

## Standard IV

### The Academic Program

#### Description

A quality academic program is at the heart of Western Connecticut State University's Mission and the Vision Statement that guides our Strategic Plan (see Appendix: Standard IV: 1). The institution offers degree programs that embody a coherent course of study that is compatible with its stated mission and is based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education.

The University is comprised of [four academic schools](#), with 39 undergraduate degree programs and 65 majors offered by the School of Arts and Sciences; the School of Professional Studies; the Ansell School of Business; and the recently created School of Visual and Performing Arts (established in 2006). In order to achieve [WCSU's Mission](#), undergraduate academic programs require students to complete a broad range of General Education courses (discussed in detail, below) and more extensive in-depth study within their chosen major.

[The Division of Graduate Studies](#) offers 17 degree programs and 5 certifications. During the fiscal year ending June 30, 2012, WCSU conferred over 1,000 degrees. In Fall 2012, 6,200 students were pursuing degrees ranging from the Associate's to the Ed.D. (A precise breakdown follows below, under "Summary: Enrollment and Degrees.")

Planning, implementation, and assessment of academic programs are accomplished through a shared governance process between administration and faculty. Programs and curricular changes are initiated at the department level based on documented needs and best practices in the field. Faculty are involved at all levels of academic oversight. Three University Senate standing committees are charged with ensuring that academic programs are consistent with WCSU's Mission (see Appendix: Standard IV: 2). The faculty ensure curricular quality at the departmental level and assesses student learning. Proposals are processed through the appropriate school and the University Senate for approval. In the case of graduate programs, curricular proposals are further reviewed by the graduate council.

Each program of study has established a formal "program sheet," available to students, documenting a recommended and coherent route through courses that constitute the program. These program sheets are utilized in the process of academic advisement to guide students efficiently through the requirements of their major programs. [The BA in Communication](#) serves as a typical example. A collection of [program sheets](#) for all academic programs is available online.

The Provost collaborates with the President in setting academic priorities and provides leadership for the academic deans and the faculty. The [University Senate](#) serves as the ultimate forum for sharing information and raising issues of concern to the faculty. Through periodic program review, faculty examine programs of study in contrast to those of peer institutions and in light of

local community needs and past experiences at WCSU to develop agendas for change that informs program-level strategic and comprehensive planning.

Undergraduate and graduate admission policies are described for students on the university website. WCSU admits undergraduate students who have graduated high school with a cumulative grade point average of “B-” or higher, and a variety of courses in fields such as English, mathematics and social sciences. Some programs have special criteria. For example, the Department of Music requires an audition for admission to any of its degree programs. (Other programs with special criteria include Nursing and Education.)

In order to remain in good academic standing and be granted a diploma from the university, undergraduate students must maintain a cumulative average of at least 2.0. Some programs, including those in Music and Education, have additional retention policies, such as minimum GPA for graduation (see Appendix: Standard IV: 3).

### **Summary: Enrollment and Degrees**

In the DATA FIRST tables, fiscal year (FY) 2010 is used as the base year for most comparisons, and FY 2013 is used as the current year. In the case of headcount enrollment, the data are used from the official third week census: Fall 2009 data for FY 2010, and Fall 2012 data for FY 2013.

During the fiscal year ending June 30, 2012, WCSU conferred 1,101 degrees: 22 Associate’s; 912 Bachelor’s; 155 Master’s; and 12 professional doctorates (EdD). Of the 6,200 students enrolled in Fall 2012, 84.4 percent were pursuing Bachelor’s degrees, 0.8% Associate’s, 7% Masters, 0.8% EdD and 7% nonmatriculants. The breakdown of full-time equivalent (FTE) students followed a similar pattern, with 91% attributable to Baccalaureate students.

### **Headcount by Undergraduate Major**

The total undergraduate population decreased by 4.6% between Fall 2009 and Fall 2012 (from 5,869 to 5,552). Nonmatriculants decreased by 7.5% (from 348 to 322), while Associate degree candidates increased by 38.2% (from 34 to 47) and Baccalaureate candidates decreased by 4.7% (from 5,487 to 5,230). (For a more specific breakdown of programs and enrolled students, see Appendix: Standard 4: 4.)

### **Headcount by Graduate Major**

After two years of large decreases – from 748 to 622 to 592 – the graduate student population rebounded to 601 in Fall 2012; however, the decrease from 2009 to 2012 was 19.7%. The doctoral level experienced a decrease of 21.2%, similar to the decrease of 25.8% in teacher certification and other non-degree studies, and the decrease of 26.7% in Master’s level headcounts. The remainder of this section will focus on specific Master’s degree programs.

In terms of headcount enrollment, the top two graduate programs continue to be the MS Counselor Education (87) and the MS Education (84), although both have experienced decreases (13% and 47.2%, respectively). In contrast, the MSN Nursing has increased by 81.3% (from 32 to 58). Except for the 21.7% increase in MHA Health Care Administration (from 23 to 28), the other twelve Master’s programs have experienced enrollment declines. The MBA Business

Administration and the MFA Creative and Professional Writing experienced small decreases (11.1% and 15.2%, respectively), compared to the 60.5% decrease in MA History and the 56.5% decrease in MFA Visual Arts. In addition, MA Biological Sciences decreased by 71.4% and is not accepting any new candidates. (For a breakdown of “Credit Hours Generated by Department or Comparable Academic Unit,” see Appendix: Standard IV: 5.)

### **Programs: Goals, Progress, Standards, Governance**

Programs are continually monitoring goals and progress and the extent of student learning and achievement. These efforts are summarized annually in the department annual reports (10). (Further appraisal of the work of the university in assessing its goals and progress is provided in sections 4.48 to 4.54.)

[The Strategic Plan Assessment Team](#) assesses WCSU’s quality standards on a university-wide basis. The 2012 report highlighted the university's change from assessing quality standards using an inputs model (emphasizing faculty, faculty qualifications, instructional resources, facilities, technology and quality of students) to an output model (emphasizing transformed learning, with a focus on assessment of student learning outcomes).

Consistency in quality across University programs is systematically achieved through shared governance and the efforts of the departments, the school, the [Program Review Committees](#) (PRC), CUCAS, the Graduate Council, and the General Education Committee. Program Review Committees examine and when necessary suggest revisions of a program's mission, goals, and/or objectives to ensure congruence with the University's mission. Department Program Review Committees (DPRCs) conduct their work over three years and often all of the department’s fulltime faculty work on the review process. DPRCs identify program goals and needs over the next seven years and delineate action plans for achieving the goals of quality academic programs. The DPRCs makes recommendations for external evaluation, which may or may not include on-site visitation, to the appropriate Dean.

Fulfillment of General Education requirements involves students successfully completing courses in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, math, computer science, and exercise science. Expectations for student learning and achievement are set by departments.

Undergraduate students progress from introductory to advanced content in their major. Students are also exposed to a broad range of disciplines and methods of inquiry as they fulfill their General Education requirements.

Since the last accreditation visit, WCSU has added a number of graduate programs. Students at the graduate level are held to academic standards emphasizing greater mastery of the knowledge and skills of their discipline and receiving more exposure to professional development opportunities.

When courses are offered to both undergraduate and graduate students, student learning expectations are more rigorous at the graduate level. Examples include HIS 206 and 598 (History 1914-1939); HIS 318 and 536 (The Civil War); and HIS 212 and 507 (History 1945-present).

A policy for [standards for faculty who teach graduate-level courses](#) was [approved](#) in 2009.

A listing of required courses and goals for all undergraduate and graduate programs is published on the University website and in the appropriate catalogs. Each student is given an official program sheet that includes a listing of all prerequisites and graduation requirements in the major. Specific academic skills and knowledge to be acquired are listed in the university catalogs by program as student learning outcomes. For example, whereas the English (Literature) program emphasizes in-depth study of significant works in English, American and Western literature and development of critical thinking and writing skills, the newly-developed Musical Theater program offers a variety of experiential learning opportunities in musical theater that develop domain-specific knowledge, analytical skills, technical proficiency, career preparation and creativity.

WCSU's Banner Web system features a [Curriculum Advising and Program Planning \(CAPP\)](#) program, allowing faculty advisors and students to assess student progress towards their major degree program requirements at any time. In addition, the University is in the process of adopting MAP-Works, an early alert and early intervention tool.

Advising students is the responsibility of faculty within a student's major, while undeclared students receive advising from the [Academic Advisement Center](#). Career-preparation requirements are clearly described to students at the beginning of their WCSU studies. (The university's Education Department offers fine examples of the manner in which [career-preparation requirements are described to students](#).)

The WCSU undergraduate curriculum is designed to provide breadth and depth of knowledge in a given field, as well as a general education component that offers diverse learning opportunities. The graduate programs are designed to strengthen the academic and professional abilities of students by increasing their knowledge of specific subjects and improving their capacity for independent study. (For more on the design and depth of WCSU programs, see Appendix: Standard IV: 6).

A wide range of instructional methods is utilized including lectures, class discussions, student independent studies, internships, service learning, and cooperative learning, teaching and research assistantships, experiential learning and field studies, recitals, rehearsals, master classes, demonstrations, public performances, theatrical productions, exhibitions, critiques, group projects, and technology-enhanced instruction (see Standards VII and VIII for additional information on technology). Student instruction in information literacy is a priority, as made clear in the [Principles of the University Mission](#). Teaching students information literacy skills is the responsibility of faculty, who build a variety of learning opportunities into their courses.

Support for faculty in enhancing information literacy is provided by the [Information Technology and Innovation Department \(IT\)](#), which provides training and follow-up help for faculty at all levels of programs and systems use. Moreover, the [Instructional Technology Center](#), a collaborative effort of Academic Affairs and Information Technology & Innovation (IT, formerly University Computing), assists faculty in learning new technology and/or making better use of classroom-related technology, and the Student Technology Training Center provides

assistance and training for students in the use of university software and technology. [IT](#) also offers program and technology assistance.

In addition, the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching ([CELT](#)) offers a variety of faculty-led peer training sessions in the use of various classroom and educational technologies. CELT has been charged within the newly revised Online Policy with providing training opportunities and support to faculty.

At the undergraduate level, college-ready skills in the English language are assessed before a student begins classes via high school transcripts and placement exams. Development of college-level skills is emphasized via [writing intensive \(WI\) courses](#) and through an introductory course in Communication which all students take as part of their general education requirements.

The WI courses have specific criteria that emphasize the production of texts that have undergone careful analysis, research, critique, review, and revision. Most Writing courses are offered by the Writing Department.

English language skills are also promoted through a variety of challenging writing and speaking assignments across all departments and in many courses. Undergraduate and graduate capstone projects in many departments usually require substantial writing and speaking expectations, such as completing a thesis, an original research project, or a public presentation.

All undergraduate and graduate degree programs have been approved by the Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education and all academic program options with program sheets undergo [review](#) every seven year. This review begins with a faculty-led self-study and involves a departmental program review committee and an external evaluation. (For more on the review process, see Appendix: Standard IV: 7).

Academic planning is coordinated by the Office of Academic Affairs, with the Provost, working with the deans and faculty. Existing programs are reviewed by departments, schools, and governance committees. Standing committees of the University Senate, review programs for assessment of student learning.

The Committee on Undergraduate Curriculum and Academic Standards (CUCAS) is charged with reviewing undergraduate programs; the Graduate Council is responsible for review of graduate programs.

Programs with external accreditation are reviewed by their accrediting bodies. In addition to accreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, the Connecticut Board of Governors for Higher Education, and the Connecticut State Department of Education, several graduate and undergraduate programs (e.g., Administration and Supervision, Chemistry, Counseling, Music, Nursing, Social Work, and Education) are accredited nationally and reviewed by discipline-related agencies.

A 2012 faculty survey indicated that 62.5% of faculty and staff agreed that “WCSU provides sufficient resources to improve programs and instruction” – in spite of the fact that Connecticut’s fiscal crisis and budget constraints have impacted WCSU significantly in recent years (for instance: TK20 expenditures, money spent on accreditation, faculty development grants, CELT grants, and more).

WCSU has made many changes to courses and processes over the past 10 years. While few fell within the boundaries of “substantive change” which required Commission communication and approval, two that did were the creation of the EdD in Instructional Leadership, the EdD in Nursing and the Media Production Program. The first accredited by NCATE in Fall 2009 and described in more detail in the Graduate Degree section and the second begun in Fall 2012.

Procedures for discontinuance of undergraduate and graduate programs are in place and have been reviewed (Painting, for example).

WCSU offers students alternate education sites. The Waterbury campus is on the grounds of Naugatuck Valley Community College (NVCC) (35). The online Learning course management system provided by Blackboard, as provided in the state contract for the ConnSCU system is used as a course delivery platform. (For more on this issue, see Appendix: Standard IV: 8.)

### **Appraisal**

WCSU is proud of the quality of undergraduate and graduate academic programs. Current challenges include the University’s commitment to full implementation of the Strategic Plan; the state budget crisis, changes in the state’s higher education governance; and changing state demographics.

As state aid to the Institution declines, efficient and effective resource allocation grows more challenging and more crucial. Examination of the Data First forms shows a total undergraduate population decrease of 4.6% between Fall 2009 and Fall 2012 (from 5,869 to 5,552). Nonmatriculants decreased by 7.5% (from 348 to 322), while Associate degree candidates increased by 38.2% (from 34 to 47) and Baccalaureate candidates decreased by 4.7% (from 5,487 to 5,230). Between FY 2010 and FY 2012 enrollments in the individual schools have fluctuated between -7% and +2%. While the university and individual schools did not show significant change, some individual programs have changed significantly (see Appendix, Table 2). The 2012 report of the WCSU Strategic Plan Assessment team concluded that: "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 experience serious financial challenges. 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."

If a program has too few students the department may have trouble offering necessary classes. WCSU policy has been that classes with fewer than 12 students are subject to cancellation (see Appendix, Table 3). However, low enrollment in a program does not necessarily mean that resources are being wasted or that a student’s progress is impeded. While there was only one BS Elementary Education and Political Science major in FY 2012, there were 52 Political Science majors and 270 Elementary Education majors. Since all the courses taken by that one student are also taken by the other Political Science and Elementary Education students, the University can efficiently provide for some low-enrollment programs.

Advising is an area that can be improved, as indicated by the results of an electronic survey sent to all students in the spring 2012 semester by the Strategic Plan Assessment team (38). Of

respondents to this survey (mainly undergraduates), 24% identified better advisement as the major vehicle for providing better academic programs at WCSU.

[The Academic Program Review Process](#) recently became a focus of the University. In the Spring 2011 semester an Ad Hoc Graduate committee conducted an initial review of each graduate program. WCSU's Provost reviewed the committee recommendations for each graduate program and requested that all programs be reviewed on a five-year cycle, rather than on the former 10-year cycle. Guidelines approved by the University Senate in April 2012 established that all programs will be reviewed on a seven-year cycle.

Connecticut has been drastically reducing its support of higher education. Constant budget reductions place a strain on resource planning, which is coordinated through [Finance and Administration](#) and described in detail in Standard IX. Nevertheless, WCSU has significantly increased support of student learning, as reflected in number of funded faculty lines. In Fiscal Year 2003 (the time of the last comprehensive accreditations visit), WCSU had a total of 191 funded faculty lines. In FY13 (the current budget year) 232 faculty lines are fully funded in the approved budget. This represents a 21% gain of 41 funded faculty lines in the 10-year period since the last self-study.

A reflection of WCSU's commitment to enhance programs, in spite of fiscal strains, is the level of new program funding. The University has committed significant resources to developing new programs, especially at the graduate level, and supporting efforts to upgrade existing programs to meet relevant national accreditation standards and workforce needs. WCSU spent an average of \$158,000 per year for direct accreditation expenses for FY03 to FY12, for a total of \$1,586,214 over this 10-year period. These numbers include the expense for fees paid to the accrediting body, work by consultants and faculty on accreditation reports, travel expense, etc. It does not include program costs or staff enhancements that were incurred to meet accreditation standards. If these were included, the total would be far greater.

### **Projection**

The academic program is the strength of WCSU but it must continue to evolve dynamically and flexibly to address issues of student graduation rates, student retention, and student attainment of desired competencies. Subsequent sections in Standard IV will address the academic programs or processes which are being evaluated and revised, including:

- A reassessment of the general education program, ensuring that it is unique to the needs and resources of WCSU and is also effectively aligned with the needs of students transferring from other state institutions of higher education by fall 2013.
- A revised First Year Experience (FYE) program that includes and meets the needs of all incoming freshman. Deans currently working with faculty and plan to submit recommendations in fall 2013. Arts and Sciences faculty will pilot 3 areas in fall 2013: 1. University Navigation Skills: Extended Orientation (FYE: University Success Factors) 2. Core Academic Competencies completed in the first year and 3. Orientation to Major: Introductory course in major or a specific seminar.

- Effective oversight of academic advising, addressing student concerns that advising not be a pro forma process and faculty concerns that students commit to and complete the advising process every semester to facilitate effective academic planning by ???
- More effective design and implementation of the program sheets used by students to assess their graduation requirements and progress **effective ???**
- Greater access to all course syllabi by students and faculty and the continued improvement of syllabi to clearly state learning outcomes, demonstrate the academic content of courses, and provide clear assessment criteria upon completion of process re-engineering kicked off the latter part of March.

## **Undergraduate Degree Programs**

### **Description**

In order to achieve WCSU's Mission, academic programs require students to complete a broad range of General Education courses and in-depth study within their majors. Students must complete their [major's course work](#) at the intermediate and advanced levels. Programs have published appropriate rationales which demonstrate clarity and order. Most offer adequate space for students to take unrestricted electives, though state and accreditation requirements in some majors leave little room for elective courses (e.g., elementary education). All undergraduate [program sheets](#) are available online.

### **General Education**

WCSU has taken steps to enhance its General Education program. We have an excellent balance of liberal arts knowledge such as critical thinking and professional workforce skills. We offer our students a holistic learning experience that we believe is more expansive and wider reaching than the offerings of community colleges.

The General Education Task Force developed a definition of “The Educated Person” based upon the essential learning outcomes for college students enumerated in the AAC&U LEAP initiative. The General Education Committee adopted this definition, which was approved by the Senate, and used it to develop objectives for the existing General Education program. However, the definition needs greater attention and publication in order to be fully effective.

General Education is based on a distributed requirement model the purpose of which is to expose students to the broad spectrum of human knowledge and mode of inquiry. Students must take a number of credits from prescribed areas based on disciplinary boundaries. A student's General Education accounts for 42 credits of the degree program. These credit hours are drawn from and include at least one course from each of the following areas: 3 credits in Oral Communication skills, 15 credits in Humanities, 12 credits in Social and Behavioral Sciences, 10 credits in Natural Sciences, Mathematics, and Computer Science, 2 credits in Exercise Science. These prepare students for life-long learning. Course credit is documented by way of the standard Carnegie credit hour metric, regardless of venue (classroom, distance education, summer, intersession, accelerated, etc.) and is generally expected to be completed (but is not required) prior to undertaking major program course work.



In Spring 2012, the ConnSCU Board of Regents for Higher Education approved a new [transfer articulation policy](#). First, it calls for common general education competencies, in alignment with NEASC Standards and with AAC&U LEAP competencies across all Connecticut state universities, community colleges, and the Charter Oak College. To ensure that students transferring from the community colleges to any of the CSU's can do so smoothly, the new policy requires establishment of common "pathways" to graduation for each major. WCSU is utilizing this opportunity to revise curricular practices with respect to general education, majors, and assessment.

Expectations for catalog descriptions have been developed. These include the expectation that all departments will have clearly defined student learning outcomes for their programs which are necessary for program and course development, clear and organized instruction, and proper assessment.

### **The Major**

Major programs provide graduates with breadth and depth of knowledge in their chosen field. Majors at WCSU, including options, requires between 33 and 70 credits of concentrated study within a specific area. Students are asked to demonstrate an in-depth understanding of their major and its connections to the world. In order to help students synthesize their coursework and experiences and demonstrate in-depth knowledge, most majors offer a capstone course or other learning experience. For many majors this may be a senior seminar or research seminar. For example, education majors participate in a student teaching experience in their last semester which counts for 12 academic credits.

### **Appraisal**

The E-Series data show 84% of programs indicated that they had developed student learning outcomes and 75% indicated that the outcomes were available in a location easily available to students such as on the university's Website, in the catalog, on course outlines, or in syllabi. On websites and in catalog entries for the sample of departments, 75% have published student learning outcomes; 81% have a mission statement or departmental objectives which are in alignment with the university's mission; and 81% have objectives based on national standards. (For a list of accredited programs, see Appendix: Standard IV: 9.)

A sample of program sheets reveals that most programs allow students 17 to 51 credits of unrestricted electives. In some cases, such as Elementary Education with a major in Anthropology, a requirement of over 90 credits of specified work beyond general education requirements leaves little or no room for free electives; this is due to the need for these students to develop both a breadth and depth of knowledge in education as well as in their chosen areas of concentration. All the sampled programs had made at least minor updates within the past 10 years. The format of program sheets hasn't changed in over 20 years and includes outdated data resulting in confusion to students and faculty. It is recommended that program sheets be redesigned for clarity. (More on the program review process is found in Appendix: Standard IV: 10.)

In recent months, changes instituted at the Board of Regents served General Education is moving to a competency model to clarify and be more consistent with the university's mission. A systematic assessment of the general education program is in progress.

The self-study survey of syllabi for academic year 2011-2012 conducted by Standard IV self-study committee indicated that 83% of syllabi showed alignment between the content listed on the official course outline. 28% of the courses listed learning outcomes on both the course outline and the syllabi; 48% of syllabi contained learning outcomes that were clearly connected to the content; and 100% of the syllabi were in alignment with WCSU's Mission. The self-study assessment found that many of the course outlines had not seen any significant changes in some years. In some programs course outlines had been recently updated within a department but the current updates were not on file with the university. Moreover, the content listed on syllabi was not always in alignment with the content on the course outlines.

Student surveys were examined to determine student satisfaction with their WCSU experience. Eighty percent of seniors surveyed between Spring 2008 and Spring 2011 evaluated their experience at WCSU as excellent or good, and 75% stated that they would probably or definitely go to WCSU if they could start all over again (WCSU NSSE Surveys); these numbers are similar to those from the other Connecticut State Universities (76%) but are below the average of universities in the same Carnegie Class (83%). When first-year students are surveyed, 76.5% rate their experience at WCSU as excellent or good, and 72% would definitely or probably go to WCSU again if they were to start all over; these numbers fall below those of the other CSU's (76%) and also below the average for universities in the same Carnegie Class (85%).

Student attitudes toward the general education program at WCSU mirror those toward the university: 81% of seniors felt that WCSU had contributed to their acquisition of a broad general education which is similar to the attitudes of seniors at other Connecticut State Universities (CSUs) and slightly lower than other universities in the same Carnegie Class (Appendix, Table 1). Meanwhile, 77% of first-year students agreed with this statement which is slightly lower than the average of 81% for the other CSUs and similar Carnegie Class universities.

Faculty perceptions mirror those of the students: 92.8% believed that WCSU provides a strong Liberal Arts foundation to students; 88.6% felt that students developed strong skills in communication, problem solving and critical thinking; and 75.9% felt that WCSU emphasizes a strong background in information technologies. Only 53.1% said WCSU provides an effective first-year experience for incoming freshmen; 65.2% felt that mathematics and writing placement procedures are transparent and easy to understand for faculty advisors. The results of these surveys informed these changes: Design of Math Emporium, conversion from distribution to competency based programs; renewed emphasis on FYE.

### **Retention**

Currently WCSU has a 73.2% retention rate of first-time, full-time undergraduates, while nationally the rate at [comparable institutions](#) is 78.2%.

To address concerns with respect to the first year student perceptions, success, and retention WCSU is examining a number of possibilities including student success factors in existing 100 level courses and learning communities. The faculty bolstered the First Year Experience and

strengthened first-time student retention. In February 2013, WCSU faculty endorsed a tiered competency approach to general education. A number of FYE enhancements have been drafted and are currently being piloted (see “Projection,” below). Additionally, the Process Reengineering Committee recommended elimination of policies and practices that impede retention and graduation rates.

### **Projection**

As a thorough appraisal of the undergraduate program reveals, a number of issues need attention. Steps are being taken to ensure all programs identify and publish their objectives and learning outcomes as detailed in the summary of this section.

### **Retention**

The General Education Committee will develop a complete proposal of a redesigned competency-based general education curriculum during the summer of 2013. The proposal (and likely a few variations) will be vetted by the full faculty in the fall of 2013, and implementation will take place in fall 2014. Alongside these efforts a new first year experience will be created. WCSU has piloted several small versions of an FYE, and the lessons learned from those pilots are central to the new design.

In the first FYE pilot, a small group of students took part in a college skills seminar developed by the psychology department. Among the topics in this course were basic academic skills like time-management, study skills, critical reading skills as well as some essential college navigation skills such as registration processes and schedule planning. Results of this pilot suggested that while some of the topics were a benefit to the students, one size does not fit all. Several students felt it was too basic and others needed more time on study skills.

In the second FYE pilot, faculty developed a larger program that was based on reconfiguring Freshmen undergraduate classes to include three of five academic skills (information literacy, critical thinking, research, writing, and ethics) and at least two university success factors (co-curricular involvement, support services, organizational skills, technology skills, working in groups). Students were to take three FYE courses in their first year. This program had a minor positive impact on retention if students enrolled in one of these courses, but there was no added benefit if they enrolled in two. There were no measures of the success of the academic piece (no assessment) and no student ever completed three.

WCSU has tried variations on learning communities in two separate initiatives. In both cases, students expressed some frustration with this model (it was too much like high school, they couldn't change any classes) and in the second iteration, Explorers, the impact on retention appears to have been negative. However, in the Explorers program students did express a desire for more information on things like registration processes, planning their education, finding advisors and finding support.

In each of these pilot studies, one hindrance has been the inability to test it university-wide, due to budget constraints. So, the current proposal is based on lessons-learned, best practices, the one cohort model at WCSU that seems to benefit retention, and sustainability in terms of budget. The details are as follows:

1. University 101: University navigation skills are essential to supporting progress toward degree, learning how to navigate basic registration processes and learning how to get the support needed throughout a student's career at WCSU. Many students take a first semester writing course, so this is a natural location that does not impact budget or scheduling. UNI101 will be largely developed by the student services side of the house, with guidance from faculty. Essential to the success of this embedded experience are the following: a. points must be attached to the assignments, b. some of the content will be based on the writing placement (more advanced students will be able to opt out of some of the study habits, for example), c. assignments will require students to meet with people around campus (advisors, career center, tutors, and so on) so that they familiarize themselves with their resources.
2. Under the new model of tiered competencies, first year competencies will be identified and assessed. These competencies will likely be writing tier 1 & tier 2, quantitative reasoning, information literacy, critical and analytic thinking. These will be defined by the General Education Committee in the new curriculum. Clear definitions of learning outcomes will be included and assessed.

### **Summary of Action Steps**

In order to address these issues, WCSU will take the following actions:

- Syllabi will be in compliance with requirements and expectations by September 2013.
- Program review procedures were adopted in 2012 and as a result a schedule of course outline review has been written
- In order to comply with state articulation requirements and to facilitate assessment and curriculum development, a tiered-competency based General Education program is being proposed and considered by the faculty. If this process moves forward, it will be developed by September 2013 and implemented by September 2014.
- A new freshman experience program with clearly stated outcomes and University 101 course will be developed by September 2013 and implemented by September 2014 (see above).

### **Graduate Degree Programs**

#### **Description**

The Graduate Mission Statement guides Graduate Studies at WCSU (53). [Seventeen graduate programs are offered](#), including the recently developed and jointly offered (with SCSU) Doctorate in Education (EdD), which launched in Fall 2012.

Expectations of graduate programs regularly exceed those of undergraduate offerings in the same departments. Courses are more theoretical and are presented at more advanced levels, often in accordance with the requirements of accrediting bodies. The MA in Counseling, for example, fulfills Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP) requirements. Fulltime faculty in the Ed.D. in Instructional Leadership program are granted

reassigned time for research in their field. Campus-wide, graduate faculty are expected to conduct research and produce scholarship that informs their graduate teaching. WCSU librarians work with departments and faculty to ensure sufficient library holdings and electronic databases for graduate programs.

The Division of Graduate Studies oversees Graduate Admissions, supports Graduate Council and reports to the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs. The Division maintains a [website](#) containing comprehensive information about graduate admissions, degree programs, and courses. The Graduate Catalog (available in print and [online](#)) also contains this information. A Graduate Open House is held every April. The Division also supports recruitment efforts for the [Ed.D. in Instructional Leadership](#) and the Master of Arts in Teaching.

The Graduate Council, a standing committee of the Senate, recommends graduate policy, approves programs, and maintains academic standards. (For more on graduate teaching and faculty, see Appendix: Standard IV: 11.)

Graduate Admissions and the departments follow standards published in the Graduate Catalog in admitting graduate students. Requirements concerning undergraduate GPA, major subject area, writing ability, and special prerequisites in the discipline are upheld.

Rationale for graduate degrees are stated in the Graduate Catalog, on university and department web pages, and in course outlines and syllabi. Adherence to their stated standards and learning objectives, individual graduate programs are designed to advance students substantially beyond the requirements of corresponding undergraduate programs (see also Appendix: Standard IV: 12).

All graduate programs at WCSU require at least one of the following: a comprehensive examination, a capstone course, or another culminating experience in which students demonstrate successful learning. For example, the MBA emphasizes diverse skills in business research; science courses require lab work; and the MA in History has a required research course. Master's programs also ensure the development of research skills at an appropriate level. The EdD in Instructional Leadership program develops students' research skills sequentially, culminating in a dissertation. Most of the graduate degrees prepare students for career preparation and professional practice. The two MFA programs instruct students in professional practice as well as in creative genres and methods. The Ed.D.in Instructional Leadership instructs students in the methods employed by instructional leaders and researchers in the field (see also, Appendix: Standard IV: 13).

[Student learning outcomes](#) have been defined for all graduate degrees. They are listed in the Graduate Catalog, course outlines, syllabi, department handbooks, and are available online. Accrediting bodies have judged that learning outcomes in some departments, by far have met their standards as evidenced by specialized accreditation approval. 42% (8) of a total of 17 graduate programs are accredited by specialized bodies. In others, course and program requirements match or exceed the expectations found in graduate programs at comparable institutions. For example, the MFA in Writing reported

Program coordinators maintain contact with alumni/ae of graduate programs. The EdD in Instructional Leadership and MFA in Writing programs in particular make use of graduates as

instructors and visiting lecturers for future cohorts. The Counselor Education program tracks the licensure for its graduates. Such indicators measure the success of degree recipients in subsequent licensure, certification, and career advancement.

In 2010 the Graduate Division established general guidelines for departments to determine the qualifications for faculty teaching at the graduate level, and many departments have developed and now enforce their own special guidelines. Departments expect that graduate faculty will be productive scholars. The Ansell School of Business, for example, adheres to the AQ (academically qualified) and PQ (professionally qualified) designations recommended by [AACSB](#).

### **Appraisal**

While the growth of graduate programs at WCSU is indicative of positive development, this growth has placed additional pressure on university resources. Since the opening of the Science Building in 2006, laboratories have been adequate for graduate-level research in Biology and in Earth and Planetary Sciences, but these programs are constrained by budget and space limitations.

Most departments have adequate full-time faculty for graduate instruction. Exceptions include the Biology graduate program, which is currently not admitting MA students, and the Finance department, which is conducting searches for new tenure-track faculty. Some of the most successful programs, such as Counselor Education, Nursing, and MHA need additional resources. Economic conditions over the past several years adversely affected decisions to recruit and employ needed faculty. Programs had to limit expansion. Due to its shortage of faculty, Counselor Education has a multi-year applicant waiting list.

Holders of graduate degrees have succeeded in the workforce and in doctoral studies. Graduates of the [MFA in Creative and Professional Writing](#), for example, have published books and been featured in anthologies and journals. Others have accepted positions as communications executives, speechwriters and advertising consultants at major companies; still others have found success as playwrights, screenwriters, and teachers. Three recent MAs in English and History have completed their Ph.D. study and have accepted academic positions. MBA graduates have gained positions of high responsibility in businesses around the world. EdD, MS, and MA recipients in Education have in many cases advanced. MS in Music Education recipients constitute half of the public school music teachers in Connecticut. MFA in Visual Arts graduates have obtained teaching positions and have given individual shows in prestigious Manhattan galleries. These graduate success stories should be more widely disseminated and a more systematic collection of data on graduates needs to be implemented and data analyzed.

### **Projection**

Since 2011 the University has examined the future of graduate education at WCSU, determining the place of graduate learning in the Strategic Plan, the relative size of the graduate student population within the institution, and the future configuration of the Division of Graduate Studies. The significance of graduate education is growing in the light of changing demographics. United States Census researchers have projected the continued [growth of the working-adult population](#) and the [decline of the high school-age population in the Northeast](#)

from 2011 to 2021. WCSU's Marketing Committee has begun to promote graduate programs in cost-effective social media. In response to a report from the Ad Hoc Graduate Studies Committee comprised of faculty, the Division of Graduate Studies was restructured in 2011. , elimination of the position of Dean of Graduate Studies and transference of responsibilities and duties to the Associate VPAA, to insure greater focus and intentional strategic planning

During academic year 2013-2014 the University will continue to address issues of scarce faculty lines and other resources in its programs.

### **Integrity in the Award of Academic Credit**

#### **Description**

WCSU is authorized by the ConnSCU Board of Regents to confer the undergraduate degrees (BA, BS, BBA, and BM in a variety of academic and professional disciplines), and the MA, MAT, MS, MHA, MBA, MFA, MSN and the EdD at the graduate level. All programs follow Connecticut's Office of Financial and Academic Affairs for Higher Education Connecticut State Office of Finance and Academic Affairs for Higher Education's official Program Inventory and are in compliance with the Rules and Regulations for Licensure and Accreditation of Institutions and Programs of Higher Education outlined by the state of ConnSCU Board of Regents for Higher Education. The five certificate programs offered are appropriately named for their specialization (The Certificate for Intermediate Administration and Supervision, the Advanced Certificate Program in Interdisciplinary Gerontological Studies, the new Online Applied Behavior Analysis Graduate Study Certificate, Clinical Mental Health Counseling, and School Counseling).

A review of undergraduate programs reveal that 100% of the programs meet the minimum of 120 credits and a number of majors require additional credits for graduation. Programs exceeding 125 credits include: Elementary Biology (126), Music: Jazz and Classical Voice (127), Elementary Education: English, English Writing, and History/SS (128), Medical Technology (129), and Music Education (131). All graduate degree programs require at least 30 credits.

All courses required for graduation are listed on the [program sheets](#). Departments establish course rotation plans in order to guarantee that courses will be available for students to graduate in four years if they attend school full-time. This information along with good advising helps students plan their course needs for graduation.

The university has an established governance process for oversight of degree programs and courses, approval of new courses and programs, and changes to existing courses and programs. Specific roles and responsibilities are clearly articulated by the university, published in the [Faculty Handbook](#).

The Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs has overall responsibility for the entire area of [academic affairs](#) and the total instructional program of the University, as well as enrollment management. [The school deans](#) oversee and assess the curricula and quality of instruction and the assignment of duties to personnel within each school.

In Academic Year 2011-2012, 145 undergraduate and graduate program and course changes were logged in the WCSU Curriculum Development SharePoint. The process of governance

became bottlenecked with proposals, creating an impetus for change in curricula review. As a result a redesign of SharePoint was commissioned and was carried out effectively.

In Fall 2012, WCSU and Southern Connecticut State University began jointly offering the EdD in Nursing Education. This EdD has been licensed by the ConnSCU Board of Regents and approved by NEASC.

The evaluation of student achievement is based on successful course completion and meeting graduation requirements. The award of degree credits is appropriate to the degree level to which they are applied. Graduate candidates must take all course work at the graduate level, and advanced undergraduate candidates may take graduate level courses on a limited basis with permission from their department.

The course syllabus is a critical instrument for sharing clearly stated learning outcomes. In 2011 a syllabi template was developed and deceminated university-wide. Departments ensure that assessment of learning objectives and award of course credit are consistently applied across the discipline.

WCSU policy stipulates that [Writing](#) and [Mathematics skills](#) are assessed after a student is admitted, but before s/he begins classes. A student who needs remedial work in one or both areas must arrange to complete it during the summer or at another institution before completing 24 credits at WCSU. Faculty across the CSU and community college systems are now meeting to establish clear guidelines and processes for how such support will be offered in college courses for students who need it.

Students are not permitted to enroll in an advanced course until completion of basic courses. For example, Students in Nursing, Medical Technology, and in the Sciences requiring CHE 110 and 120 are required to take the [Chemistry Placement Exam](#). Students registering for PHY 110 or 120 must take the [Physics Placement Exam](#).

In the Summer of 2011 all courses were reviewed to be in alignment with the [NEASC Policy on Credits and Degrees](#). The university has adopted the NEASC Commission and Federal definition of the credit hour (one hour is equal to one hour of classroom time and two hours of student work outside of class). All academic units of WCSU adhere to this definition of a student credit hour.

While the credit-hour issue has been addressed, the self-study review of sample WCSU syllabi indicated that while all syllabi list class dates and times, some syllabi do not clearly articulate out-of-class assignments and activities.

WCSU provides students with a variety of opportunities to go beyond the classroom such as Study Abroad and Service Learning. The appropriate level of academic content is built into all such experiences. For example, the Department of World Languages and Literature facilitate [faculty-led Short Courses Abroad](#) in Italy (Spring 2012) and Spain (Summer 2012). Candidates may also participate in the [International Student Exchange Program](#) (ISEP) and may qualify for [Scholarship for Study Abroad](#). The EdD in Instructional Leadership offers optional coursework leading to the Intermediate Supervisor and Administrator endorsement (#092) including a clearly defined two-semester administrative internship at a school and district office location. The Master of Arts in Teaching program requires 20 hours of service learning in an urban school as



part of ED 571 Urban Education Experience. Evaluation of service learning focuses on knowledge, skills, and dispositions aligned with the Connecticut's Common Core of Teaching.

The university participates in the [College Board Advanced Placement Program](#) and awards college credit to entering undergraduate students with qualifying scores. Transfer credit for experiential learning may be accepted from Connecticut's Charter Oak College, after the appropriate department chair assesses the appropriateness and relevance of the course. Students may earn credit through the [College Level Exam Program](#) (CLEP).

Undergraduates whose GPA falls below a 2.0 are placed on academic probation. Students, who withdraw from the university in good academic standing, may apply for re-admission. Students who were academically dismissed, however, need to attain probationary status before the University will consider re-admitting them for full-time status. WCSU has a Fresh Start Policy that provides eligible students who initially struggled academically to have a second chance at graduating with a GPA unaffected by the below-average grades of their initial enrollment (see Appendix: Standard IV: 14).

The degrees awarded reflect distinctions achieved by students (Cum Laude, Magna Cum Laude, and Summa Cum Laude). Student achievement is also recognized through the Dean's list completion of the prestigious and competitive-entry [Honors Program](#).

Faculty members are responsible for the academic integrity of the award of grades ([Collective Bargaining Agreement](#), 4.2.2.2, p. 13). There is an established and published system in place for students to appeal a grade in the case of [palpable injustice](#): students may use the appeals process when they believe there is evidence to show that a) a final grade was determined by methods and criteria different from those used for determining final grades for others in the same class or b) the evaluation was made as the result of bias or caprice.

Identifying plagiarism is an individual faculty member's responsibility. The university provides the SafeAssign online tool to assist in this process; however, the program can only be used with the Blackboard course management system. The library also has dedicated an online page called "Plagiarism (and how to avoid it)."

The Academic Honesty Policy is clearly listed in both printed and online versions of the [Undergraduate](#) and [Graduate Catalogs](#). A review of a sample of course syllabi, conducted for the Self-Study, found that 63% of the syllabi included a description of or link to the Academic Honesty Policy.

Distance education and [online learning](#) were recently reviewed by the [Senate Distance Education Committee](#) to ensure compliance with NEASC guidelines. In 2012 a [Distance Education Policy](#) was submitted to the Senate by the Distance Education Committee.

Online learning programs are subject to the approval of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, CUCAS and Graduate Council. WCSU adheres to the policy that all courses of the same prefix and number are equivalent, regardless of mode of delivery, online or on ground, or period of delivery. It is the responsibility of the faculty to ensure that the rigor of programs and quality of instruction are maintained within their courses. Assessments of student learning are equivalent to those employed in traditional instructional modalities and faculty

regularly meet with Information Technology & Innovation staff to discuss assessment issues and share best practice strategies.

Faculty members desiring to adapt a traditional course into an [online course](#) follow the Online Course Approval Process, which involves submission of a request by a faculty member, review and approval by the appropriate Dean, followed by approval by the Provost. New online courses may also be designed and offered by following regular course development policies as well as the university's online course policies.

WCSU offers programs and courses for abbreviated or concentrated time periods during Spring and Winter Intersessions, three 5-week summer sessions, and through online learning. Such courses are designed to offer equivalent experiences to on-ground, face-to-face courses and the process and mechanisms for achieving equivalency must be described in the [application process](#) in order for faculty to offer courses through online education. Some hybrid courses, comprising regularly scheduled classroom time with both face-to-face meetings and online learning, are offered. All face-to-face meetings for a hybrid course are announced prior to registration. The online component is delivered via the University's online course management system, currently Blackboard Learn. Hybrid courses, a mixing of electronic and at least 70% on-campus are designed to assure that all students have access to appropriate services. (For more on student preparation for taking online courses, see Appendix: Standard IV: 15.)

Instruction in all courses, whether campus-based or online, is reviewed by the same criteria set forth in the AAUP-CBA, the Faculty Handbook and Departmental Bylaws. Fulltime faculty design and implement online courses offered by WCSU. Review of online courses includes evaluation of teaching effectiveness and student satisfaction.

WCSU strives to ensure that students enrolled in distance learning courses have sufficient opportunities to interact with faculty regarding course content and related academic matters. For example, the EdD program has a Wiki where candidates can sign up for office hours. Faculty must clarify in their syllabi and course policies the nature of planned interaction, feedback timelines (like grading or email turnaround), as well as appropriate modes of communication (e-mail, phone, fax, chat, or discussion board). Faculty must ensure clear responses to students, within a student-friendly timeframe, e.g., 24 hours. Complete and detailed feedback is provided via the discussion board, individual email, or other appropriate means. Learning outcomes are appropriate to the rigor and breadth of degree or certificate program.

Certificate programs are approved through the governance process and are held to the same standards as other academic programs. WCSU offers a limited number of certificates based on online courses offered for credit, and the level of academic quality of these are consistent with the degree programs. For example, the new online Applied Behavior analysis has been approved by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board®, Inc.. The Advanced Certificate Program in Interdisciplinary Gerontological Studies is the first of its kind within the CSU system and within the western region of Connecticut and northeast region of New York. This program is a collaborative effort by five of WCSU's academic departments (Nursing, Health Promotion and Exercise Sciences, Management, Social Work, and Psychology).

According to the Board of Regents [Transfer and Articulation Policy](#) (TAP), transfer associate degrees will be common to all of the Connecticut Community Colleges and will include at least

30 credits of transferrable general education, liberal arts core or liberal education program courses that address the core competencies. The remaining credits will be articulated with degree programs at the respective Connecticut State Universities and Charter Oak State College. The TAP Framework was designed by a representative group of faculty members from all 17 campuses who were constituted in April 2012 and completed remarkable work in the one year. WCSU is currently participating in the second phase of the articulation process to establish pathways to majors across all departments with the community college and CSU institutions.

Potential transfer students may access and examine [admission information](#) our home page. All equivalent courses for the Connecticut community colleges can be easily identified.

The Connecticut State Colleges and Universities offers a [Transfer Compact for Dual Admission](#) to students who are planning to enroll at one of the four CSUs after completing an Associate's degree at one of Connecticut's 12 community colleges. The university is actively involved in the TAP process to ensure a smoother path of access for all students within the CSUs and Connecticut community college system.

Undergraduate students complete at least one-fourth of their program at WCSU (30 credits), including advanced work in the major, with the exception of students transferring under articulation agreements. The university will accept a maximum of 75 semester hours from a two-year institution and up to 90 semester hours from a four-year school for [undergraduate transfers](#).

Graduate credit transfer is accepted on a limited basis to preserve the integrity of the degree awarded. All transfer credits must represent satisfactory work (a grade of "B" or better) at the institution where the work was completed and must be in accordance with a planned program of study. Transfer credits older than ten years are not accepted toward any graduate program. (For more on graduate credit transfer, see Appendix: Standard IV: 16.)

### **Appraisal**

The "orientation to online learning" course is in development and has not been offered to WCSU students as required by the university Online Policy.

The self-study indicated that there are inconsistencies among departments in design and implementation of online courses and in their oversight.

Due to fiscal constraints, WESTCONNect Office Hours and Staffed Computer Centers' operating hours are shortened; more support is needed in these areas. The library's operating hours are broader during the Fall and Spring semesters, but abbreviated during the summer.

In the case of Education candidates, where the Educational Unit is made up of faculty from three different schools and over 16 departments, better articulation needs to be configured across department lines in order to improve candidate advisement.

Faculty make inconsistent use of plagiarism programs and the training provided by MIS and Library personnel.

Listings of upcoming course offerings are often published and made available to students by departments, although this is not done consistently.

## **Projection**

WCSU is undertaking a number of steps to address the issues identified in the Appraisal section.

The University is currently evaluating program rotation plans and low enrollment courses for viability; initial findings are due by the end of 2013.

In order to deal with the bottlenecks in curricula review, a new curriculum approval process was adopted by CUCAS in Spring 2012. The new process shifts authority to approve identified curricular changes to the departments and expedites those proposals that require State approval.

The self-study process will be the vehicle for further publicizing the importance of quality syllabus design with faculty (for example, in setting clear expectations for students regarding out-of-class work to meet credit hour standards). The university has addressed compliance with the credit-hour requirements by developing and circulating to all faculty (in Spring and Fall 2012) guidelines for syllabus language that specifies to students that courses will require at least two hours of work outside of class for each hour spent in class. Student learning assessment criteria will be clearly stated in all syllabi by Fall 2013.

A major effort is underway in the Office of Academic Affairs to synchronize the print and online catalogs by entering new programs and program revisions in September of each year, beginning in Fall 2013, and publishing the print catalog annually. A process to assure that all documents are current and a clear process exists for uploading all revisions in a timely fashion will be established by Spring 2014.

In 2012 a fully revised and updated WCSU Online Policy from the Distance Education Committee, a Senate standing committee, was curriculum committees and adopted by the Senate in 2013. The requirements of this policy will be further disseminated to all fulltime and part-time faculty during the 2013-2014 academic year.

In 2013 the university began a review of policies at like universities for an identification process that provides safeguards or authentication that a candidate who registers for a course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the program and receives the academic credit. This process is expected to produce concrete recommendations at the end of 2013.

By the start of 2014, WCSU will ensure that the “T” on transfer students’ program sheets will identify the grade earned for each transfer course. This process will be completed by the Registrar.

## **Assessment of Student Learning**

### **Description**

Since 2001, faculty and Student Affairs professionals have been charged with the responsibility of identifying what and how students learn within the individual academic programs and through experiences outside the classroom. The University’s assessment plan calls for ongoing collection, analysis and dissemination of information on student learning outcomes in every degree program, to assist faculty in meeting the university’s goals.

WCSU has provided guidelines to help academic departments and their Chairs implement an effective assessment policy in compliance with NEASC standards. These standards focus on course, program, and institutional levels. (For the five stages of the assessment cycle, see Appendix: Standard IV: 17.)

Two standing committees of the University Senate advise the Provost and Senate on assessment of student learning and related matters: the [Assessment Committee](#) and the [General Education Committee](#). Additionally, each school has a committee responsible for integrating curriculum development and assessment of student learning outcomes. The University has worked consistently and successfully to implement assessment of student learning outcomes across the curriculum as stipulated by the NEASC reaccreditation report of March 2004. Beginning in 2004-05, each academic dean was charged with the responsibility of:

reviewing the assessment status of all programs in the school or division

providing copies of the NEASC statements on evidence to all department chairs

asking departments which were already successful in assessing learning outcomes to agree on a common format for reporting assessment results

conferring with the chairs of departments judged to be in need of assessment and explaining the procedures

ensuring annual reporting of assessment findings, including changes in instruction and curricula

Evidence of the degree to which WCSU students achieve student learning outcomes is compiled by the office of Institutional Research and Assessment and made available to departments, Deans, and the Provost.

The WCSU mission emphasizes preparing our students to be productive members of society. We meet the educational needs of a diverse student body by providing programs of excellence in the liberal arts and by providing students with the necessary background to be successful in their chosen careers. Academic departments are required annually to provide evidence of program learning outcomes that articulate the fulfillment of the institutional mission.

WCSU's Assessment Plan calls for ongoing collection, analysis, and dissemination of information on student learning outcomes in every degree program, together with annual reporting of the status of program assessment. The Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs requires departments to submit plans for the assessment of student learning outcomes. All new program proposals submitted to governance review are also required to include assessment plans. The university wide Assessment Committee develops guidelines, reviews plans, and issues reports of good practices in several departments. The Assessment Update for each degree program is now an integral part of the annual report of each school, department, and division. Administrative implementation of policy on learning outcomes assessment begins with the Academic Dean, is carried out by department Chairs, is reported to the Dean, and finally goes to the Academic Vice President, with a copy to the Assessment Committee for policy review (100).

In 2011 the Division of Student Affairs completed its three-year project to have all departments conduct self-studies using the national assessment standards developed by the Council for the

Advancement of Standards (CAS). CAS is nationally recognized for its work in providing assessment standards specifically for departments that fall within the purview of Student Affairs. Each department director has formally presented their respective CAS findings to all of the directors. Every area now has an Action Plan based on their self-study analysis. Several departments worked with the office of Institutional Research and Assessment to design new measurement tools that focus on student learning.

The University's [assessment plan](#) provides for gathering direct and indirect evidence of student learning outcomes (SLO's) and for interpreting the evidence and documenting levels of student achievement by program. This information is a critical part of the periodic review of academic programs.

Assessment data support the University's Academic Program Review Process, which was approved in 2007-08 by the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Curriculum and Academic Standards (CUCAS) and by the Graduate Council. Programs that do not have, or aspire to, national accreditation must conduct regular formal program reviews. Of the 56 degree programs, 24 are in various stages of acquiring national accreditation, including 14 that are currently accredited. All accredited programs require evidence of student learning. Of the 32 programs not seeking accreditation, one has completed the university required program review process and 5 are scheduled to continue the newly approved process in 2012-13. Of the 26 remaining programs, three were recently approved by the state of Connecticut (BOG/BOR; BA in Media Arts, and BA in Musical Theatre, and Ed.D in Nursing Education), and one involves individualized plans of study, each of which must be approved by CUCAS.

Each degree program at WCSU, graduate and undergraduate, is designed so that students learn the critical skills in their major or graduate degree program via a systematic and sequential learning experience tailored to the specific needs of the program. In class discussions and feedback; tests, quizzes and exams; writing assignment feedback; critical evaluations of performance and creative activity and other forms of feedback from instructors and peers is designed to provide students with regular and constructive information to help them improve their learning.

A diversity of approaches to the assessment of student learning outcomes is utilized at WCSU. Some examples include:

The Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences uses the nationally-normed ACT major Field Test in Biology to assess students' skills in relation to student performance at peer institutions. This tool is an embedded component of two senior-level capstone courses required of graduating majors.

In the Ansell School of Business, the departments of Marketing and Management have implemented assessment instruments that require students to apply knowledge of key concepts from discipline-specific areas of study that measure achievement at the conclusion of the program.

The Department of World Languages and Literature assesses student performance at the "novice," "intermediate," and "advanced" levels of language comprehension. In corresponding

courses, rubrics are applied to student projects that clearly characterize the level of learning students have achieved.

The Department of Social Work has an extensive capstone assessment that is based on nine core competencies that speak to the range of profession-specific skills required for graduates to achieve success in the field.

WCSU utilizes a variety of methods, including external review of programs, to ensure that its methods of understanding student learning are trustworthy and provide useful information for continued improvement of programs and services for students.

### **Appraisal**

Many WCSU programs are doing an excellent job of preparing our students for work and educational experiences after earning the undergraduate degree. For instance, the following departments and programs reflect the institution's mission in preparing students for effective citizenship, further study, and future employment:

The Music-Bachelor of Arts aims to prepare students for careers in music and arts-related professions. However, a supplemental goal of the department is to create an appreciation of the arts on behalf of the student and appreciate the arts in relation to society. The Music department also emphasizes the importance of exploring other academic interests throughout the University. This is best evidenced by their extensive general education requirements.

The Communication Department offers degrees in communicative processes and media arts and production. The program helps all undergraduate students improve their ability to engage in and evaluate the communication process, an essential aspect of fulfilling the University's mission.

The Health Promotion Studies Bachelor of Science provides students with a comprehensive approach to health and fitness education. Students are encouraged to examine the connection between individuals, careers, family, and community.

The History Department "introduces students to the framework of American, European and world history." This student learning outcome helps to foster students' understanding of the world around them.

Moreover, the Self-Study team identified several departments and programs with exemplary assessment policies which illustrate the systematic involvement of WCSU faculty in using assessment results to improve student learning:

The Department of Music provides a clear definition of each degree, the objectives and student learning outcomes for each, an alignment of the courses to the outcomes, and a student guide that clearly explicates each of the degrees, the requirements and the assessment criteria. The Department of Music leads the School of Visual and Performing Arts as an example through its full accreditation from the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM).

The Department of Psychology administers a general discipline content exam to students at the beginning and end of their PSY 100 course and again at the end of their senior year. The Department assesses Proficiency in Experimental and Statistical Methods in the first week of the

semester following completion of PSY 201 and 204; and they conduct a rubric-based assessment of a sample of capstone projects submitted by students in their senior seminars. Assessment results have had a significant impact on the design of the psychology program leading to increasing the number of required courses, standardizing course outlines, using standardized content from computerized statistical analysis programs across course sections, and using the model goals for Psychology undergraduates developed by the American Psychological Association (APA) in curriculum development. The most recent external review of the Psychology program, conducted in Fall, 2008, highlighted the department's "commitment to assessment of student learning" as a strength of the program.

The Department of World Languages: The B.A. in Spanish and B.S. in Secondary Education and Elementary Education have included assessment as part of the program since their inception in 2006-07. They identified three levels of language preparation within the student base: true second language learners, heritage Spanish speakers and native speakers. As the program was assessed on a yearly basis, adjustments were made within the curriculum at the 200 course level so that the needs of all three groups could be met within the areas of conversation, critical thinking, composition, and standard Spanish vocabulary. Simultaneously, all students were led to explore cultural, linguistic and literary issues preparatory to the in depth studies of the upper division classes. Spanish has conducted an annual assessment of oral and writing proficiency of Spanish majors developed according to national guidelines established by ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages). In 2012-13 further revisions are being made because assessment at the 300 course level indicated a need for greater structural linguistic development.

The Standard IV self-study committee examined the E-Series Data Forms to assess the clarity and accessibility of statements of student learning outcomes (SLOs) by program. Clearly stated SLOs provide for more effective assessment of learning outcomes. Out of 56 degree programs within the university, 48 submitted E-Series Data Forms and, of those, 40 reported that learning outcomes had been developed for the degree. The manner in which student learning outcomes for each degree were presented was assessed via an examination of the 2010-2012 undergraduate catalog. The results revealed that:

- 45% of programs clearly stated SLOs in the catalog
- 16% embedded their SLOs in the program descriptions
- 13% did not state SLOs, but did describe their program goals
- 22% listed the degree content but did not describe SLOs
- 3% of programs did not describe SLOs, program goals, or degree content

For WCSU's approach to assessment to function effectively programs must have both clearly established goals and clearly described SLOs. These outcomes help determine the effectiveness of the program map and accurately assess student competency at program completion.

E-Series survey results supported observations made at meetings of the Assessment Committee: while only half the programs assessed clearly stated their learning outcomes, 97% of programs described their learning goals, the skill sets they provide, or the content provided to students in their program. The next step is for all programs at WCSU to develop clearly stated SLOs in support of their published program learning goals.



There is a need for those programs lacking curriculum maps to better utilize the WCSU assessment process in order to establish clear statements of student learning outcomes and to determine the best curriculum path to achieve those outcomes.

### **Projection**

Improving our academic assessment process is an ongoing effort. The work continues today with the support of the Provost leading a 12-month initiative facilitated by membership in the New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability. Their efforts will help to strengthen program mapping through the development of clearly stated student learning outcomes on the program and course levels.

The Provost's 2013-2014 Action Plan stipulates that the Provost will work with the WCSU Assessment Committee and the ConnSCU (statewide) Council of Academic Officers to refine and publicize student learning outcome statements that clearly articulate what students should be able to do, achieve, demonstrate, or know upon graduation. The Director of Institutional Research and Assessment, with faculty assistance, will assemble narratives and tables to identify the places in the curriculum and co-curriculum where students encounter and/or achieve each student learning outcome. The Action Plan further provides that the University's annual report of assessment of student learning outcomes will be made available to the WCSU Assessment Committee and the Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education for recommendations for improvement. The Provost and academic deans will review departmental updates and make recommendations to department and division chairs. Additionally, the Vice President for Student Affairs will review annual updates for the relevant departments and make recommendations to directors.

Support of the Provost's Action Plan requires that evidence-based changes be periodically reviewed and evaluated by the University Senate and its constituent committees (General Education, Assessment, UPBC, CUCAS, and Graduate Council) to determine how effectively student learning has improved.

### **Institutional Effectiveness**

The university identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results. WCSU is actively engaged in outcomes assessment for the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of its academic programs and organizational units. In the case of academic programs, academic program review is systematically conducted and comparative data from national organization such as NCSSE and VSA are used to benchmark institutional effectiveness. Ultimately, the goal of assessment at WCSU is to evaluate the extent to which academic programs and organizational units are meeting intended outcomes and to use the results of assessment to formulate plans for continuous improvement. To this end, the university makes extensive use of both direct and indirect measures where "direct measures" are typically real-time performance indicators and "indirect" measures are typically findings from surveys and focus group interviews.

In 2011 the President appointed six Strategic Assessment teams to assess WCSU's Strategic Vision, Plan, and Progress. The 2012 [Report of the Public/Private Team](#) noted that "Western provides a culture of learning for the purpose of innovating because we see our students as

creators as well as consumers of knowledge. A WCSU education is the blending of the scientist with the artist and the philosopher with the practitioner to create scholars that are engaged citizens." Evidence of the creation of such innovative scholars and engaged citizens is provided by:

Winning grants such as Fulbright and National Science Foundation awards. Faculty members Christopher Kukk, Anam Govardhan, Oluwole Owoye, Burton Perett, and Darla Shaw have received Fulbright Scholarships while at WCSU. Students Kevin Gaughan, Ashley Hyde, and Stephen Price have been awarded Fulbright Scholarships, and eight students are applying for Fulbright Scholarships in 2012-2013

The many publications and creations of faculty in various forms such as books, productions, performances, recordings, paintings, and journal articles (summarized in the department annual reports)

The annual publications of various departments highlighting the academic work of students – e.g. *Clio* from the History department; *Black & White*, a writing journal edited, written, and published by the Writing Department; *Beyond the Margins*, a literature and art magazine published by the English Department; and the *Journal of Undergraduate Psychology Research*

The success of "town-gown" programs such as the Bridge Program and the 2012 Presidential Election broadcast anchored and reported by WCSU Communications students and faculty

Volunteerism and civic engagement linking on-campus organizations with nongovernmental organizations such as the Dorothy Day House and the Candlewood Lake Authority

An Honors Program that fosters innovation through an interdisciplinary approach to learning.

The creation of "think tanks" such as Views from the Center and the Center for Financial Literacy

A nationally-ranked debate team

The fact that many of WCSU's schools receive the highest accreditation in their respective fields

Further evidence of WCSU's success in preparing students to excel within their discipline is provided at the annual Western Research Day (WRD). Held each May WRD gives the University the opportunity to highlight students' discipline-specific capstone projects. Students from many programs present their projects to faculty, staff, and the invited public via outstanding presentations and poster sessions.

This self-study also identified a vibrant culture of assessment at WCSU, with faculty engaged on many levels in designing assessment programs and "closing the loop" by using assessment data to modify learning programs. This represents a marked shift from the 2003 self-study and indicates steady progress from the 2006 WCSU progress report on assessment.

The 2013 NEASC Self-Study has identified several areas in which WCSU can improve the academic process to better support the university's Mission and Strategic Plan. An improved process for revising and publicizing the academic standards of our programs is a priority; student learning outcomes must be more clearly articulated and better integrated into all programs and

courses; the WCSU general education program must evolve to reflect changing state standards and national best practices; and a comprehensive and effective academic plan for first-year students is critical. The Provost's Action Plan will address and improve many of these academic and assessment issues.

[The Board of Regents Transfer Articulation Policy](#) instigated a need to examine programs and revise the General Education curriculum. WCSU will take this opportunity to streamline the program and course approval process in a way that maintains transparency. Already a simpler, more transparent system for revising courses and outlines has been adopted (106). In addition, we expect to update and change the format of all program sheets; and we will create clear expectations for the publication of programmatic and student learning objectives during 2012-13 and 2013-14. Benchmarked student learning outcomes will be adopted in all programs, reflecting generally accepted higher education goals that are appropriate to the Vision and the Mission of the University.

A revision of the First Year Experience will enhance students' initial learning and social experience at the University and lay out a clearer road to attaining learning success.

Additionally, WCSU is engaged in a vigorous discussion of the nature of the general education curriculum and is considering proposals to move from a course-based checklist to a learning-outcomes-based model which is more flexible and easier to assess. The General Education Committee is currently developing and evaluating alternative proposals to guide the implementation of the new system. The proposed general education curriculum will be considered by the entire university, faculty, and students in 2013. Considerable input and engagement is expected.

The WCSU Strategic Planning Teams and the University Planning and Budgeting Committee (UPBC) will make recommendations for improvement of student learning. These recommendations will be reviewed by the Vice President for Finance and Administration and his staff as they prepare the annual Spending Plan for submission to the Board of Regents. Recommendations may include changes in priorities, program offerings, and the allocation or reallocation of resources.

As a consequence of the self-study, strategic planning, and effective university governance, an ongoing and integrated commitment to achieving student learning outcomes will be increasingly reflected in the campus community's actions.