
WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

FOCUSED INTERIM REPORT TO THE
NORTHWEST COMMISSION ON COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITY

OCTOBER, 2010



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INTRODUCTION REGARDING THE CONTEXT OF THE FOCUSED INTERIM REPORT TO THE NORTHWEST COMMISSION ON COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

In her letter of July 28, 2008, Sandra E. Elman, President of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), reaffirmed the accreditation of Western Washington University. In the same letter, Dr. Elman requested that the University prepare a focused interim report and host a Commission representative in fall, 2010, to address the University's progress in carrying out four NWCCU recommendations. The NWCCU recommendations concerned transparency and faculty participation in resource decisions, assessment, the library's strategic plan, and the university's committee structure.

Upon receipt of the July 28 letter we carefully considered the recommendations and related "concerns" detailed in the Comprehensive Evaluation Committee Report. We determined that the recommendations and concerns accurately identified areas of needed improvement. Indeed, our own evaluations, including the review President Bruce Shepard conducted upon his arrival at Western, affirmed key features of the recommendations—for instance, the need to improve transparency and faculty participation in resource decisions. Consequently, progress on the recommendations has been aligned with internal planning and improvement efforts.

The changes and improvements we have made since 2008 in light of the recommendations have been structural as well as procedural. We have revised our faculty governance structure, the committees responsible for our joint governing arrangement, and the architecture of our academic assessment activities. Procedures have also changed. We have a new operating and capital budget development process, and numerous new methods of sharing and distributing resource-related decisions and information. Most importantly, we have made a cultural shift, establishing new norms and standards for collegiality, transparency, and service to our students and state.

These were not immediate changes made by our upper administration. These were changes made in collaboration with staff and faculty, changes worked out in dialogue and discussion. Broad institutional change of this order is necessarily more difficult and time consuming than rapid, top-down mandates, but it is also more substantial, enduring, and significant.

We look forward to the response to this report from our campus community and our NWCCU colleagues.

NOTE: all appendices associated with this document can be found at the following site:
<http://www.wvu.edu/provost/planning/accreditation2010.shtml>

RECOMMENDATION 1:

The Evaluation Committee recommends that the operating budget process be given a thorough review and revision. The current process, though detailed and iterative, does not always provide adequate transparency. There is a need for more discussion prior to decisions, better and consistent communications of results, and greater demonstration that funding decisions are linked to strategic priorities (Standards 1, 7.A).

RELATED CONCERNS

1. There is a complex array of committees and processes that create the potential for input on key decisions, yet there is a feeling on the part of many faculty that this process does not impact decisions. (6.A.3, 6.D)
2. The decision of the faculty to enter into a collective bargaining agreement calls for considerable reworking of governance details such that there is a lack of clarity on the respective roles of faculty bargaining entities and other faculty governance organizations. (Policy 6.2.4).

WESTERN'S RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 1

Our response to Recommendation 1 is divided into two parts. In Part I we review the new operating budget and capital budget processes, demonstrating improvements that have made our budget process more transparent, participatory and aligned with strategic initiatives. In Part II we present exemplars of the new emphasis upon transparency and participation in our processes and offices.

Part I: New Operating and Capital Budget Processes

Upon his arrival in the summer, 2008, Western President Bruce Shepard began work with faculty and staff to improve the transparency of the operating budget process and to increase participation in budgetary decision-making. The need for these changes, made evident in the NWCCU response to the 2008 self study and required by the new collective bargaining agreement, was further affirmed by comments President Shepard heard while meeting with faculty and staff during the "Listening Campaign" he conducted over the first months of his tenure as university president. Informed by these comments, Shepard and the Vice Presidents, in collaboration with Faculty Senate President Matthew Liao-Troth, initiated a number of strategies for increasing budget transparency and participation in fall, 2008. These strategies included "bottom up" processes for widely soliciting input and participation in budgeting and resource decisions, public announcement of the processes and assumptions by which budget decisions are to be made, and the subsequent regular and updated publishing on the web of the details of the budget for public comment. All units involved in budget processes were expected to adopt and integrate these strategies, beginning with the office of University Planning and Budgeting (UPB).

Working quickly to fulfill President Shepard's new standards for participation and transparency, the UPB established an innovative operating budget process in 2008-09; the offices of Business and Financial Affairs and Capital Budget did the same for the capital budget process in 2009-2010.

Operating Budget

Stated in simple terms, the new operating budget process worked like this: the President and Vice Presidents established seventeen planning units, each charged with the responsibility of carrying out bottom-up, transparent processes to develop their own unit's assessment of its "Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Threats" (SCOTS), as well as its principles, planning assumptions, and detailed budget proposals. Planning units then posted these documents to a UPB web site and presented their budget proposals for review and discussion to a university-wide budget panel. In addition to the President and Vice Presidents, this panel included representatives from faculty, staff, and student governance groups, including the President of the Faculty Senate, the Chair of the Faculty Senate's University Planning and Resources Council, the President of the Associated Students, the President of the Professional Staff Organization, and a classified staff representative. These panel presentations were webcast to the entire community and public feedback from multiple sources was solicited and considered. Additionally, President Shepard met with the University Planning and Resource Council (UPRC) to discuss planning priorities. Operating budget recommendations were then refined by the Deans, Vice Presidents and the President, with the President preparing a final recommendation for approval by Western's Board of Trustees. Each step in this process was explained in university announcements and through direct communication via Western's internal e-mail system. In addition, budget changes and revisions were posted to the web for comment. In May, the President and Vice Presidents held a public forum, well attended, and again audiocast, to gather final suggestions. Operating budget presentations to the Board of Trustees were also audiocast. The full "Principles, Guidelines and Processes" document for adjusting and building the operating budget request can be found in Appendix 1.1 or <http://www.wvu.edu/upb/princguidprocadj201011opbud1113.pdf>.

Upon completion of the operating budget development process, feedback was solicited to determine how the process could be improved in the future. While more arduous and time consuming than previous processes, the new operating budget process provided extensive discussion prior to decisions, a close alignment of funding decisions and strategic priorities, transparency, and broad, bottom-up participation.

Capital Budget

Before the internal study of 2008, Western spread its capital planning processes among five offices and numerous initiatives. The Master Plan, Major Capital Budget, Minor Capital Budget, and the Strategic Initiatives each came from different offices by way of different processes and yielded different products. With information "siloes," or held separately in different hands, communication, accountability and transparency proved elusive.

In spring, 2009, the University Capital Budget Office introduced a new capital budget model: the Integrated Capital Planning Process. The new model assigned responsibility for the Master Plan, Major Capital Budget, and Minor Capital Budget to one area, while at the same time placing evaluation of major and minor capital requests at a higher administrative level. These improvements in transparency and participation provide useful checks and balances, facilitating on-going assessment of both the developing budget and the capital planning and budgeting process itself. The University Planning and Resources Council has proven an especially useful body, providing consistent and frequent dialogue on budget and planning between the Vice

Presidents and the faculty. Combined with a new emphasis upon bottom-up processes that stress participation and alignment with the institution's strategic plan, the new UPRC structure has served to revitalize the Capital Budget process, engendering a sense of ownership within the campus community. (See Appendix 1.2.)

The Stages of the New Capital Planning Process

1. Solicit capital proposals from campus community. (Anyone within the campus community may initiate a request.)
2. Review and assess proposals to:
 - identify technical feasibility, space availability, operational impact and overall estimated project cost, and
 - size and categorize the requests as minor or major works.
3. Revise and submit requests for evaluation and prioritization to:
 - institutional divisions,
 - the Capital Planning Leaders (a council comprised of the Deans, Vice Provosts, Vice Presidents, the Provost and President),
 - the University Planning and Resources Council (UPRC), and
 - the Vice Presidents.
4. The President revises and recommends the Capital Plan to the Board of Trustees

PART II: TRANSPARENCY AND PARTICIPATION INITIATIVES AND EXEMPLARS

University Planning & Budgeting Office

The University Planning and Budget (UPB) office is now charged with the responsibility of serving as an exemplar of the high standards for transparency and participation that President Shepard has undertaken to establish within Western's budgetary processes.

To these ends, UPB, in collaboration with Western's Academic Technology and User Services (ATUS), has begun airing budget forums and presentations live over the internet. These audiocasts are promoted weeks in advance via emails from UPB and notices in *Western Today* (Western's daily news and information e-newsletter). Afterwards, the recordings are archived. UPB has also revised its web site, creating simple and clear home page links and downloadable PDFs of the latest and most germane budget information, including:

- 2010-11 Supplemental Operating Budget Proposal
- 2011-13 Biennial Operating Budget Request: Proposed New Initiatives
- 2010-11 Supplemental Budget Reduction Proposals
- Comparison Governor-Senate-House-Conference Supplemental 2010-11 Budget
- Principles, Guidelines & Processes: Adjustments to 2010-11 Operating Budget & Building the 2011-13 Request

- Policy & Draft Process for Considering Proposals for Elimination of or Major Reductions in Programs
- 2011-13 Planning Unit Draft SCOTs (Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Threats)
- 2011-13 Planning Unit Preliminary Drafts on Initiatives and Priorities
- 2011-13 Planning Unit Leaders, Budget Panel Membership, and Process Calendar
- Discussion Forum

Each subsequent page contains even more information in the form of links and downloadable PDFs. These pages include:

- Role & Mission Statement
- Budget Management Advisory Council
- 2011-13 Budget Principles, Guidelines, Processes & SCOT Analyses
- Annual Operating Budgets & Funding History
- Budget Facts, History & Peer Comparisons
- Survey List
- Budget Forms, Instructions & Resources
- Select Policies & Procedures (Focus on Budget & Finance)
- Audio Presentations
- Archives
- Links
- Staff

Please visit <http://www.wvu.edu/upb/> for a complete listing of all the current and archived budgetary information available.

President and Provost Web Pages

The President's and Provost's home web pages have also been revised keeping budget transparency goals in mind. These web pages now feature easy links to all of Western's administrative and governance organizations, including those related to the budget. Links to our College Portrait and other forms of reader-friendly assessment and accountability data, including Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and graduation, retention and time-to-degree information, is also now available on these sites. This emphasis upon transparency and participation is now evident across the university, creating a mutually reinforcing culture that values bottom-up deliberations and the open sharing of information and decision-making processes. For example, during the 2010-2011 budget process, reduction scenarios for each college were posted to the UPB web site and linked the president's and provost's home pages to on-line discussion forums. Similarly, President Shepard regularly discusses budget considerations and processes on his online blog, and each new blog is advertised in *Western Today*. These down-to-earth and straight-forward blog entries are widely read and distributed on campus and have become an important component of the new culture of transparency and participation. (See Appendix 1.3.)

Transparency and Participation in New Processes

Importantly, UPB has served both as a leader in the establishment of new budgetary processes and as an exemplar in the development of new standards of transparency. As the summary of web links above makes clear, the revised budgetary sequences Western has adopted include new processes and multiple opportunities for participation.

For example, during the 2008-09 budget crisis brought on by the recession and severe state budget cuts to Western and other state public universities, the *Viking Village*, an on-line forum, was utilized to keep the Western community informed of issues like the budget, and to provide an accessible means of soliciting suggestions and comments on cost-saving ideas as well as drafts of budget policies and procedures and budget reduction proposals.

These budgetary threads provided a forum for comments and suggestions—all of which were read by the president, the vice presidents, the UPB director and others responsible for planning and budgeting. Importantly, UPB also established the practice of beginning budgetary processes by agreeing upon and publishing the assumptions, criteria and SCOT analyses upon which decisions will be made. “Budget Principles, Guidelines and SCOT Analyses” for each division of the university are published on the UPB web site:

<http://www.wvu.edu/upb/princscotetc/index.shtml>

Policies and procedures with which the budgets are formulated are also published at the UPB web site:

<http://www.wvu.edu/upb/selectpp.shtml>.

Transparency and Participation in New Committee Structures

President’s Cabinet. Participation has also been increased by changes in committee structure and oversight. It is especially noteworthy that several new members were added to the President’s Cabinet to promote transparency in budget and policy discussions, including the President of the Faculty Senate, a newly appointed Faculty Associate to the President and Provost, the President of the Professional Staff Organization, a classified staff representative, the President of the Associated Students, Special Assistant to the President on Diversity, the Vice Provost of Equal Opportunity and Employment, the university’s Chief Information Officer, the Director of University Communications, the secretary to the Board of Trustees, and the President’s administrative assistant.

University Planning and Resources Council (UPRC). Another important change to the budget planning and resource allocation process came late in the 2008-2009 academic year, with the transformation of the Faculty Senate’s University Planning Council into the University Planning and Resources Council (UPRC). This new body includes the University’s Provost and the Vice Presidents as voting members. The Executive Director of UPB continues as a non-voting member. Under the new UPRC, stakeholders representing the entire campus will now have an opportunity to review and discuss together operating and capital budget processes and decisions. The UPRC remains an advisory council to the Senate, facilitating broader, cleaner lines of information sharing. Further information on the development of this council appears in our response to Recommendation 4.

Budget Management Advisory Council (BMAC). In 2009-10, the President charged the UPB Executive Director with forming an institutional-wide budget management and advisory committee, known as the WWU Budget Management Advisory Council (BMAC). A collaborative body of over 45 budget and finance professionals from across the university, the BMAC serves to provide “responsive, high-quality customer service, collaboration and mutual respect; open communication and access to information;” and a shared commitment to demonstrate “the highest level of professional standards and ethical conduct.” Transparency is at the heart of its mission statement:

To support Western Washington University’s strategic goals by sharing accurate, timely and complete information and analyses to guide planning, decision-making, policy development and the allocation of financial resources at Western.

Monthly meetings of the BMAC were held throughout the fiscal year with excellent attendance, and topics selected by the members to improve their understanding of university budget and accounting processes, as well as to keep members informed of progress related to new initiatives in Banner Finance and Human Resources. Agendas, meeting reports and presentations are posted at this web site: <http://www.wwu.edu/upb>. Reports on each meeting were provided to the President’s cabinet and the Deans of the University. Feedback from members concerning year one of the existence of this very successful council has been uniformly positive, especially in the area of increased communication and cooperation. The full mission, vision, values, charge and committee makeup of the BMAC can be found at:

<http://www.wwu.edu/upb/BMAC/index.shtml>

New Practices of Direct Communication

To reinforce this new culture of transparency and participation, President Shepard initiated new practices of direct communication with Western faculty and staff. His “Listening Campaign” brought him into dialogue with nearly every Western employee, creating familiarity that he built on through his blog and regular budget updates sent to the Western community via Western’s internal email system. These included mailings directly from President Shepard and the Executive Director of UPB, plus additional notices, stories, and updates sent from *Western Today*, Western’s daily e-newsletter. Examples of these updates and communications, together with a host of other communications regarding university processes, resources and budgetary deliberations, may be accessed via President Shepard’s web site at:

<http://www.wwu.edu/president/>

An aftereffect of the practice of using the internet to help create budget transparency has been the adoption of this practice by various Western offices to create more efficient communications about various topics and issues. For instance, Facilities Management instituted *Desk Notes*, an e-newsletter providing regular updates about the impact and progress of construction and maintenance projects. Many offices now include e-notes and/or e-letters as part of their information-sharing protocol; for instance, an e-note announced the formation of the new Office of Capital Planning and Development—which itself was another attempt to create more budget process transparency.

Conclusion

University Planning and Budget has been instrumental in creating improved operating budget processes within the University; the offices of Business and Financial Affairs and Capital Budget have done the same for the capital budget processes. These new budget processes have been opened up for community review and consideration (by staff, faculty and students) with a focus on bottom-up decision-making. Budget requests are now clearly linked to the missions of the planning units, as well as the SCOT analyses created by those planning units. Budget forums have been held, budget discussions audiocast and recorded, budget materials openly posted on the university web site, and budget discussion forums (via the *Viking Village* web discussion site) have been created.

Complementing these developments has been the establishment of the UPRC, which has clarified and strengthened the role of the faculty and the Faculty Senate in joint governing procedures. Faculty report that the new structure has facilitated meaningful participation in discussion of budget and planning, and real involvement in decision making. This innovation has helped to establish the important role of the Faculty Senate in university governance.

Finally, the following quote from President Shepard's 100 Conversations Initiative gets to the heart of how budget transparency has swiftly become a central tenet of the culture of Western Washington University:

"At Western, our budget process was entirely open, well documented in detail on the web. Relying upon all sorts of means for bottom-up involvement, criteria were publicly posted, all proposals for reductions publicly posted on the web, and budget presentations from each budget unit were podcast in real time and available thereafter from the web. All with forums attached for open discussion and debate. Every penny we have to budget was available for all to see. In part because of this transparency, folks at Western never felt in the dark about the budget, or budget cuts, and were real participants as Western was forced to make very difficult budget choices."

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Evaluation committee notes that there has been inadequate progress on the implementation of key aspects of an institution-wide plan of program assessment. Despite admirable growth in ongoing data collection, campus support, a plethora of reports, the number of robust college-level plans and efforts, investments in staff, and committees, there is a need to close the feedback loop and use the information generated to improve programs and inform resource decisions in a consistent and systemic manner (Standards 1.B, 2.B, and Policy 2.6)

RELATED CONCERNS

There is evidence of a tremendous amount of activity and energy related to general education, but little coordination in what various committees are doing and how their work will impact the assessment and campus level responsibility for the GUR (Policy 2.1; General Education/Related Instruction Requirements and Policy 2.2 Educational Assessment).

The Division (Student Affairs) has not systematically evaluated student services and programs and used the results from these evaluations as a basis for change (3.B.6). While many departments have evaluated student services and programs, some have not done so. It was not apparent that results from evaluations were consistently used for change. The Division has committed to identifying common learning outcomes. A core group of staff are working on this effort and should help the Division in this area.

WESTERN'S RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 2

Our response to Recommendation 2 is divided into two parts: 1) narrative summaries of our recent program assessment efforts, and 2) further demonstrations of our progress toward improving our academic assessment processes and using assessment data to make program improvements.

PART I: NARRATIVE SUMMARIES OF RECENT PROGRAM ASSESSMENT PROGRESS

A. General Education Assessment and Improvement Progress

Immediately following receipt of the NWCCU Comprehensive Evaluation Report, Provost Dennis Murphy charged Vice Provost VanderStaay to coordinate a thorough and comprehensive response to the NWCCU recommendations. Because two of the recommendations—program assessment and committee structure—concerned the General Education program, he directed Dr. VanderStaay to begin there.

Vice Provost VanderStaay began this process by reviewing the campus assessment plan and Western's general education assessment and reform efforts. This review included all Office of Institutional Assessment, Research and Testing (OIART) assessment pertinent to general education, the Quality Undergraduate Education committee findings from 1993, a review of AAC&U documents and initiatives on general education, a survey of general education assessment at other regional universities, the last two University self-studies and the NWCCU reports to each. This review culminated in his report, "Where We Are in General Education

and How We Got Here," which was circulated among Deans, shared with faculty as a power-point presentation, and discussed with Academic Coordinating Committee (ACC) Chair Roger Thompson. (See Appendix 2.1.) The report indicated that OIART research on the general education program held two key findings:

- Students do not find their general education courses as useful or as engaging as their major courses.
- Students do not sufficiently recognize the value of their general education courses.

These conclusions were tied to observations and comments made by ACC members that many faculty are teaching general education courses unaware of the general education competencies.

Finally, these findings were linked to NSSE data demonstrating that—relative to seniors at other regional and far west universities—Western seniors are more satisfied than Western freshman with their experience of faculty interaction, their active and engaged learning, and the academic challenge of their classes.

Separately, the OIART held a fall retreat to discuss the evaluation report and to plan its activities for the year. At this retreat participants participated in a lengthy discussion protocol (McDonald, Mohr, Dichter & McDonald 2003) designed to reveal the "problem beneath the problem" of general education assessment at Western. The protocol resulted in the following finding: The problem beneath the problem of general education assessment and improvement at Western is the diffusion of responsibility for these activities across several offices and individuals. In other words, with no one in particular responsible, the work does not get completed.

Committee Restructuring (Committee on Undergraduate Education/CUE)

For ACC Chair Roger Thompson, these discussions, the VPUE report, and the NWCCU Comprehensive Evaluation Report demonstrated an urgent need to clarify faculty responsibility for general education. Following discussions with the ACC, the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, and the VPUE, Dr. Thompson determined that the faculty governance structure needed to be revised. Whereas the ACC had placed authority for improving general education in one committee—the GER Committee—and assessing general education in another—the Committee on the Assessment of Teaching and Learning (CATL)—Dr. Thompson suggested that these tasks would be best carried out by a single committee. Thus began a year of discussion among all these committees, the Faculty Senate, the Provost, and the VPUE. These discussions concluded in broad consensus for Dr. Thompson's view. Ultimately, the faculty senate dissolved the GER and the CATL committees and established a new Committee on Undergraduate Education (CUE). The establishment of CUE represented a transfer of authority from the VPUE to the faculty. The CUE charge is as follows:

- Advise the Academic Coordinating Commission on all curriculum matters related to General Education, including the acceptance of courses for listing as fulfilling General University Requirements (GURs) and oversight of the Writing Proficiency (WP) requirement.
- Promote the goals of a liberal education in general, and writing and general education goals in particular, within the academic community.
- Periodically review these educational goals and assess the degree to which these goals have been achieved. These spheres of assessment include the University, colleges, and

departments. The Committee on Undergraduate Education shall communicate its findings, and recommendations for improvement, to the ACC and the appropriate units.

- Work in cooperation with and with support from the offices of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education; the Office of Institutional Research; and the University Writing Program.
- Report to the ACC.

During this same time, Dr. Thompson asked all committees involved in general education to examine the Association of American Colleges & Universities' (AAC&U) Liberal Education for America's Promise (LEAP) outcomes and to compare them with Western's 11 General Education Competencies. Western faculty saw many parallels between these documents and recommended that LEAP curricular and assessment materials—such as the VALUE rubrics—be considered for their applicability to the assessment of Western's general education program.

A Transfer of Assessment Authority from the Administration to the Faculty

Amidst these discussions and changes, Vice Provost VanderStaay continued his review of general education assessment plans at other institutions and began to sketch possible general education assessment plans for Western. He proposed a three-step process whereby he would share two or three possible assessment plans with deans and faculty, receive feedback and direction, revise the plans and resubmit them for university discussion. This proposed process was shared with deans and the ACC Chair. Dr. Thompson strongly advised against this process. Noting that a general education plan would be more likely to succeed if it were initiated and carried out by faculty, he suggested transferring authority for the development and implementation of a general education assessment plan from the office of the VPUE to the CUE committee. After careful consideration and a review of assessment research, this recommendation was accepted. The resulting charge to the new CUE committee included full authority for the assessment of general education, transferring to faculty responsibility that had previously been vested in the VPUE. (See Appendix 2.2.) In recognition of his role in coordinating assessment activities, the VPUE was made a member of the CUE committee.

This process of transferring assessment authority from the administration to the faculty, and seating an administrator as a voting member of the Faculty Senate Committee, was documented in the paper, "Push Without Pushback: Mission and Metanarrative in a Faculty Initiative to Take Control of General Education at a Regional University," co-authored by ACC Chair Thompson and VPUE VanderStaay. The paper was presented at the 2010 AAC&U General Education Assessment Conference in Seattle.

CUE Achievements and Efforts Toward a General Education Assessment Plan.

The CUE began its work in spring, 2009, with an introductory workshop and dinner. At this dinner, Dr. Thompson described the process by which the committee was formed and Dr. VanderStaay shared the "Where We are in General Education and How We Got Here" report. Committee members were presented with the committee charge. Following discussion of the charge, committee members agreed to a half-day workshop for kick-starting the committee work in Fall, 2009. Committee members were also presented with AAC&U literature on General Education assessment and the (LEAP) initiative. CUE members used the fall workshop to become acquainted with procedures for reviewing general education course proposals and to begin discussions toward the development of a general assessment and improvement plan.

While the brevity of this narrative precludes a full description of this work, the following highlights outline the achievements of the CUE regarding the establishment of a general education assessment plan.

- CUE reviewed the College Learning Assessment (CLA) exam and decided to assess its results for applicability to Western's general education competencies.
- CUE reviewed the Woodring Information System and discussed its applicability to a course-based assessment plan for the general education requirements.
- CUE revised the general education course proposal form to require documentation of how each course meets one or more of the competencies.
- CUE reviewed the AAC&U value rubrics, plus other frameworks, and revised them for use with Western's general education competencies.
- CUE selected rubrics to be piloted and initiated the design of a plan to solicit faculty volunteers and to pilot the rubrics at both the course level and, via senior seminar papers, at program completion in 2010-2011.

CUE Achievements and Efforts Toward a General Education Improvement Plan

In addition to the work of revising the course approval forms to include outcomes, approving courses, and researching a general education assessment plan, CUE reviewed processes for "closing the loop" by making program improvements based on assessment data. This work, informed by the assessment findings listed at the beginning of this narrative, resulted in the following improvement initiatives:

Initiative: Better clarify for students the value of liberal education and the general education requirements.

Means: CUE will communicate the importance of clarifying the value of liberal education and the general education program through *Dialogue*, the academic assessment newsletter.

Outcome Assessment Procedure: WELS surveys.

Initiative: Improve the curricular alignment of general education by initiating a messaging/communication campaign to acquaint faculty with the general education competencies.

Means: Use *Dialogue*, presentations to the ACC, and the piloting of the competency assessment rubrics to acquaint faculty with the competencies and to urge their inclusion in syllabi.

Outcome Assessment Procedure: Survey of syllabi.

A Timeline for Future CUE Activities.

Fall, 2010

- Pilot use of competency rubrics in general education courses and senior seminars.
- Review ways to restructure General Education.
- Publish *Dialogue* about clarifying the value of liberal education and the competencies.
- Review CLA exam results and "crosswalk" results with the competencies.

Winter, 2011

- Review rubric pilot and competencies.
- Determine whether competencies can be assessed via CLA.
- Draft sustainable plan for assessment of competencies at course and program completion level.

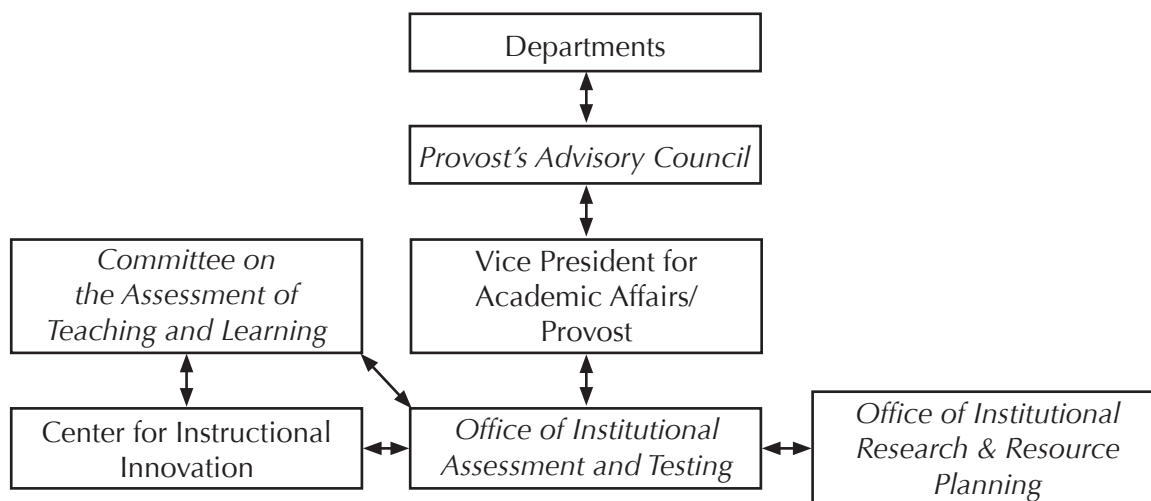
Spring, 2011

- Complete draft of assessment plan.
- Submit plan for review to ACC, Chairs, and campus community.
- Revise assessment plan based on campus feedback.
- Plan 2011-12 general education improvement efforts based on 2011 assessment results.

B. Revising the Academic Assessment Structure and Creating a New Academic Assessment Plan

Charged by Provost Murphy to lead the university in carrying out the NWCCU recommendations, Vice Provost VanderStaay began discussions of the existing academic assessment plan in fall, 2008, with Department Chairs, the Academic Coordinating Committee Chair, the former OIART, and all university Deans. Deficiencies in the existing plan were clearly evident in these discussions. This was particularly true of the plan's assessment structure. This "Assessment Plan Organizational Arrangement" included committees and offices that no longer existed at Western. In addition, the structure mapped poorly onto Western's institutional processes and created confusion regarding roles and responsibilities. (See Figure 1.) Simple responsibility charting makes this evident. (See Table 1, next page.)

Figure 1: WWU's Previous Assessment Plan Organizational Chart



Italics = offices and/or committees no longer in existence.

Table 1: Previous Assessment Plan Responsibility Chart

Assessment Level	Responsibility	Support	Supervisory
Course	Faculty	?	?
Degree	Chair	?	?
College	?	?	?
University	?	?	?

New Assessment Structure

To establish a new academic assessment structure, the following guiding parameters and qualities were developed to inform our restructuring. (See Table 2.)

Table 2: New Assessment Structure Levels and Guiding Principles

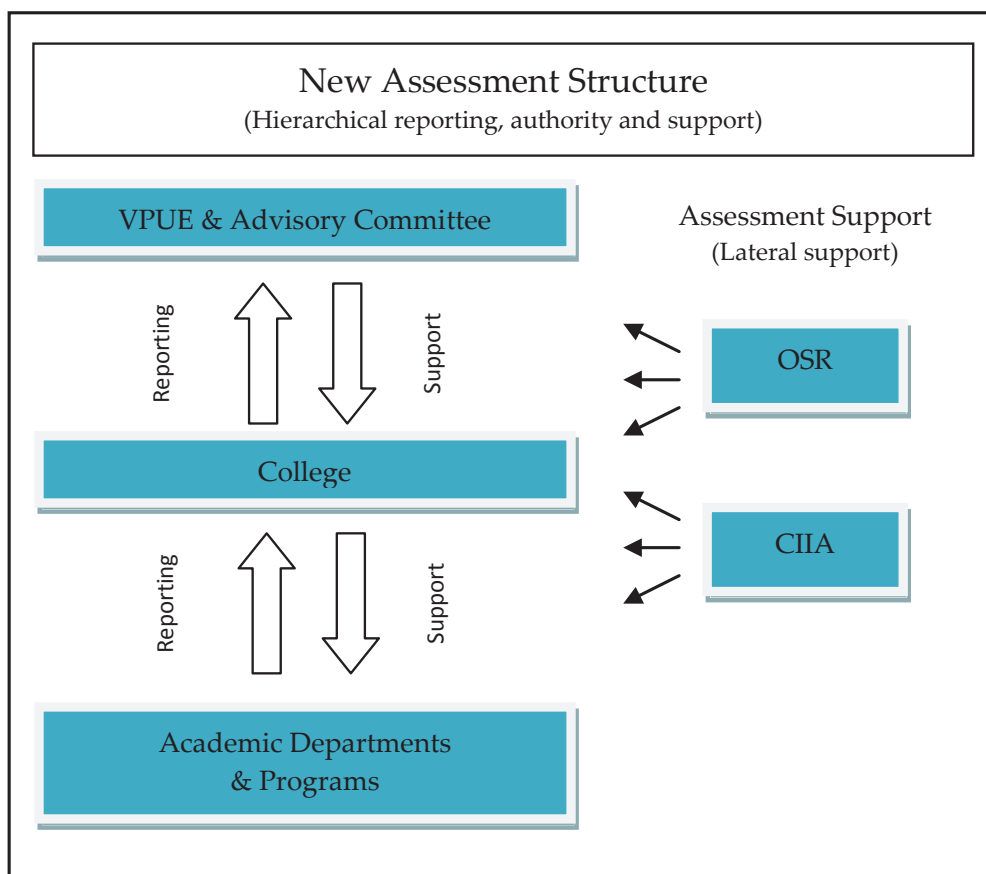
Simplicity:	The structure should be brief and well-defined.
Leadership:	The structure should facilitate leadership of assessment activities.
Cultural Fit:	The structure should feel “natural” to participants and map onto what already works well at Western.
Accountability:	The structure should specify responsibility at each level.
Support:	The structure should provide support at each level.
Efficiency:	The structure should make assessment easier and less time consuming for faculty and chairs.
Sustainability:	The structure should be easy for departments and colleges to sustain year to year.
Economy:	The structure must reduce costs, compared to the previous structure.

Informed by these guiding parameters and qualities, Provost Riordan added the duties of “Director of Academic Assessment” to Vice Provost VanderStaay’s job description. She also formally named the VPUE as Western’s Accreditation Liaison Officer. These steps clarified campus responsibility by designating that the Vice Provost is both the campus coordinator for

assessment and its chief representative/spokesperson for accreditation activities—duties that were diffused across several offices in the previous system.

To research the remaining components of a revised assessment structure, the VPUE reviewed the “best practice” research in assessment, studied assessment structures at other universities, received post-graduate training in performance assessment, and met to discuss Western’s assessment structure with Deans, Chairs, faculty and the Senate Executive Committee. Informed by this research and the parameters and qualities noted above, the VPUE proposed a college-based assessment structure to Provost Riordan, who recommended that the proposed structure be distributed for discussion to Deans, Chairs and the Senate Executive Committee. Deans approved the structure. The Senate Executive Committee recommended a faculty committee, the University Academic Accreditation and Assessment Committee (UAAAC), to assist the VPUE in his duties as Director of Academic Assessment. This recommendation was accepted and a revised assessment structure established and publicized to the campus in a special issue of *Dialogue*.¹ (See Figure 2, next page.) Simple charting clarifies the specificity of responsibility within this new structure. (See Table 3, next page.)

FIGURE 2: REVISED ASSESSMENT STRUCTURE



OSR = Office of Survey Research.
 CIIA = Center for Instructional Innovation and Assessment.

¹Appendix 2.3: http://www.wwu.edu/depts/vpue/documents/Dialogue_March2010.pdf.

Table 3: New Assessment Plan Responsibility Chart

Assessment Level	Responsibility	Support	Supervisory Responsibility
Course	Faculty	CIIA/Chair/OSR	Chair
Degree	Chair	CIIA/Dean/OSR	Dean
College	Dean	VPUE/OSR	VPUE
University	VPUE/UAAAC	NWCCU	NWCCU

College level responsibility for assessment may be delegated to an Associate Dean, a faculty member or committee. For General Education, the CUE committee occupies the College position.

The University Academic Accreditation and Assessment Committee (UAAAC)

Faculty were named to the UAAAC by college Deans and the faculty senate in January, 2010. The committee began meeting in February and was charged by the Vice Provost with the following responsibilities:

- Help coordinate the University response to the NWCCU recommendation that we “close the loop.”
- Establish a new campus assessment plan.
- Oversee the implementation of that plan.
- Lead the campus effort to transition to the new NWCCU standards and complete the Year One report.

The UAAAC spent its first meetings getting acquainted with its charge, the 2008 NWCCU Recommendations and Comprehensive Evaluation Report and the NWCCU Revised Standards. Regarding Recommendation 2, the UAAAC recommended that all departments make annual reports to the UAAAC summarizing (1) departmental assessment activities, and (2) the use of assessment data in program improvement.

This discussion was informed by a review of the NWCCU Comprehensive Report. Committee members noted that despite the concerns expressed in Recommendation 2, the Comprehensive Report praised Woodring College of Education, Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies, and the College of Business and Economics for their assessment activities and provided special commendations for the use of assessment data in program improvement in CHSS and Huxley College of the Environment. With the intention of building on “what works at Western,” the committee sought tools and exemplars in the assessment materials of these two colleges. After discussion, the UAAAC decided:

- Not to require anything new or different of colleges deemed successful for their assessment and closing the loop activities. These colleges would simply be asked to make available to the UAAAC the annual assessment reports required of their departments.

- To recommend that all departments in CST and CFPA use the “Closing the Loop” reporting template required of departments in CHSS.

A modified version of the CHSS “Closing the Loop” reporting template was provided to all departments in the annual assessment reporting request made to the Deans by the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education. This request noted that the template was recommended and not required of colleges with robust and successful assessment processes. The template and departmental annual assessment reports are included in Appendix 2.4.

C. Narrative of Student Affairs/Academic Support Services Assessment Efforts

The Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support Services has routinely been evaluating its services and using that information to guide changes in structure or service delivery. At the time of the NWCCU Comprehensive Evaluation Report, concerns were cited in this area for the Division. A written response was submitted for clarification in which many examples were provided of the Division’s efforts of evaluating its services. (See Appendix 2.5 to review the response.) Additional information since the time of that response is included below to further illustrate the Division’s commitment to program assessment.

In fall, 2007, the Division of Student Affairs and Academic Support Services formed the Division Assessment Resource Team (DART). The purpose of the team—made up of fifteen full-time student affairs staff members, representing a variety of backgrounds and departments—was to build capacity for planning and assessing student learning outcomes (SLO’s) in the Division. DART was facilitated by Dr. Pat Fabiano, a faculty member in the Student Affairs Administration graduate program. Each week, members of the team met for ninety minutes to expand their assessment knowledge, skills, and abilities.

DART members continued to work with Dr. Fabiano during 2008-09, implementing assessment projects in their departments. In addition to SLO’s, departments also define program goals annually and report on the data results and how that data was used to inform service or practice. (See Appendix 2.6 for a copy of the 2010-11 Athletic Department strategic plan as a model for all Division programs.) Some examples of resulting projects, and changes made, include:

- Disability Resources for Students developed student learning outcomes, informed by research, national standards, and targeted student surveys. Using the outcomes as a guide, staff re-framed services, including the creation of a new alternative text training workshop for students. Plans are currently in place to measure progress (and adjust services and activities accordingly) during the 2010-11 academic year.
- University Residences identified measurable program and learning outcomes—by functional area—and implemented a data-based decision-making process. Drawing on usage and demand data, additional beds were added for fall, 2008. Meal plan options were revised (based on quantitative and qualitative data) and the staffing structure for Birnam Woods and University Apartments was re-configured to better meet student needs.
- Data regarding alcohol use and related behaviors in housing is a concern at Western. University Residences implemented a program in partnership with Academic Advising, Prevention and Wellness Services, and other campus partners to address violations in a more timely manner, to increase social opportunities for students, and to provide more alcohol-free housing availability on campus. Outcomes included reductions in alcohol-

related behaviors both annually and in the fall quarter, where declines fell below the ten-year average for the quarter.

- Academic Advising wanted to reach more freshmen registering for the winter quarter with information and support. Data indicated that an in-person program which had been offered in the past was yielding low participation rates and that more students were responsive to information that was provided in a format that provided for flexibility in their schedules. As a result, this program was replaced with an on-line module about registration that could reach all freshmen and which was more readily accessible.
- Campus Recreation Services had concerns about safety and the possibility of injuries from use of the climbing wall. Through data gathering and a review of industry best practices, several improvements were implemented to further meet the Center's mission of providing safe facilities and services. In addition, learning outcomes were identified for those using the climbing wall at the Wade King Student Recreation Center.
- Western's student leaders embraced the concept of outcomes assessment and have incorporated program evaluation into their initiatives. In 2009, the Associated Students' Vice President for Business and Operations developed the Triennial Assessment Program (TAP) to ensure that Associated Student (AS) programs were fulfilling their objectives and meeting the needs of students. Each year, one third of AS programs will be evaluated, with the first round completing their assessments in spring, 2010. Assessment activities include gathering data, submitting a written report of their findings, and presenting those findings and recommendations to the AS Board. In this first year, recommendations were varied and responsive to the needs of students, including increased staffing levels for some programs that were gaining interest and program elimination in other areas where needs no longer existed.

In September, 2009, the Division's day-long staff development conference—NAKAMA—focused on assessment. The theme was Informed People: Powerful Decisions. Noted assessment expert Dr. Marilee Bresciani served as the keynote speaker, and led a series of workshops focused on writing and mapping learning outcomes.

In winter, 2009, DART members developed a set of common learning outcomes which will be measured in the upcoming academic year. These include:

Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Competence: Students reflect and self assess, gain self confidence, communicate with honesty and respect for self and others, and engage in healthy relationships.

Social Responsibility: Students seek, respect, and integrate diverse perspectives of others as a resource for learning, work, and responsible local and global citizenship.

Acquisition, Integration, and Application of Complex Knowledge: Students acquire, reflect on, and integrate complex knowledge, ideas, and theories and apply them to current and future learning and life experiences.

Practical Competence: Students take responsibility to meet their learning and personal needs, develop and implement an intentional curricular and co-curricular plan, and use campus resources.

Responsible Leadership: Students develop moral and ethical reasoning, skills, attitudes, and behaviors required for making decisions for and about themselves and the communities around them.

Stewardship of Individual and Community Health: Students exercise good judgment in caring for their own health and demonstrate responsibility for the economic, social, and environmental health of their communities.

In 2009-10, the Division signed on to participate in NASPA's Assessment and Knowledge Consortium, "a comprehensive data collection and benchmarking program in student affairs." As part of the Consortium, Western participated in four national assessment projects in winter and spring, 2010: campus climate and diversity; career planning and professional aspirations; mental health and counseling; and student union and programming. Staff are currently interpreting the data, and will be using it to inform planning and decision-making.

PART II: FURTHER RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 2

This section of our report highlights further evidence of recent progress on "the implementation of key areas of an institution-wide plan of program assessment" and our efforts to "close the feedback loop and use the information generated to improve programs and inform resource decisions in a consistent and systemic manner." For purposes of clarity, we've divided this evidence into four parts: A) Achievements and efforts of the First Year Planning Group (FYPG) to use assessment data to inform improvements to Western's first-year programs; B) steps the Office of Survey Research (OSR) has taken to improve the usefulness of our student surveys; C) campus-wide improvements in the distribution and publication of assessment data; and D) continued progress by academic departments to improve the assessment of student learning outcomes and the use of that data in making program improvements.

A. Assessment-Based First-Year Program Improvements

As mentioned previously, NSSE data demonstrate that while Western seniors report more engagement, active learning, and student/faculty interaction than do seniors at other universities in our Carnegie class, Western freshmen report proportionately less engagement in these areas. As part of Western's effort to make better use of assessment data, Susanna Yunker, the Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs, recommended that a joint Academic Affairs/Student Affairs task force be convened to coordinate a response to these data. Noting that no coordinated effort had been made to establish a unifying mission and set of student learning outcomes for first-year programs across the university, Ms. Yunker recommended that this effort begin with a First Year Planning Group, comprised equally of representatives from Student Affairs and Academic Affairs, charged with the task of developing a mission and set of student learning outcomes (SLO's). Vice Provost VanderStaay and Assistant Vice President Yunker solicited nominees for the group in spring, 2009. The FYPG met at that time, met again for a half-day workshop in the summer, and then continued to meet into 2010.

Each member of the FYPG received a copy of *Challenging and Supporting The First-Year Student: A Handbook for Improving the First Year of College*. The FYPG began its work by becoming familiar with this text's summary of the literature on first-year programs and with NSSE and Western assessment data on first-year engagement. The committee then worked to write a mission statement and SLO's. This work was difficult but successful. The First-Year Mission and SLO's were completed in winter, 2010, and presented to the Academic Coordinating Committee in spring 2010. (See Appendix 2.7.) The mission and SLO's were distributed for use to first-year program participants in both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs.

Together with consideration of the NSSE data, the first-year mission and SLO's led to the following substantive changes:

- The Freshman Interest Group (FIG) program was expanded from nine to fourteen clusters.
- All FIG seminar instructors received and were asked to incorporate the first-year mission into their curricula.
- Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Extended Education and Summer Programs collaborated in establishing a fall early-start program for freshmen called *Viking Launch*. For the purpose of improving student readiness, engagement, and success, *Viking Launch* brings freshman to campus ten days early for extended orientation activities and a two-credit seminar.
- The Sophomore Survey was revised to provide more assessment data on student satisfaction and engagement in the first-year.

Assistant Vice President Yunker is currently convening a working group to address the "next steps" to be taken to make further program improvements in the first-year programs.

B. Improvements in Student Surveys

The Office of Survey Research (OSR) surveys students, alumni, and the campus community to provide valuable assessment and institutional data, analysis, and reports. The goal of OSR is to aid in the improvement of programs, instruction, scholarship, and information services. OSR utilizes state-of-the-art electronic, phone, and paper survey techniques and routinely achieves response rates from Western students in excess of 70% with participation in some surveys reaching 90%.

Following receipt of the NWCCU accreditation report, OSR revised its survey structure in order to more comprehensively assess students over the course of their career at Western. Currently, OSR administers annual surveys of incoming freshmen, incoming transfer students, and students completing their second year on campus. OSR also administers quarterly surveys of graduating students, both undergraduate and graduate; and biennial surveys of Western's Alumni. By surveying students prior to arrival on campus, then as sophomores, exiting seniors, and finally as alumni, OSR hopes to build a longitudinal picture of the Western experience which can document personal and academic growth while simultaneously providing Western with information on student needs and areas of needed improvement.

Highlights from the 2009 undergraduate exit survey include²:

- 84% of respondents indicated that if they were starting their college experience again they would still attend Western.
- 88% claimed they were very satisfied or satisfied with their Western experience.
- 27% took longer to graduate than initially expected. (The most common reasons given for these delays were a changed major, poor advising prior to choosing a major, and their major required a large number of credits.)
- 24% collaborated with a professor on a research or creative project; of these, 66% indicated the experience contributed a lot/ quite a bit to their learning.

²OSR reports results as a whole as well as by department and by college.

- 55% reported their principal activity upon graduation is full-time employment, while 17% were accepted to a graduate or professional school.

Following the 2008 accreditation report, OSR volunteered to customize the senior exit survey and alumni survey to include departmental questions targeted to graduates from specific programs. This option facilitates end-of-program satisfaction assessment by academic departments and reduces duplication of survey efforts. Senior exit and alumni survey data are distributed to deans and department chairs, providing an additional source of assessment data to be taken into consideration for program improvement.

The 2010 alumni survey differs from prior OSR endeavors in that the OSR has partnered with Western's Alumni Office to survey all living Western Alumni (over 102,000 individuals). Electronic surveying began in May. Telephone and paper surveying followed in early summer. At press time for this report, compilation of these data had yet to be completed, but it is hoped that it will provide the Alumni Office with information which can be of long-term value in getting alumni more integrated into the Western community.

OSR's on-going survey administration of incoming freshmen and transfer students continues to provide opportunities to learn more about our students prior to their arrival on campus. Areas of interest are pre-college engagement and experiences, the college application process, and student goals and expectations. From these surveys, we learn that a majority of students learn about Western prior to their sophomore year in high school and the most frequent source of information about Western appears to come from a family member or friend. Including Western, students applied to an average of three colleges and were admitted to at least two others. The most common colleges applied to were the University of Washington (35% of all respondents), Washington State (25%), Central Washington (9%) and the University of Oregon (9%). The most common schools Western students were admitted to were Washington State (23%), the University of Washington (13%), Central Washington (8%), and the University of Oregon (8%). Of all schools to which they were accepted, 86.3% of respondents listed Western as their first choice. Our hope is that this data will facilitate improvements in admissions and the financial aid process.

The incoming freshmen and transfer surveys ask about the likelihood of a student transferring to another school prior to graduating from Western. Roughly 15% of 2009 freshmen indicated they were somewhat or very likely to transfer from Western prior to graduating. Analysis of prior years data suggests that students who indicate this typically carry through and leave Western. Indeed, 35% of 2007 freshmen who indicated they were likely to transfer actually did so by the fall, 2009—a rate almost double that of students who initially thought it was unlikely they would transfer. Students claiming that they are likely to transfer more frequently listed Western as their second or third choice school. The most common reason given for their increased likelihood of transferring was that Western did not offer the major they wanted to study. Because the information is new, we have not yet established how best to use it toward program improvement. Data such as this can be used to improve Western's quarterly enrollment forecasts and to assist first-year planning efforts.

C. Campus-wide Improvements in the Distribution and Publication of Assessment Data.

Following the NWCCU accreditation report, Vice Provost VanderStaay met with chairs and with the Deans and Chairs Committees (DAC) of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS) and the College of Science and Technology (CST). In these meetings chairs expressed

frustration that they only tended to hear of assessment data when it was negative. They also indicated that they were not apprised of key indicators, such as time to degree, for their majors. This feedback was received by Provost Murphy and helped to inform the development of the Academic Fact Book, the Dashboard of key indicators, and Western's participation in the Voluntary System of Accountability. In addition, Vice Provost VanderStaay re-initiated *Dialogue*, an assessment publication the university had previously used. Focusing on the theme of "Building on our Successes," *Dialogue* publishes university-wide assessment data and provides updates on the assessment structure and development of the revised assessment plan for the university. (See Appendix 2.8.)

D. Continued Progress by Academic Departments

Following receipt of the NWCCU accreditation report, Vice Provost VanderStaay met with each academic dean to reinforce the report's directives concerning the continued development of departmental assessment plans, and the use of assessment data in program improvement. The Vice Provost also made presentations on the accreditation report and recommendations, the new academic assessment structure, and the new NWCCU standards and accreditation cycle to the Deans and Chairs committees in CHSS, CST, and CFPA.

After establishment of the University Academic Assessment and Accreditation Committee (UAAAC) as part of the revised academic assessment structure, Vice Provost VanderStaay met to review the accreditation recommendations with that committee. The UAAAC recommended that all departments be asked to make assessment reports to the UAAAC to include two elements: summaries of departmental assessment activities, and reports of the use of assessment data in program improvement. Recognizing that CHSS had received a commendation for its efforts to "close the assessment loop," the UAAAC adapted the CHSS reporting form for its request to departments. These reporting requests were made to the Deans through the Vice Provost. It is expected that departments will amend their assessment plans to reflect the new NWCCU standards and the new assessment plan that will be developed by the UAAAC during the 2010-11 academic year. Current departmental assessment plans can be accessed via the Vice Provost's assessment plans web site and at this URL:

<http://www.wvu.edu/depts/vpue/assessment/plans.shtml>

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Evaluation Committee finds that the library has not engaged in a fundamental and thorough planning effort, informed by assessment, to consistently support the University's academic mission (Standard 5).

RELATED CONCERNS

Assessing the quality, adequacy and utilization of the library is not routinely done.

NARRATIVE OF WESTERN'S RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 3

Western Libraries has responded expeditiously to the NWCCU's Evaluation Committee's recommendation for a thorough assessment-based strategic plan. Indeed, this planning began before the NWCCU recommendations were received and was described in the position description used to hire Dean Cox. The library's strategic planning efforts began with data gathering. External and internal assessments and recommendations were gathered and compared to the university's academic mission and strategic plan. Based on this process, the library established a cohesive mission, and a statement of its values and strategic themes. A comprehensive, participatory, and cohesive strategic planning process followed as library staff divided into committees to write sections of the strategic plan. These were presented in well-attended all-library meetings, yielding a draft strategic plan that was posted to the *Viking Village* discussion forum on May 5, 2009. The library reviewed all comments in early June, finalizing its strategic plan. The final plan is ambitious, addressing every aspect of the library mission. For more details, please go to: <http://www.library.wvu.edu/info/stratplanning.shtml>

At Staff Development Day in August, the library staff prioritized specific issues to be part of the plan's first-year implementation. This included the appointment of an Organizational Development Committee who were charged with suggesting ways to improve organizational communication and to develop a training program for supervisors. After the appointment of a Collection Development Librarian, a group was formed to draft a new collection development and management policy. Another task force reported on the needs and future directions in regards to digital assets, and one was also assigned to deal with way-finding and signage. A task force has been formed to address diversity: recruitment, retention, collections, and services. It recently was successful in gaining funding for a diversity resident position. Qualified library faculty and administrators have been assigned oversight duties for web site makeover, library instruction, and marketing—including direct marketing, and branding initiatives that will coincide with the University's efforts. All of these efforts have either been completed or are in the process of being completed. (For updates on these and other strategic initiatives see Appendices 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3). In fact, approximately 30% of the library's strategic plan has been completed and about 60-70% has been put in motion.

At Staff Development Day this summer the library staff helped set priorities within the strategic plan for implementation in 2010-11.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Evaluation committee recommends that the University address the structure and working relationships of the numerous committees, processes, and reports that populate the governance process in order to enhance communication and effectiveness. This good faith effort to provide multiple opportunities for input and review has, in some areas, created confusion and sometimes tensions as to where reports go, how processes work and which group has responsibility for making decisions and implementing recommendations (Standard 6.A.1).

RELATED CONCERNS

There is evidence of a tremendous amount of activity and energy related to the GUR, but little coordination in what various committees are doing, and how their work will impact the assessment and campus level responsibility for the GUR (policy 2.1, General Education/Related Instruction Requirements and Policy 2.2 Education Assessment).

There is a complex array of committees and processes that create the potential for input on key decisions yet there is a feeling on the part of many faculty that this process does not impact decisions. (6.A.3., 6.D).

NARRATIVE OF WESTERN'S RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 4

As evidenced by the concerns and recommendation above, the NWCCU accreditation report directed Western to attend to its committee structure with respect to the general education and, more generally, faculty participation in budgeting and planning.

GUR Committee Restructuring

Previously, responsibility for the general education program (called both the General University Requirements or GUR and the General Education Requirements, or GER) was divided among two faculty committees and the office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education (VPUE). Theoretically, the GER Committee oversaw course approval and program improvement while the Committee on the Assessment of Teaching and Learning (CATL) oversaw program assessment and the VPUE coordinated the program. As noted by the NWCCU report, this arrangement created confusion and misunderstanding.

Following the NWCCU comprehensive evaluation report, Academic Curriculum Committee (ACC) Chair Roger Thompson, initiated discussions with the ACC, the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, and the VPUE to revise the joint governance structure for general education. Whereas the ACC had placed authority for program improvement in one committee (GER) and program assessment in another (CATL), Dr. Thompson suggested that these tasks would be best carried out by a single committee. Thus began a year of discussion among all these committees, the Faculty Senate, and the Provost and VPUE. Informed by the VPUE's report on the history of GUR reform at Western (Appendix 2.1), and a "problem beneath the problem" analysis that found that diffusion of responsibility impeded general education improvement, these discussions concluded in a broad consensus for Dr. Thompson's view. Ultimately, the faculty senate dissolved the GER and the CATL committees and established a new Committee on Undergraduate Education (CUE).

As described in our response to Recommendation 2, the establishment of CUE represented a transfer of authority from the VPUE to the faculty. The CUE charge is as follows:

- Advise the Academic Coordinating Commission on all curriculum matters related to General Education, including the acceptance of courses for listing as fulfilling General University Requirements (GURs) and oversight of the Writing Proficiency (WP) requirement.
- Promote the goals of a liberal education in general, and writing and general education goals in particular, within the academic community.
- Periodically review these educational goals and assess the degree to which these goals have been achieved. These spheres of assessment include the University, colleges, and departments. The Committee on Undergraduate Education shall communicate its findings, and recommendations for improvement, to the ACC and the appropriate units.
- Collaborate with and receive support from the offices of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education; the Office of Institutional Research; and the University Writing Program.
- Report to the ACC.

The establishment of CUE has proven an effective structural improvement within both the faculty governance structure and the joint governing arrangement (faculty / administration) at Western. As described in our response to Recommendation 2, CUE made enormous progress with respect to general education improvement and assessment in its first year of operation and has an ambitious timeline of further progress planned for the coming year.

Closing the Loop

Notably, this progress is itself a result of our “closing the loop.” Our “problem beneath the problem” assessment revealed that responsibility for general education was diffused among too many committees and individuals. In response, we improved the structure of the program by concentrating responsibility for improvement and assessment in a single committee, and by shifting administrative authority for the committee from the VPUE to that committee. These changes resulted in a year of rapid progress in planning efforts to improve and assess general education.

Planning and Resource Committee Restructuring

Previously, joint governance responsibilities for planning and resource decisions was distributed among several committees, including the President’s Planning and Resource Committee (PPRC) and the University Planning Committee (UPC). As noted in the NWCCU Comprehensive Evaluation Report, this created confusion regarding processes and responsibilities. More importantly, faculty often reported that their committee work did not substantially affect administrative decisions concerning resources. Faculty had asked for more interaction with the vice presidents in the University Planning committee, for instance.

Fortunately, the NWCCU report appeared during a key transition time in Western’s history. First, Western had just hired Bruce Shepard as its new president. President Shepard came to Western seeking to improve faculty participation in governance and to create a new culture of transparency in budgeting and decision-making. Second, the recent unionization of the faculty created a strong impetus to review all of the senate standing committee, and an important

review of the UPC had recently been completed under the leadership of Dr. Tom Downing. Drawing from this review, President Shepherd and Faculty Senate President Matthew Liao-Troth examined possibilities for collapsing PPRC and UPC into a single University Planning and Resource Committee (UPRC). This committee would be further strengthened by the inclusion of all the vice presidents. After several weeks of dialogue, collaboration and Faculty Senate discussion, this model of an effective joint governing committee for planning and resource-related decisions was officially established in April of 2009 with the following charge:

The University Planning and Resources Council (UPRC) shall be responsible to the Faculty Senate for the formation and review of policy and procedures in all aspects of university planning and allocation of resources, with special emphasis on matters of concern to the faculty. The responsibilities of the UPRC shall include:

1. Assuring that the council is well-informed about issues regarding planning at the University, as well as its financial operations and financial status.
2. Regular review of the University Strategic Plan, either on the UPRC's own initiative, or as requested by the President, the Provost, or the Faculty Senate.
3. Recommendation of priorities to be used in preparing the University's biennial operating and capital budget request, in the allocation of appropriated resources, and in consideration of budget reductions.
4. Examination of resource implications for major changes in the academic program. From time to time the Council will review the adequacy of the resources devoted to existing programs.
5. Participation in the allocation of resources appropriated by the legislature and review of how allocated resources are used at the University. It is not the role of the UPRC to attempt to direct or control the planning and budgetary process within the colleges and non-academic units, other than to provide broad general priorities.

Additional Restructuring

The successful restructuring of university-level committees, such as UPRC, President's Cabinet, and the CUE committee, has created interest in examining the faculty governance structures within specific colleges. The United Faculty of Western Washington believes that an elected faculty budget and planning committee for each college would be appropriate to the spirit of shared governance that characterizes the University and is reflected in the Faculty Handbook. Discussions of this idea are currently underway.

Conclusion

Together with the restructured President's Cabinet, the new UPRC is considered an important improvement to the joint governing procedure and the faculty senate governance structure. Faculty report that these new structures have facilitated input that is more proactive than reactive and that they have better and more meaningful input into budgetary and planning processes. Together with the committee restructuring that simplified and clarified responsibility for the improvement and assessment of the general education program, these changes represent

a substantive response to Recommendation 4 that has improved the governance and committee structure at Western. Moreover, to insure a smooth transition from the old committee structure to the new, the Faculty Senate President Matthew Liao-Troth spearheaded the updating of the Faculty Handbook.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

Western has addressed each of the NWCCU's recommendations with substantive changes.

Regarding Recommendation 1, the new budget processes are transparent and efficient. Budget requests are now clearly linked to the missions of the planning units and to SCOT analyses, created by planning units in a bottom-up fashion. Complementing these developments has been the establishment of the UPRC, which has clarified and strengthened the role of the faculty and the voice of the Faculty Senate in budgeting and resource decisions.

Regarding Recommendation 2, Western has made significant progress concerning the development and implementation of an institution-wide plan of program assessment. Informed by broad-based discussions and assessments of the previous academic assessment structure, a new assessment structure has been established and a new academic assessment plan is being developed. To clarify responsibility and to underscore the university's commitment to assessment, the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education (VPUE) has been named the Director of Academic Assessment and the Accreditation Liaison Officer, and a faculty advisory committee has been established to assist the VPUE in these duties. Departments now post their mission, student learning outcomes, and assessment plans on departmental web sites and submit annual reports of how they have used assessment findings to make program improvements. Each college and academic department has named a designated assessment coordinator. A faculty committee, the Committee on Undergraduate Education, has made significant progress toward the development of a GUR assessment and improvement plan. The First Year Planning Group, the Division of Student Affairs, and other programs have strengthened and systematized their program assessment procedures and have made significant program improvements based on assessment results.

Regarding Recommendation 3, the library has responded expeditiously to NWCCU recommendations with a thorough and assessment-based strategic plan. External and internal assessments and recommendations were gathered and compared to the university's academic mission and strategic plan. Based on this process, the library established a cohesive mission, and a statement of its values and strategic themes. The final plan is ambitious, addressing every aspect of the library mission. Implementation of the strategic plan has been rapid and ongoing.

Regarding Recommendation 4, significant changes in the governance structure of Western's committees have been made. These changes have been positively received by faculty; indeed, faculty report that the restructured President's Cabinet and new UPRC have improved joint governance and have facilitated faculty participation in strategic planning and resource and budgeting decisions. The establishment of the Committee on Undergraduate Education has clarified responsibility for the improvement and assessment of the general education program in a similar manner.

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Francis Halle, Director, Space Administration Management

Kathleen Kennedy, Professor of History; Chair, Department of History; Chair, Committee on Undergraduate Education

John Krieg, Assistant Professor, Department of Economics; Director, Office of Survey Research

Matthew Liao-Troth, Past Faculty Senate President

Sherry Mallory, Associate Dean of Students, Director of the Student Life Office

Gary McKinney, Management Analyst and Technical Writer, Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education

Matthew Miller: Assistant Professor, Elementary Education

Scott Pearce, Associate Professor, Liberal Studies; Faculty Senate President

Ramon Rinonos-Dias, Associated Students, Vice President for Academics

David Rossiter, Assistant Professor, Environmental Studies

Sylvia Tag, Western Libraries

Roger Thompson, Associate Professor of History; Former Chair, Academic Coordinating Commission

Tracy Thorndike-Christ, Assistant Professor, Special Education

Steve VanderStaay, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education; Accreditation Liaison Officer

Elsi Vassdal-Ellis, Professor, Art

Carmen Werder: Director, Teaching Learning Academy

Sara Wilson, Special Assistant to the Vice President for Student Affairs and Academic Support Services

Nicholas Wonder, Associate Professor, Finance & Marketing