounding governance and operation.

The website is comprehensive and fully functional. Current and prospective students have access to up-to-date information regarding programs, courses, registration deadlines and procedures, and costs. Requirements, procedures and policies regarding admissions and transfer credit are online, as are student fees, charges, and refund policies. The Registrar's page outlines degree requirements and other forms of academic recognition. To facilitate inquiries, the website provides links and telephone numbers for all departments and services.

Major campus publications such as the Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogs and pertinent information such as regional and program accreditation and audited financial statements are available online.

Academic programs and corresponding undergraduate and graduate program sheets are showcased online, as is the Student Handbook. The Handbook informs students of their obligations and responsibilities, and of the University's obligations and responsibilities to its attendees.

Other pertinent information online includes instructions for enrolling in and withdrawing from the University; lists of offered courses; academic policies, procedures, and other educational opportunities; and lists of current faculty by department and program affiliation (4). Many academic and administrative departments have their own webpages.

WCSU conforms to all applicable federal and state laws, protecting the privacy of individuals, while also fully disclosing information that the public and appropriate University officials have a right to know. WCSU complies with the 1974 federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Student directory information is published. With regard to student records, only appropriate faculty and staff are given access and this information is not disclosed to a third party unless the student authorizes disclosure. The University responds promptly to information requests. All non-exempt data are subject to disclosure to the general public and the news media under the provisions of Connecticut's Freedom of Information Act. The information shared with and presented to the public is obtained from offices responsible for the collection, analysis, and maintenance of data that directly impacts students and the public. The University ensures that information it provides is truthful and accurate.

The website archives minutes of its various committee meetings such as the University Senate, the Information Technology Committee, and the Committee on General Education.

The President's Annual Report has been produced solely on-line since 2008. In it, the President shares highlights of the last year. The latest report, for instance, showcases the 2012 visit of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Banned Books Week, interviews with Fulbright scholars, and excerpts from guest lecturers. Faculty achievements as well as contributions by staff and students are also featured.

Other key publications include: the Student Handbook; the Faculty Handbook; various collective bargaining agreements; the Policies and Program Manual, the Admissions Office Viewbook, the WestConn Report, and Institutional Advancement's publications, *Momentum* distributed to donors and *The Cupola* with broad distribution.

In compliance with the Clery Act, the Police Department annually publishes a public safety report, providing information on campus crime statistics and the Police Department's efforts to create a safer environment. Safety programs and services available to the campus community are also listed. Since 2006, the Police Department communicates with the University community using an Emergency Notification System which sends texts, e-mails, and robo-calls in the event of emergency situations such as inclement weather, disaster preparation, or health and safety issues. Additionally, this system makes it possible to post emergency information directly to the University website (see Appendix: Standard X: 1).

Information on all undergraduate and graduate programs is provided in the Undergraduate Catalog and the Graduate Catalog, respectively. The catalogs include comprehensive descriptions of the University's Mission, Principles, and Values, expected educational outcomes, admissions policies, and procedures, financial aid information, degree requirements, faculty and course offerings, as well as a listing of the obligations and responsibilities of both the institution and its students.

WCSU's Waterbury campus is located on the grounds of Naugatuck Valley Community College, approximately 25 miles from WCSU's Danbury campus. Completion courses for a Bachelor in Business Administration (BBA) or a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) are offered on the Waterbury campus.

The Office of Academic Affairs supervises the revision of the Undergraduate and Graduate catalogs to ensure accuracy and completeness and that courses listed are in fact offered. A schedule of classes is published three times a year (in Fall, Spring, and Summer) listing all courses offered during the current and upcoming semester or session.

The size, composition, description of the campus setting and other relevant characteristics of the student body are found on the Consumer Information webpage. There students may also review the total cost of education, including a net price calculator, and average debt incurred by graduates. The University's Registration and Cashiers pages clearly explain and identify all student fees, ancillary charges and refund policies.

Information on academic services, such as Academic Advising, and co-curricular and non-academic programs, such as AccessAbility Services, are provided in published brochures, the website, and catalogs.

Institutional learning and physical resources from which a student can be expected to benefit are posted online, as are the University's goals for students' education. Retention, graduation rates, and post-graduation study are also published online.

Information about program excellence and learning outcomes for programs with external accreditation are found in accreditation reports in the Office of Academic Affairs. The University's statement on regional and program accreditation is featured on its Admissions web page, including the university's current accreditation status through NEASC as well as other accrediting bodies.

Appraisal

WCSU makes a concerted effort to meet NEASC standards for Public Disclosure. The University strives for consistency, clarity, and accuracy when publishing print and online information. The same holds true for information that is mailed or distributed to students, faculty, staff, and the public. 87.5% of faculty and staff surveyed in 2012 stated that the university's educational policies and procedures are clearly stated in publications, including the website. (link to Spring 2012 Faculty-Staff Survey)

Rich in content, the website and publications present a vibrant and thorough picture of the university and illustrate the university's strengths from a multiplicity of perspectives. In addition to facts, figures, mission, and policies, they showcase the university's events and achievements as well as civic and community endeavors. They portray a dynamic university with exciting learning opportunities.

Given the number of publications generated by the university it is important that they, and the website, project a consistent image and message to students and the public. A review of university communication vehicles with this in mind would be beneficial.

Aggressive efforts are made to update and add new information which keeps the site fresh. As projected in the Fifth Year Report, a major website redesign was completed in 2007. The site is more student-centered and now incorporates measures of student success in achieving institutional goals including rates of retention and graduation and the expected amount of student debt upon graduation. 83% of faculty and staff surveyed in 2012 agreed that the website contains accurate and current information. Focusing attention on webpage updates will increase this percentage. Generally, web pages do not indicate when last updated. In addition, a web policy, including editorial and content responsibilities and updating procedures and responsibilities, needs to be adopted and distributed to the campus community. This will clarify who and how web pages are managed, which is not currently understood throughout the university.

The website stays relevant by embracing new and popular communication technologies. These include increasing use of social media, a FaceBook page, a Twitter feed and online chat sessions for prospective and new students.

The website supports the university's goal to provide as much information as possible to help students navigate smoothly through every step of the college experience, including contacting their professors. A recent web enhancement does just that. The Dean of Arts & Sciences in Spring 2013 insured online posting of all faculty contact information and office hours. This

information needs to be posted for all full–time and adjunct faculty, including degrees and institution granting them.

Appropriately, the Emergency Notification System (ENS) is used only during emergencies. As of 2011, incoming freshmen are automatically provided with basic enrollment into the system using their University issued e-mail address. Other members of the University community are not required to sign up for this system consequently not all university personnel receive emergency notifications. There is no process in place to remove students, faculty or staff from the ENS system once they leave the university resulting in unwanted notifications. Additionally, if the university electronic communication servers fail, there is no mechanism in place for conveyance of emergency information. Currently the ENS system does not provide coverage to campus visitors.

Overall, WCSU presents an accurate portrait of itself in the information it makes available. Transparency is a valued part of the campus culture and dialogue and this contributes to the University's positive image.

Projection

The University's website is the primary source for current and accurate information about WCSU. The University's Communications team is comprised of eight members from various departments including Information Technology and Innovation, Admissions, Institutional Advancement, University Relations, Publications & Design, and the Library. This team will continue to insure that the website maintains high standards of integrity, public disclosure, reliability, timeliness, and accessibility.

In Fall 2013 the Dean's Council will develop a plan to have current full- and part-time faculty listed on the website indicating departmental or program affiliation, degrees held and the institutions granting them. The list will be online by January 2014.

A Comprehensive Communications Plan Team was formed in Spring 2013 to audit and assess effectiveness of all university communication and develop consistent messaging on all platforms by Fall 2013.

In Spring 2014 Information Technology and Innovation will convene a committee to review an existing, but never finalized, web policy. This policy will be adopted and disseminated to the university community in Fall 2014. Training workshops for faculty and staff to assist with learning various web responsibilities will be held each semester.

The University Police Department is working to improve its ENS system and extend coverage to campus visitors. Improvements will be implemented over the next 24 months.

Institutional Effectiveness

Transparency, accuracy, inclusion, and engagement are highly valued at WCSU. So is increased accessibility to information and resources. To this end, Human Resources, and University Publications regularly engage in review and evaluation of university documents and information materials. The Communications Team meets weekly to address website content and accessibility; policies and procedures and ensure that it is consistent with the University's Mission. The

University is aware of the benefits of having an excellent story to tell and the multiplicity of formats and technologies that can be used to reach prospective students and the campus community. There is campus-wide awareness that it is important to keep current and embrace new communication technologies adopted by our constituents. Emerging electronic technologies will continue to play a part in our information distribution both in and out of the classroom.