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DATE: January 6, 2004  


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For the next Academic Policy Committee meeting, please read the final draft that we received from NEASC. At that meeting, we will discuss initiatives that we will discuss during the semester to address NEASC's concerns.  

Enclosure
Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students of
Western Connecticut State University
Danbury, Connecticut
by
An Evaluation Committee representing the
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the
New England Association of Schools and Colleges

Prepared after study of the institution’s
self-evaluation report and a visit to
the campus October 19-22, 2003

December 15, 2003

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This report represents the views of the Evaluation Committee as compiled, interpreted,
and edited by the Chairperson. Its content is based on the Committee’s evaluation of the
institution with respect to the Commission’s Standards for Accreditation. It is a confiden-
tial document in which all comments are made in good faith and with intent to be con-
structive. The report is prepared both as an educational service to the institution and to
assist the Commission in making a decision about the institution’s accreditation status.
Given the institutional mission of access, need exists to develop new resources to fund the need gap for demonstrated student financial aid.

**Standard 7. Library and Information Resources.**

Library and information resources necessary for the fulfillment of the mission of the institution are made available to constituencies of both campuses. Sufficient audio/visual and University computing systems are readily accessible and delivered through the campus network. Young Library on the Westside Campus fosters an atmosphere conducive to inquiry, and the 1999 renovation and expansion of Midtown’s Ruth A. Haas Library doubled the size of the facility and created an unusually compelling environment for research. Library collections are sufficient in quality, currency, and diversity to support existing undergraduate programs. Database resources to support faculty research and graduate programs through the doctoral level have improved since the University’s 1998 fifth-year report. However, quantity, level, diversity, and currency of print-based collections supportive of existing graduate programs have not been adequately realized.

The University provides consistent financial support for effective maintenance of computing and media services. Library materials budgets, however, have been consistently insufficient since last accreditation review.

Library personnel are currently adequate to support Haas Library whereas Young Library has lost staff while new programs have been added to the Westside Campus, undermining service quality. University computing and media services lack sufficient personnel fully to realize network goals.

The Connecticut State University Library System (CONSULS) provides a rich and growing diversity of online resources and network enhancements to each CSU campus. Librarians are committed to the principle that taking advantage of the CSU system resources carries with it reciprocal responsibility to build local collections that carry benefits for the system.

WCSU has moved increasingly into analysis of network-based statistical information but has not yet firmly established outcome measures that would demonstrate its commitment to a culture of evidence.

**Strengths.**

*Libraries are well designed and heavily used facilities, fully accessible both physically and virtually. The new Haas facility is an inviting environment that has created increasing demand for services and collections.*

*Library administration has championed outreach to campus and greater Danbury communities through a varied array of cultural enrichment programs.*
*The library has been at the forefront on campus in implementing information technologies. Library administration and faculty had the vision and wherewithal to integrate into library services both e-reserves and enhanced document delivery services—first among the CSU system libraries.

*Addition of library systems personnel has made Haas and Young libraries less dependent on external support from University Computing.

*WCSU consortial participation in CONSULS has been highly beneficial for library users, providing access to important proprietary databases that satisfy current undergraduate curriculum demands.

*Video and audio productions created by Media Services are of high quality.

*University Computing provides nimble and well-planned support through its CISCO fiber optic network that provides data, voice, and video services to both campuses. Ongoing infrastructure upgrades and new management software ensure that University Computing systems successfully manage campus network access.

Areas of Concern

*Despite substantial budget increases over many years, funds for library materials (books, periodicals, electronic resources, etc.) remain inadequate. Supplemental funds for the new Ed.D. are insufficient to provide the high level of intellectual content and service that one associates with doctoral programs.

*A well conceived set of collection development policies and procedures is lacking despite more than a decade of effort on the part of library administration to realize this goal.

*Institutional commitment to information literacy is uncertain. Inconsistent views about the nature and objectives of information literacy are current within the library and the University at large.

*Relationship of Media Services to integration of educational technologies campus-wide appears uncertain. Lack of campus-wide planning as well as staffing and budget levels limit Media Services from enabling the University to realize benefits of digital media classroom applications.

*Young Library is experiencing exceptional demands for instruction and new services as programs expand on the Westside campus. Although Young Library was founded and is maintained specifically to serve business programs only, students and faculty in Education/Educational Psychology and in Justice and Law Administration, served by Haas Library, expect to be supported on the Westside Campus. Plans for a performing arts facility and associated arts programs also raise concerns about the adequacy of Young Library’s facility, staffing, and collections, if students and faculty expect similar support.
While the Campus Pipeline portal technology currently under development holds great promise to establish a unified digital campus, University Computing under-staffing raises questions about adequacy of infrastructure support for initiatives articulated in strategic planning documents. There is insufficient time for network planning, evaluation, and research. Computing help for students, faculty, and departments is unavailable around the clock; evening and weekend assistance is only available from staff members that work above and beyond the 40-hour work week.

The June 2003 CSU System Information Technology Strategic Plan appears to conflict with WCSU goals. The CSU Board of Trustees-approved plan is perceived by many as a clear threat to local service quality.

A culture of evidence is still evolving. Administration of occasional surveys within the libraries, Media Services, and University Computing does not appear to result in action that improves the effectiveness of these services.

Suggestions.

Significant and sustained increased institutional financial support for collections—both print and online—is required to provide resources (especially in the area of print reference resources) needed to support the growing curriculum, to remedy long-standing inadequacies, and position libraries among peers. Less than 30% of total library budget is allocated to material resources; consequently, expenditures on intellectual content are disproportionately low. The University should achieve budgetary equity within the WCSU libraries by aiming for a rough balance between personnel and material expenses but not at expense of current staffing levels.

New management strategies for print and online collections of both libraries should be given high priority; existing structures that locate collection authority within teaching faculty outside the libraries should be reconsidered. In an environment of increasingly pluralistic sources of intellectual content available from competing providers, current department-based allocation restricts realization of collection balance, limits professional judgment of library faculty, and is at odds with best practices within the profession. The University should consider a subject-based approach, where final selection authority rests within the libraries—one that that aims at a balanced collection, equitably derived, and centered on institutional mission.

Formalized and frequently administered assessment of all campus constituencies should be undertaken by the libraries, Media Services, and University Computing. Statistical information and the use of data to reconsider existing policies should follow as a part of a coordinated assessment strategy.

The ambitious and well-conceived goals of the IT Strategic Plan 2002-2005 must be tempered by marketplace realities in recruiting affordable academically centered University Computing staff. Since all objectives of the Strategic Plan will likely not be realized over the next two years, the seven broad goals should be reconsidered and prioritized
anew with emphasis on meeting academic needs of students through successful applications of educational technologies.

*A University “information literacy” program—following the framework proposed by library administration—should be thoroughly examined by senior leadership. There should be campus-wide discussion regarding the mission of such a program (e.g., to teach students how to teach themselves), curricular content, delivery mechanisms, and assessment strategies modeled on professional criteria that have been successfully applied in other reputable institutions.

*As the University completes its centennial celebrations, the Director of Library Services, the CIO, and other campus leaders should consider a campus-wide records management plan that conserves University heritage. A cross-format approach to archiving institutional history is required to ensure that paper, audio, image-based and digital documents are preserved in “containers” accessible to future generations.


Western Connecticut State University operates two campus sites in Danbury, the original Midtown Campus consisting of 22 buildings on 55 acres, and Westside Campus consisting of 6 buildings on 364 acres. Nursing and Management programs operate as WestConn at Waterbury, located on the campus of Naugatuck Valley Community College.

Following completion of a campus facilities master plan in 1995, WCSU experienced what one administrator called an explosion in capital spending totaling $125 million. A new 122,000 square-foot Science Building currently under construction has a targeted completion in 2005. In addition, the Connecticut Health and Education Finance Authority sold bonds to support another $58 million for additions on the Westside Campus, including a 350-bed residence hall, a parking garage, and a second student center, including a dining facility. The 1995 Master Plan recommended 1.1 million assignable square feet for a student FTE totaling 3,800. When these projects are complete, WCSU will have 1.04 million assignable square feet to serve student FTE that totaled 4,391 in Fall 2002. This calculation excludes a new 140,000 square-foot Arts Center for which planning money is currently sought from the legislature; and a recently purchased city elementary school abutting the Midtown Campus that becomes WCSU property in a couple years.

The most dramatic changes since 1995 appear at the Midtown campus. Additions and renovations have transformed WCSU physically, programmatically and attitudinally. Former city streets running through the Midtown campus as well as centrally located parking areas have been replaced by a well-organized series of walkways and landscaped open spaces integrating the primary academic, administrative, and residential facilities. The Haas Library, Warner Hall (which houses social and behavioral sciences), and Science Building, together with renovations to Old Main for administrative offices and to White Hall (a former high school renovated for professional studies programs), provides