

Standard II

Planning and Evaluation

Description

There are four interrelated aspects of WCSU's planning and evaluation process over the past several years: (1) strategic planning, guided by the "Values and Vision" process; (2) academic planning, comprising accreditation efforts and program review ; (3) financial and facilities planning, including the Master Plan, the technology plan, annual Spending Plans and construction of budget models; and (4) the University Planning and Budgeting Committee (UPBC), a standing committee of the University Senate which balances academic and financial concerns.

Since 2005, we have been guided by the Strategic Vision and Plan developed from the "Values and Vision" process, which involved 76 focus groups and more than 650 stakeholders. This Vision has been adopted and internalized by the University community. It appears in operating procedures, departmental annual reports, performance appraisals, and financial planning.

Strategic planning is vital to the continued existence of the University. Strategic planning helps the institution strategize for the challenges of fluctuating finances, state aid, and college-age student demographics in Connecticut. As DATA FIRST tables reveal, the strategic planning process encompasses the academic plan and the financial plan. In 2011 the President formed strategic assessment teams to answer six key questions. [The reports of these teams](#) were presented in Spring 2012, together with [priorities for decision making](#) in the next strategic planning cycle (2012-2017).

Other University plans include the [Facilities Master Plan](#), the annual [Spending Plan](#), and the [Technology Plan](#). In most cases, the needs and characteristics of graduate programs are not considered separately from those of undergraduate programs.

[The Strategic Plan for WCSU](#) typically covers a five-year period. During the period of evaluation, there are two strategic plans covering the periods 2006 to 2011 and 2012 to 2016. The Strategic Plan covering the period from 2006 to 2011 was [unanimously endorsed by the University Senate](#) on March 28, 2007 and served as the basis for planning at WCSU.

The development of the Strategic Plan attests to the cooperative nature of planning at WCSU. The process began in 2004 through Values and Visions, a series of personal and group interviews with representatives of all shareholders of the university. Ideas from these interviews were shared with the university community in a meeting and analyzed by the Extended President's Advisory Committee (EPAC) and the University Planning and Budget Committee (UPBC). Based on issues identified during the interviews, five action teams were established to discuss strategic enrollment management, student success, comparative advantage, summer and intersession activities, and community partnerships, respectively; reports of the action teams were used by the EPAC and UPBC to draft a vision statement for – and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of – the university. A Strategic Planning Steering Committee (SPSC), which included the chairs of the action teams, was then formed. With input from academic and

administrative departments, [the University Senate](#), and people who attended open forums or who submitted comments online, the SPSC drafted the [Strategic Plan](#).

The Strategic Plan has six planning goals: (1) outstanding faculty; (2) location; (3) a diverse university community; (4) a range of quality academic programs; (5) a student-focused environment; and (6) affordable costs.

[Six strategic priorities](#) were established for 2011 to 2013: to maintain our outstanding faculty and staff with their strong commitment to students; to capitalize on WCSU's location; to embrace our diverse university community; to ensure a range of quality academic programs; to foster an enriching and supportive student-focused environment; and to deliver outstanding value to students.

The Strategic Plan is supported by plans encompassing WCSU's Facilities, Financial Planning and Information Technology. (See also, Appendix: Standard II: Number 1: Summary of Facilities, Financial and Information Technology Plans.)

The University maintains an [Office of Institutional Research and Assessment](#), whose mission "is to improve the quality of information for problem solving, decision making, assessment, strategic planning, facilities planning, and effective management of the University." This office helped organize CSU Assessment Conferences in 2007 and 2011. Its other duties include: producing faculty workload summaries, processing student evaluations of courses, and analyzing third-week student data from the Banner administrative computing system.

WCSU's Strategic Plan covers a five-year span. In addition to its annual fiscal and operating planning processes, the university continually assesses progress towards its Strategic Plan. WCSU's progress towards realizing its Strategic Plan goals is periodically assessed. Priorities are established and plans adjusted based on recent progress and current opportunities and challenges.

The University has a good track record of advancing its goals, in spite of fiscal challenges and other potential hurdles such as changing academic governance at the state level. Many of WCSU's programs have achieved national accreditation or are proceeding towards national accreditation. These efforts are supported by rigorous planning to meet specific standards for achieving and maintaining accreditation.

WCSU regularly assesses its progress towards its Mission, Vision, and goals. In 2011-12 six Strategic Assessment Teams investigated "to what extent have we adhered to/ implemented the goals of the Strategic Plan and how has it driven the progress of the university" by addressing the following questions: How real is the university's public/private focus? Are we really taking advantage of our location? With the number of budget and contractual constraints we face, are we able to attract and retain outstanding faculty? How real is the university's student-centered focus? Can we measure advances made in delivering quality academic programs? How can the university rebalance its financial model to achieve continuing success in times of state budget constraints and continue to deliver value to students? These teams reviewed relevant research, organized public conversations and focus groups on each topic, and analyzed data compiled by the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (See Appendix: Standard II: Number 2 for more details of the assessment process.)

[WCSU's academic program review process](#) is detailed in the Faculty Handbook. In 2007, it was [established](#) that all academic programs were to be reviewed every ten years. In Spring 2012, the scope of ten years was shortened to seven years. This change has been approved by the Committee on Undergraduate Curriculum and Academic Standards (CUCAS), the Graduate Council, the University Planning and Budget Committee (UPBC), the University Senate, and the University President. The President or a designee of the President can award [reassigned time to faculty for activities related to program review](#). By May 1 of each year, the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA) announces the programs to be evaluated the following year. Departments that are undergoing program review meet with the Provost/VPAA to discuss the review process and then elect a Departmental Program Review Committee (DPRC). The DPRC can be composed of all faculty members or a subset of faculty in the department. The DPRC conducts and writes an internal review, including an action plan. The internal review is based on the criteria listed in the Faculty Handbook. (See Appendix: Standard II: Number 3 for internal review criteria listed in the Faculty Handbook.) The DPRC recommends appropriate people to serve as external evaluators. The appropriate Dean, in consultation with the Provost/VPAA, selects a maximum of two external evaluators who read the self-study, conduct an on-site visit (if requested to do so), and write a report which is submitted to the appropriate Dean and the DPRC. If necessary, the DPRC revises the action plan based on the comments of the external evaluators and submits the revised plan to the Dean. After writing a summary statement, the Dean submits the self-study to the Provost/VPAA who reviews the material and forwards it to CUCAS (undergraduate programs) or the Graduate Council (graduate programs). These committees review the document and make recommendations to the Provost/VPAA who, in turn, makes recommendations to the DPRC and, if necessary, to the university community.

WCSU uses information gathered from surveys of students, graduates, and employers to assess the success of its education and recent graduates (14). The University used the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) from spring 2008 through 2011 to help assess student involvement in activities shown to enhance learning. After a one-year hiatus, a fifth year of NSSE is underway in Spring 2013. In addition, the University administered the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) for Fall 2009 through 2011 to help assess expectations of beginning students. The Strategic Vision Action Team analyzed the results of the NSSE and BCSSE surveys, the results of WCSU's Survey of Recent Graduates (2006 - 2010), and labor market outcomes for the Connecticut State University System (2004 - 2009). The team then explored five key areas that needed improvement: readiness to be engaged and academically challenged in college; effectiveness of academic advising; streamlined pathways to degrees; readiness for employment and/or graduate school; and administrative decisions that affect students. Suggestions for how to improve these areas are included in the Team's Report. (See Appendix: Standard II: Number 4.)

Another vital evaluative arm of the university is its [Assessment Committee](#), which has been a standing committee of the University Senate since 1994. It includes student, faculty, and administrative representation. The Assessment Committee helps to facilitate program, school, and university-wide assessment. It also helps to coordinate assessment efforts with the UPBC and the Student Life Committee. The Assessment Committee is also charged with monitoring the [Institutional Assessment Plan](#) (which deals with assessing student learning outcomes) and offers assessment guidelines and suggestions to departments and offices.

WCSU also maintains an [Office of Institutional Research](#) that supports the data collection needs of the University's planning process. In addition to collecting and disseminating admissions data, student performance data, and external information on trends in higher education, WCSU also coordinates the administration of surveys to faculty/staff, students, and recent graduates.

Appraisal

In general, the four interrelated aspects of WCSU's planning and evaluation initiatives are complementary. Especially in recent years, there has been a strong alignment of strategic, academic, financial/facilities, and UPBC activities. However, work remains to be done in several areas. The facilities Master Plan has gone nearly seven years without a major revision. The Spending Plan could be better integrated with the strategic planning process by creating a five-year plan with several alternative scenarios. Data on student progression, retention, and graduation rates could be better utilized by EPAC, UPBC, and/or a campus-wide committee comprised of enrollment management and student affairs professionals. Comparable data on graduate and undergraduate programs has not been reviewed annually by committees with faculty representation.

Planning and evaluation processes are spearheaded by EPAC and the UPBC and involve committees of faculty and administrators across the University. The initial process that began in 2004 was led by a Strategic Planning Steering Committee (SPSC) and quite extensive. It involved stakeholders inside and outside of the University.

In addition, WCSU utilizes other resources to evaluate its progress to advance its strategic plan. These include faculty-staff surveys, student surveys and analysis, and assessment committees.

In a Spring 2012 survey of faculty and staff ([F-S Survey](#)), there was strong consensus that WCSU uses its Vision, Mission and Strategic Plan as a basis for future planning, budgeting, and evaluation of programs. There also was strong agreement that the Vision and Mission provide a basis for future planning with accurate and current information. Respondents also agreed that University leadership shows integrity in management of University affairs.

Other results of the F-S Survey are largely gratifying. For instance, most faculty and staff are familiar with the University's Mission statement (88.7% and 92.9%, respectively) and believe that WCSU emphasizes a personalized learning environment (90.6% and 88.2%, respectively) and interdisciplinary programs (80.2% and 86%, respectively). A high number of faculty and staff think that the University uses its Vision, Mission and Strategic Plan to provide a basis for staffing priorities (74.5% and 64.2%, respectively), establishing budgets (81.2% and 81.1%, respectively), setting technology priorities (77% and 67.7%, respectively), planning (89.8% and 83.1%, respectively), and evaluating its endeavors (80.7% and 78.8%, respectively).

Our network of evaluative and planning processes yields a wealth of fruitful, if at times unsettling, [information](#). For instance, the University must factor a shrinking number of high-school graduating seniors into its projections. In 2007 there were 43,405 Connecticut high school graduates, but in 2012 there were only 41,541 – a decrease of 4.3 percent. The number of graduating seniors is projected to shrink to 38,416 by 2022 – a decline of approximately one percent per year. This trend will unquestionably impact prospective applicants since WCSU

draws students primarily from western Connecticut and eastern New York State. WCSU must also anticipate the continued decrease of state funding. State revenue as a proportion of total revenue shrank from 41.50% in 2007 to 35.15% in 2012 and is projected to reach 34.87% in 2013. In addition, scheduled salary increases and other commitments to the collective bargaining agreements must be considered in planning the University's future.

One of the Strategic Plan Assessment Teams focused directly on our ability to be a thriving university in face of the region's changing population and factors. We have incorporated these trends into our Strategic Plan from 2007 to the present; however, some implicit and explicit assumptions concerning enrollment, student preference, state support, and other factors no longer hold true. Using a newly developed five-year modeling tool for our finances, the Rebalancing Committee determined that if recent slowing enrollment and shrinking state support trends continue, the University will experience serious financial challenges. Therefore, it is imperative that we develop academic and support programs that attract more students from underserved populations and communities. For example, Hispanic/Latino/Latina students will comprise an increasing share of college-aged students in the next decade. WCSU will need to rethink its Vision and self-perception in bold and significant ways. It must make itself a regional or national destination campus in several programs. In addition, it must identify and develop its premier programs in concert with its sister schools, so that each of the four state Universities can provide a select number of premier programs that allow for meaningful distinctions among them, beyond their locations. In [the new financial model](#), tuition, fee, and auxiliary revenue become much more important and the student body is much more diverse, both in geographic and ethnic terms.

WCSU's methodical planning process has been tested by recent fiscal challenges faced by Connecticut public colleges and universities. In 2009, it became evident that the State of Connecticut was experiencing severe financial difficulties. In March 2010, the CSU System Office asked all four universities to submit a budget for FY2012 that included a 5%, 10%, 15% and 20% reduction as the legislature and the CSU System worked through the fiscal challenges. Instead of making arbitrary across-the-board cuts, WCSU reviewed its Strategic Plan, Mission, Vision and programs and engaged the campus community in assessing strategic priorities. Because of its careful approach to the crisis, the University has been able to weather reductions in state funding and maintain or improve student education with only modest increases in tuition. (See also, Appendix: Standard II: Number 5.)

An appraisal of WCSU's six strategic goals reveals the strengths of planning, as well as some aspects that need bolstering:

Outstanding Faculty

Despite the challenges WCSU faces, the University has been able to attract and retain high-quality faculty. A committee comprised of faculty and staff has identified the challenges that the University faces in attracting outstanding faculty. (See Standard V for evidence of faculty degrees and other qualifications.) WCSU is located in a high-cost-of-living area, while salaries are based on a state-wide university system and are not adjusted for cost of living within a given region or discipline. More specifically: The Cost of Living Index for Fairfield County is 42% greater than the overall U.S. Cost of Living Index and 12% greater than the overall Connecticut

index. While WCSU faculty salaries are 14.4% greater than the national average, there is concern that its premiums do not adequately offset the region's cost of living factor. Also, since professors in business school disciplines earn approximately 33% more than the average of all disciplines; the Ansell School of Business faces an additional challenge in recruiting. (See the Institutional Effectiveness section of Standard V.)

The University recognizes the importance of this goal and the need to find solutions to the constraints it currently faces in light of the state-wide compensation system and existing collective bargaining agreements. (For more on faculty compensation, see Appendix: Standard II: Number 6).

Location

Many programs within the University, especially those in the visual and performing arts, enhance the teaching and learning environment by taking advantage of the [cultural riches of New York City](#). For example, visits to Broadway theaters, Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center, the Museum of Modern Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, and art galleries in Soho all benefit WCSU students. We also capitalize on our location by hosting artists, performers and highly qualified speakers from the local area. These include CEOs, social activists, filmmakers, artists, musicians, actors, authors and politicians. Moreover, we take advantage of – and seek opportunities for – integrating global perspectives into curricular and co-curricular activities. For instance, the World Languages and Literature Department has hosted summer programs in Italy and Spain. Moreover, WCSU's location in the tri-state area makes it ideally suited for career development and placement opportunities. Students profit from University career fairs attended by over 50 local companies from the industry and business sectors. The University also uses the robust co-op and internship programs it has established with Fortune 500 corporations, as well as small- and medium-sized businesses. Companies such as IBM, Boehringer-Ingelheim, Praxair, Sikorsky and Goodrich are among the businesses that host WCSU students. For the Education Department it is an advantage to be 65 miles from New York City to avoid competition from colleges and universities with similar programs.

Diverse University Community

Students at WCSU represent the diverse backgrounds of the City of Danbury and the surrounding service area in western Connecticut, where approximately 18% of the students are members of historically disadvantaged minority groups. In addition to ethnic, cultural, religious and other demographic diversity, WCSU also has a large population of veterans, working adults and other non-traditional students. With this diversity in mind, the University has implemented initiatives to assist military veterans and other students over 25 in adapting to the pressures of campus life. With increased economic instability causing many students to attend community college prior to a four-year university, WCSU has seen an increase in transfer students, comprising approximately 40% of all enrolling students, up from 30% in 2007-08. The institution recognizes that it will have to continue to foster strong relationships with the growing number of non-traditional students in order to retain them.

Quality Programs

Despite challenging fiscal circumstances, WCSU has utilized strategic planning to maintain and expand its areas of excellence. The University offers an [Honors Program](#) that incorporates an innovative interdisciplinary approach. In recent years, WCSU has added programs including a B.A. in Musical Theatre and an EdD in Nursing Education. Several of WCSU's programs have earned national accreditation including those in nursing and teaching. The Ansell School of Business is seeking [AACSB accreditation](#) and was accepted into candidacy in Spring 2013. The creation of the School of Visual and Performing Arts was the result of strategic planning, and its new building is under construction. The Theatre Arts Department is seeking accreditation from NAST and NASAD for March of 2014.

Student Centered Focus

A strategic assessment team of faculty and administrators evaluated WCSU's [student-centered focus](#) using information gathered from surveys of recent graduates (SOG), beginning student engagement (BCSSE) and engagement of seniors and first-year students (NSSE). The student focus was conceptualized as encompassing academic readiness, advising, obtaining a degree, obtaining employment and administrative decisions to support these outcomes. Students' readiness to be engaged and academically challenged in college was indicated by the difference between expectations and actual experiences. The study found that the learning experience at WCSU was equivalent to other CSU schools by senior year; however, the First Year Experience (FYE) was not as successful. To enhance the first-year experience, beginning in Fall 2013, there will be an online FYE component in classes taken by most new students, and students will be awarded certificates of FYE completion.

Affordable Costs

In spite of the fiscal strain that WCSU has faced in recent years, [the annual tuition, room and board, and fees](#) have been held to approximately \$20,000. This amount is slightly below the national average for public institutions (approximately \$21,000) and well below [the national average](#) for private institutions (\$36,000). Tuition at public institutions also increased at a rate of 5.6% between 2011 and 2012 while WCSU's tuition increase was 3.8%. Through effective planning, the University has been able to maintain a lower than average tuition even with significant financial pressure and decreased state funds. Part-time tuition per credit hour remains attractive to out-of-state as well as in-state students at both the graduate and undergraduate level.

In response to concerns over the affordability of tuition, WCSU has made a concerted effort to enhance fundraising for student financial assistance. As a result, over the past four years there has been a 16.3% increase in the number of institutional grants (from 80 to 93), and a 33.6% increase in the total amount awarded (from \$463,719 to \$619,716; see also the attached table from the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment).

Assessment

WCSU maintains [assessment](#) and evaluation systems with periodic review of [results](#). These [procedures](#) provide a means of organizing and clarifying the data used in decision making.

Accordingly, findings can effectively be incorporated in the strategic planning progress. The widespread involvement of stakeholders, together with the vitality of their discussions provide compelling evidence that WCSU has made substantial progress in establishing evaluation as a priority. Moreover, it is likely that further implementation of the resulting action plans will engage many more stakeholders in developing an ongoing institutional capacity, while making these processes even more transparent at the institutional level.

Graduation and Retention

A committee of faculty and administrators has reviewed WCSU's graduation and retention rates. In the 2003 NEASC report, our graduation rate was 35% and current graduation data show that the rate of graduation for this group of students improved to between 40 and 42%. The strategic assessment team studying rebalancing of finances also recommended that campus processes be reengineered to remove some of the barriers to student progression, and thus increase retention and graduation rates.

WCSU surveys employers on the performance of WCSU co-op and internship students. The University also conducts annual [surveys of recent graduates](#) to ascertain their patterns of employment, graduate school activities and their evaluations of WCSU experiences. Fully 73.2% of WCSU baccalaureate recipients in 2010 obtained full-time work or graduate study. Unfortunately, this is down from 91.8% in 2007, reflecting Connecticut's current economic problems. The percentage of those graduates enrolled in further education declined from 28.7% in 2006 to 9.4% in 2010. Despite these declines, 89% were satisfied with their education at WCSU and about the same proportion would recommend WCSU to a friend.

Projection

The University has seen substantial progress toward persistent and incremental development of planning and evaluation in all aspects of the institution, which has been facilitated by regular critiques at each stage of the process. Over the past decade, WCSU has grown physically, programmatically, organizationally, and demographically. In order to keep pace with rapid changes, the interrelated aspects of University planning and evaluation initiatives must be strengthened.

By September 2013, the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs will form a strategic enrollment management committee to examine thoroughly and systematically information on WCSU students and alumni collected over the past decade. This committee will share analyses of data on student progression, retention, and graduation rates with EPAC, UPBC, and other campus groups.

By September 2013, the Vice President for Finance and Administration will oversee the construction of a five-year plan for revenues and expenditures. Funding for continued accreditation efforts will be addressed in this plan, and preliminary results of the re-engineering of campus processes will be examined. As a result, the Spending Plan will be better integrated with the strategic planning process and several alternate scenarios can be explored.

Beginning in mid-2014, the Facilities Master Plan will be revised with the assistance of the Board of Regents and a team of private consultants. A careful review of the plan will ensure that it is properly aligned with strategic priorities.

WCSU will continue to use its planning process to identify weaknesses and threats and leverage its strengths to capitalize on opportunities. For example, the University has learned that it has not effectively leveraged its location. Accordingly, WCSU will seek to [better leverage its location](#) and to market its areas of excellence to attract students, including those from nearby New York State. The University Planning and Budget Committee (UPBC) has broad-based campus representation including administration and faculty from each of the academic schools; and members of the faculty senate. The UPBC will continue to play an influential role in tracking and monitoring the University's progress in fulfilling its goals and objectives, as it is involved in discerning the areas to be improved. With the [Strategic Assessment Teams'](#) current and future work, WCSU will consider the recommendations of the faculty and administrators reviewing each of the strategic plan assessment teams into its planning process.

Demographic trends in the state's population and anticipated limitations on state funding necessitate that WCSU continue to effectively utilize the capabilities of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment and incorporate the findings into the planning process. WCSU's planning is long-term in scope and methodical. Its strategic planning will continue to involve realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. It plans for and responds to financial and other contingencies, establishes feasible priorities and develops a realistic course of action to achieve identified objectives. Institutional decision-making, particularly in the allocation of resources, is consistent with planning priorities.

The University has already begun to improve the alignment of its fiscal capacity with a sharpened focus on its scope of academic mission and services organized around the predominant goal of student success. Continued improvement will depend on the ability to address the major areas of need identified in WCSU's previous and future self-study reviews. Their completeness and accuracy will be a major step in the pursuit of University effectiveness to be accomplished during a period of unprecedented fiscal stress.

WCSU will continue to face a difficult environment in which to achieve the six goals articulated in the strategic plan. However, the University has demonstrated the ability to adapt and succeed in spite of the recent challenges. The ability to forecast and foresee unfavorable trends and adjust plans accordingly are skills needed to the university to reach its goals.

The University has experienced a number of concrete changes involved in the development and incorporation of planning and evaluation efforts to effectively establish an integrated system of regular university-wide decision-making. These changes have been underway since the 2007 NEASC update in many areas of functional evaluation, especially non-instructional student support functions. The current cycle of strategic [campus-wide planning](#) has created a framework within which specific evaluation findings can be fully pursued through an integrative implementation process at the institution.

One of our key objectives is to provide students with a quality education at an affordable cost. This staple does not change, even in these challenging fiscal times. The University is taking steps

to improve the student experience based on the information gathered from students. Examples of these initiatives include MAPWorks, other enhancements to advising, and the ongoing re-engineering of campus processes from student recruitment to alumni success. We are confident that these efforts will improve students' ability to be successful while at WCSU and after graduation.

Institutional Effectiveness

Structures and processes are in place to ensure the continued vitality of WCSU planning and evaluation. The proposed changes for 2013-14 onward will strengthen the interrelationships of the four main elements of planning and evaluation. Statistical information will be used to a greater extent to enhance the strategic planning and effective management of the University. Involvement of faculty teaching at both the graduate and undergraduate levels will be crucial to the development of a comprehensive approach to strategic enrollment management.