Report of the WASC Visiting Team
Capacity and Preparatory Review

Woodbury University

Kenneth Nielsen
President
7500 Glenoaks Blvd.
Burbank, CA 91510-7846

Visit: February 27-29, 2008

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
Reaffirmation of Accreditation

Team Roster
Geoff Chase, Chair
Melissa Sydeman, Assistant Chair
David Fite, Team Member
Ron Lau, Team Member
Nancy Magnusson, Team Member
Michelle Saint-Germain, Team Member

The evaluation team in conducting its review was able to evaluate the institution according to Commission Standards and the Core Commitment for Institutional Capacity and therefore submits this Report to the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges for action and to the institution for consideration.
SECTION I. OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT OF THE CAPACITY & PREPARATORY REVIEW REPORT

IA. Description of the institution

Woodbury University is a private, 124-year-old institution serving a highly diverse student population, including 36% Hispanic students, 12% Asian students, 7% international students, and 6% African-American students. Because of its significant population of Hispanic students, Woodbury is officially classified as a Title V, Hispanic Serving Institution. Among the 39% white, non-Hispanic students at Woodbury, many are Armenian. Many Woodbury students are also the first in their family to attend college, and a high percentage come from families with limited economic means (CPR Report).

Woodbury is located on a 22.4-acre campus in Burbank, with a satellite campus in San Diego and additional off campus sites in Hollywood and Monterey Park, California. Founded in 1884, the institution has historically aimed to train students for careers in regional businesses. Today, Woodbury offers undergraduate degrees in Architecture, Business, Animation, Fashion Design, Graphic Design, Interior Architecture, Psychology, Communication, Politics and History, Organizational Leadership, and Interdisciplinary Studies. Graduate degrees are offered in Business, Architecture, and Organizational Leadership. The Weekend College and Intensive Degree Programs offer alternative formats for students to earn the B.S. in organizational leadership or the MBA degree.

As of Fall 2007, Woodbury enrolled just under 1,552 students (1,407 FTE). Most of these are commuter students; Woodbury is able to house 18% of its students in dormitories on campus. The institution employs 271 faculty members, 47 of whom are full-time and 214 of whom are part-time. Of these part-time faculty, 22 are “participating adjuncts”, advising students and serving on university committees in addition to their teaching duties.
IB. Recent accreditation history

Woodbury University, which is seeking reaffirmation of accreditation, was first accredited by WASC in 1961. The most recent Reaffirmation Visit (March 1998) resulted in a Special Visit focusing on issues of financial viability and planning, assessment, faculty, and technology (March 2001). The institution’s progress on issues identified by the 2001 Commission action letter is summarized below and analyzed in detail in the essays under each Standard.

IC. Description of the team visit

The WASC Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) team visited Woodbury University February 27-29, 2008. During the visit, the team met with the President, members of the Board of Trustees, department directors, faculty, administrators and support staff, and students. The team also reviewed a range of documents and evidence provided by the institution, including demographic data on students, faculty and staff; longitudinal data on retention and graduation rates; various strategic and facilities plans; enrollment data; the 2007-2008 Academic Catalog; Faculty, Staff and Student Handbooks; the draft Guide to Academic Program Review; institutional and programmatic mission statements and intended learning outcomes; sample course syllabi; visiting team reports from other accrediting bodies (NASAD, NAAB, CIDA, ACBSP) and related self studies; organizational charts and committee memberships; key academic policies; and feedback from surveys and focus groups evaluating Woodbury’s institutional capacity under the WASC Standards and CFRs.

ID. Quality of the Capacity and Preparatory Report and alignment with the proposal

Woodbury’s Institutional Proposal identified a number of goals for the CPR review process. The two main goals were to ensure that the University’s resources are adequate to support growth, and to increase capacity to measure institutional performance, specifically by using and disseminating higher quality information. As CPR activities, Woodbury also targeted: redefining the mission and vision; aligning planning and educational objectives; encouraging “more robust inquiry, pervasive assessment, and greater accountability;” improved use of data; development of educational
objectives and a system for program review; teaching assessment to full and part-time faculty and developing faculty teaching portfolios. Based on targeted interviews and document review, the team found that Woodbury’s CPR Report and self-review activities were aligned with the Institutional Proposal. The team also found that the proposed goals were substantive and will likely lead to meaningful improvement. Woodbury’s progress in achieving each of the goals is addressed in the body of this report.

The brainstorming, analysis and planning associated with the CPR activities (including gathering feedback from surveys, focus groups, and self-ratings under the Standards) generated a commendable amount of positive energy and action on the Woodbury campus. Among the initiatives that resulted were work on assessment in faculty learning communities; the reorganization of academic departments and Student Affairs as a result of 2005 exercises around renewing the mission; master planning in the departments; and committee planning activities such as the Student Success Task Force and the Educational Planning Committee. The community was broadly and deeply engaged, with faculty, staff, the Board of Trustees, and even students and alumni involved in evaluating institutional performance and advising on actions for improvement. Woodbury’s ability to implement large scale projects in an apparently “bottom up” and collegial manner—for example, the redefinition of the mission, and the articulation of program learning outcomes for each major—indicates the University’s capacity and commitment to engage in serious self-review and improvement.

Woodbury’s CPR report was organized around the four Standards and was supplemented by electronic and hard copy exhibits that supported claims in relation to the Core Commitment to Institutional Capacity. In relation to these “CPR Data Files,” the team observed that much of the data presented remained only data—that is, key information (such as the tables on graduation and retention rates) was not analyzed in the institutional report. While Woodbury staff and faculty were candid both in person and in the report about the institution’s need for better data, the team
observed that it will be important for the University to move beyond data collection to a reliance on evidence to support educational effectiveness. Thus, while Woodbury has taken steps in the last several years to improve infrastructure for data collection, such as appointing an institutional researcher and identifying a dashboard of key performance indicators, it now needs to build a culture of evidence.

Woodbury’s CPR Report accurately portrayed conditions on campus at the time of the team’s visit. Based on proposals for further improvement detailed in the CPR report and on candid self-evaluations offered during interviews with leadership, faculty, and staff, the team concluded that the CPR review process had led to a deeper understanding of institutional capacity. The team also noted that Woodbury has taken decisive actions for improvement based on feedback from previous WASC visits (hiring of Vice President for IT and Planning and institutional researcher; growing the endowment to $10.5 million; improving technology infrastructure through two Title V grants).

IE. Response to previous Commission issues

The WASC special visit to Woodbury University in March 2001 resulted in two key recommendations. The first focused on financial viability and program planning. The second focused on the issue of program review and student learning.

Finances, planning, technology

The team found that Woodbury has made substantial progress in addressing issues of financial viability, planning, and technology. Major actions include increasing the endowment; appointing Advancement staff; implementing more standardized enrollment tracking; creating new planning structures and planning documents; securing two Title V grants; hiring an institutional researcher and a Vice President of Information Technology and Planning. The results of these actions are discussed in the Standard Three and Four essays.

The team also found that Woodbury has sufficiently addressed technological support issues. Finally, the University appears fiscally responsible and financially stable, and the President and the
Board are taking action to increase the endowment to $20 million in order to allay the institution’s tuition-dependency. This was clear from a review of audited financial statements and budget reports and from interviews with the President, Board, and Advancement staff.

In terms of data collection and analysis, Woodbury has identified key performance indicators, though these have yet to be routinely used in budget planning. There is room for progress in analyzing data and using it in decision-making.

**Faculty ratios**

The team noted from a review of previous WASC Commission action letters and visiting team reports, a review of team reports from Woodbury’s professional accrediting agencies, and on-campus interviews with a range of constituents, that the ratio of full-time to part-time faculty continues to be an issue for the institution, as do attendant issues such as workload for full-time faculty and faculty compensation. In this sense, the institution has only partially addressed the 2001 Commission concerns (progress is discussed in detail under Standard 3). The University has hired more full-time faculty since the last WASC visit, though enrollment has also increased. The institution acknowledges that “much remains to be done,” though the team did not find evidence that action in this area is a priority for the institution except in the case of the Business School, which will likely require more full-time faculty in order to achieve AACSB accreditation.

**Program review**

There was evidence of recent procedural improvements related to program review and program-level assessment (2007 program review guidelines; publication of learning outcomes for the majority of programs; improved assessment plans in academic writing and mathematics). Work remains to be done, however, specifically to ensure that all programs routinely analyze the results of student learning in relation to intended program outcomes. At the time of the team’s visit, there was insufficient evidence to evaluate whether Woodbury was using program review “more effectively…for assessing student learning” (2001 Commission action letter).
No reports have been completed under the new program review guidelines, though two
draft self-studies were available for review at the time of the team’s visit. Programmatic self-studies
for NAAB and NASAD were also offered as program reviews of the Architecture and design
programs. An analysis of the quality of program review thus far at Woodbury appears in the
Standard Two essay below.

The team would like to acknowledge that Woodbury has taken many steps to strengthen its
structures supporting assessment in response to the 1998 team recommendations and the 2001
action letter. Woodbury has implemented capstones in all majors; published departmental learning
outcomes in the Catalog; supported academic writing initiatives which include entrance and exit
tests, and student writing portfolios; administered the NSSE; engaged a group of 26 faculty in
reading about assessment and assembling teaching portfolios; created a faculty development
department, the Institute for Excellence in Teaching and Learning; and brought in expert speakers
on assessment. The team discusses these efforts to improve the capacity to support teaching and
learning in the essay under Standard Two.

SECTION II. EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY UNDER THE STANDARDS

Standard One: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives

Institutional purposes

In October 2005, more than 100 members of the faculty, administration and staff participated in a
professionally facilitated identity retreat, focusing on Woodbury’s mission, values, and future
direction. This collaboration resulted in a revised mission statement, a list of University ideals and a
statement of six educational goals intended to guide all academic programs (CFR 1.1). The goals
include: academic quality, innovation and creativity, communication, transdisciplinarity, social
responsibility, and personal and professional integration. These statements were approved by the Board in 2006 and are widely published (2007-2008 Woodbury Catalog; Faculty Handbook).

In interviews with the team, Woodbury’s faculty and staff repeatedly referenced the institution’s core values: providing a high quality education; engendering students’ personal and professional success; and encouraging learning that crosses traditional boundaries of knowledge (CFR 1.2). The University’s operationalized support of these values is evident in the major restructuring of the academic and educational support units, resulting from “bottom up” recommendations emerging from the 2005 identity retreat. Academic departments are now organized into four schools: Architecture; Business; Media, Culture and Design; and Transdisciplinary Studies (which houses general education and majors drawing on multiple fields of knowledge such as history, politics, and literature).

Department directors report that the reorganized structure enables a more coherent system of decision-making and attention to university-wide priorities (CFR 3.8). The reorganization efforts also produced an impressively integrated student development and academic support area (OASIS), which oversees student retention, orientation, personal development classes, peer mentoring programs, and tutoring (CFR 2.10, 2.11, 2.13).

The team commends the University for providing time and resources to fully engage the community with the mission and educational purpose of Woodbury. This investment has paid off in relation to the institutional vision and has resulted in a widespread sense of energy and a clear direction for every department. (CFR 1.2). Each academic department, for example, has been asked to align its program learning outcomes and curriculum with the overarching educational principles and intended learning outcomes at the program level have been developed and published for nearly every area.

Woodbury’s leadership is dedicated to student success (CFR 1.3). The President walks the campus twice a day to talk with students and better understand their needs. Faculty and educational
support staff report feeling responsible for fostering “the total student.” Even student peer mentors echoed the importance of considering the whole picture—academic skills, life skills, and what is going on for individual students in and outside of the classroom—in achieving student success.

There is a pervasive “family atmosphere” at Woodbury, which is cultivated at every level of the University. Faculty, staff, students, and the Board uniformly praised the hands-on leadership of the President, who has served the institution for twelve years. One staff member referred to him as “the most aware president” she had ever encountered. Faculty and staff also spoke favorably of the leadership provided by the Vice President for Academic Affairs and students praised the support of faculty members and student development staff.

The current administration has advanced the professionalism of the University considerably. Based on interviews and a review of financial statements, organizational charts, committee responsibilities and membership, policies and handbooks, the team found Woodbury to be a professionally operating university with predictable and documented processes, structures, and goals (CFR 1.8). The amount of change that has occurred in the past three years would tax most organizations, but at Woodbury these changes appear to have released human energy and potential in productive ways, revealing the talent of the leadership to lead change that does not overwhelm the organization. The President has committed to another five years of leadership; this should provide stability for the University as it settles into its relatively new structures and processes.

**Integrity**

Woodbury publishes a statement of academic freedom in the Faculty Handbook and the Catalog (CFR 1.4). In interviews with the team, faculty members reported being supported by the administration in their pursuit and respect for academic freedom. The team notes that Woodbury would benefit from developing an academic freedom policy that also encompasses student work and that provides clear guidance for appropriate interactions in the classroom and during exhibit situations.
Since its inception, Woodbury has sought to enroll students who have not been traditionally served by institutions of higher education. Woodbury is designated by the federal government as a Hispanic Serving Institution, and the current student population is highly diverse (CFR 1.5). Woodbury actively engages in projects to support the success of ethnic-minority students, including securing Title V grants and participating in the national BEAMS project (Building Educational Attainment of Minority Students).

Students are supported by an array of services, including a tailored orientation (SOAR), peer mentoring, and tutoring services (CFR 2.10, 2.11, 2.12, 2.13). An early alert program encourages faculty members to refer students for academic and other advising when students miss class or struggle to complete assignments. Faculty report that minority status coupled with an outstanding education and support services give Woodbury’s students access to graduate programs at Harvard, Columbia, and other prestigious universities, as well as entry into the professional business world. It would be productive for the institution to collect such evidence on a systematic basis, as the rate of acceptance into graduate schools and graduates’ job placement information are valuable indicators of Woodbury’s level of educational effectiveness. The Board indicated that it would like to see job placement information reported on an annual basis.

The faculty are justifiably proud of the level of achievement of Woodbury students, many of whom are the first in their families to attend college. Leadership and staff are cognizant of the fact that many Woodbury students face financial barriers to graduation that are exacerbated in their junior year by restrictions associated with their financial aid. Both the Board and the President are seeking ways to provide additional financial support for these at-risk students through an increased endowment.

Students reported that they chose Woodbury with the goal of becoming skilled and successful practitioners in their fields (predominantly architecture, business, and design), and that they looked to faculty primarily to help them achieve this goal. Part-time faculty in architecture,
design, and business are esteemed for their professional expertise that links research and creative activity to teaching (CFR 2.9). The team noted, however, that while the current full-time and adjunct faculty members are doing an admirable job of educating Woodbury’s students, 96% of Woodbury’s full-time faculty members are Caucasian (Required Data Exhibits). The team believes the University would benefit from becoming more deliberate about recruiting accomplished ethnic minority faculty members for full-time, participating adjunct, and adjunct faculty positions (CFR 1.5).

Standard Two: Achieving Educational Objectives through Core Functions

Woodbury faculty are actively involved in discussions about expectations for student learning (CFR 2.4). This involvement was evidenced in interviews, syllabi, self-studies and exhibits of student work for programmatic accreditation. Course outcomes in syllabi, a review of sample capstone assignments, critiquing practices in the design departments, student portfolios in many majors and for academic writing in GE, and the activities of the Institute for Excellence in Teaching and Learning all indicate that assessment is occurring at the course level.

Systematic engagement with program level assessment varies by department and Woodbury is seeking to change this. Educational objectives and expected program learning outcomes have been developed for most academic programs, including General Education. These are published in the Catalog, course syllabi, and (in some cases) on the program web page (CFR 1.2, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4). Architecture syllabi clearly link specific program outcomes to what will be learned in each course, an effective practice that could be adopted in other departments.

In reviewing the published Program Learning Outcomes, the team noted that most departments demonstrated a clear understanding of specific and measurable outcomes, though some work remains to be done. Outcomes such as “personal integrity” and “ability to cope with uncertainty and change” need to be reconceptualized so that they are measurable. Similarly, overly general outcomes such as “substantial mastery of learning outcomes in the field of organizational
leadership so [students will] participate and lead fully in society as well-informed citizens” need to be refined so that they are specific and also measurable (B.S. in Business and Management and B.A. in Organizational Learning, Catalog). Establishing a formal avenue for feedback on the quality of program learning outcomes would be useful (CFR 2.6). It is unclear who would be responsible for providing this type of feedback to the departments. It is also unclear whether there is a policy or a deadline for reflecting program (or university) level learning outcomes in specific course syllabi (CFR 2.3, 2.4).

Once a year in the design programs, and several times a year in architecture, outside professionals are invited to comment on exhibits and showings of student work; some departments have developed rubrics specifically for this process (CFR 2.5, 2.6). Case studies in the Business School are also subject to external review. This is a valuable practice in the professionally-oriented programs. While it is not clear how systematic these external reviews are nor what standards are used to evaluate student work and how these are related to intended program learning outcomes, trends in annual industry feedback should nonetheless be considered as part of program reviews.

Program-level assessment

Programs involve external reviewers to various degrees in evaluating their educational effectiveness (CFR 2.6, 2.7, 4.4, 4.6). Woodbury’s Architecture degrees are accredited by the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) and the Interior Design program is accredited by CIDA (Council for Interior Design Accreditation). Both these accreditations require evidence of student work that meets national disciplinary standards and involve peer review of the curriculum, faculty ratios and qualifications, facilities, and academic support (CFR 2.1). The curriculum and student work of the Animation, Fashion, Graphic Design, and Interior Design programs have also been peer reviewed as part of Woodbury’s recent accreditation by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD).
Several departments have developed programmatic assessment practices (for example, Architecture and the Academic Writing Program), with a clear linkage of course outcomes to rubrics, specific program outcomes on the syllabi, and portfolios of student work; faculty norming; and regular faculty involvement in program-level assessment activities. Other departments have less fully developed systems. Woodbury does require capstone experiences or portfolios for all majors and these experiences can provide a vehicle for program-level assessment; however, the team did not see evidence that these portfolios and capstone projects are being used systematically as a means for evaluating educational effectiveness. Further, no deadlines have been established for when academic programs must have an assessment plan or report the results of assessment.

Interviews and document review indicate that more progress remains to be made in assessing student learning outcomes in programs such History and Politics, Communication, Psychology, Organizational Leadership, and the interdisciplinary degrees housed in the Institute of Transdisciplinary Studies. Since capstone outcomes for transdisciplinary majors are contained in individual contracts between the student and three faculty advisors, the interdisciplinary degrees in particular would benefit from regular feedback about the quality of proposed student learning outcomes.

The assessment of student learning outcomes needs to be well underway by the time of the Educational Effectiveness Review. The institution should be able to point to more than one or two examples of how the results of student learning are being used by various programs. Woodbury will also need to adopt ongoing reporting mechanisms and review processes that help programs to "close the loop" on assessment of student learning. Support should be provided for faculty training in program-level assessment. Further, the team recommends that Woodbury actively encourage the sharing of effective departmental practices among its own units to speed up the development curve (CFR 4.3, 4.4, 4.6).
Evaluation of program reviews

In response to the 2001 Commission action letter, Woodbury developed new guidelines for academic program review in 2007. The University has just begun to implement a new round of program reviews (CFR 2.7, 4.4). Politics and History and General Education have presented draft self-studies under the new guidelines. Programmatic accreditation reviews (NAAB, CIDA, NASAD, ACBSP/AACSB) are also being designated as academic program reviews at Woodbury. Because the new guidelines are so recent, results of the program review process are inconclusive. Available evidence is evaluated below.

The new policy for academic program review partially addresses the previous WASC Commission concerns. The 1998 WASC visiting team acknowledged the relevance of programmatic accreditation reports, but pointed to the need for more explicit attention to assessment of student work as part of academic program reviews (CFR 2.7). However, it is still not clear that annual assessment activities at Woodbury will be related to periodic self-studies for programmatic accreditors. To satisfy the previous concerns fully, and to progress along the continuum for using program review as a vehicle for assessing student learning outcomes, the team recommends that Woodbury's program review policy require every academic program to identify, collect, and analyze direct evidence of student learning and to report how that evidence is used for program improvement. The University needs to move beyond the mandate for departments to develop program learning outcomes and to ensure that systematic program-level assessment is occurring (CFR 2.7).

In one of the draft program reviews offered as evidence, the team did find evidence of assessment of student work in relation to program outcomes. Politics and History faculty assessed a multi-year sample of senior seminar papers using a rubric. This approach to assessing educational effectiveness provides a good model for future program reviews. However, the team concluded that more substantive conclusions (as opposed to procedural recommendations) would be beneficial.
The draft program review for General Education (GE) was incomplete. This self-study describes a plan to evaluate student work from capstone courses in the majors. It is not clear to what extent capstone assignments will provide an accurate indication of how well GE outcomes have been met; faculty indicated in interviews with the team that departments were still in the process of embedding GE outcomes in these courses. Faculty also mentioned that the curriculum in each of two largest majors (Architecture and Business) does not sufficiently develop the writing skills begun in the GE writing classes.

However, GE faculty already can and do assess students’ acquisition of these skills within the sequence of GE writing classes, which is a solid start for showing educational effectiveness. Formative and summative assessment mechanisms also appear to be in place for mathematics courses within GE. The CPR Report also mentions that the Psychology department is implementing a nationally normed test of students’ critical thinking skills, which would provide an indicator of learning results for this GE outcome among psychology students. Important aspects of the GE assessment plan still remain to be defined, e.g., a curriculum map showing where each outcome is developed and assessed, a schedule for assessing the various outcomes, and rubrics which can be used by faculty in evaluating student work.

Woodbury would benefit from more focused and sustained oversight of assessment and program review activities. For example, a thoughtful self-study of the GE program in 1999 raised important questions about the program. Another, less robust self-study written in 2001 reflected none of the earlier report. A third self-study for GE, reflecting the redesign of the program, is expected in late 2008. These types of program planning documents need more continuity and follow-through on key recommendations.

The team observed that the new Educational Planning Committee, the Institute for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, the institutional researcher, and the Educational Effectiveness Review Committee have been charged with overseeing aspects of assessment and program review.
What each group will do and who is ultimately in charge of implementation is unclear. In preparing for the Educational Effectiveness Review, the institution would benefit from putting someone in charge of communicating the specific steps that need to be taken to collect, analyze, and act on the particular learning results available in each department. Focused training and support for program-level assessment would also be beneficial.

Standard Three: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability

Financial viability

Woodbury has made good progress in strengthening its financial position. The University has achieved positive operating results for a number of years. There is a conscious effort on the part of leadership, including the Board of Trustees, to balance the budget while being mindful of the needs of the University. Changes in Unrestricted Net Assets, before the adjustment for the pension liability, have been $2.5 million, $1.7 million, and $1.4 million, for fiscal years 2007, 2006, and 2005, respectively. The University reported that it was reviewing the defined-benefit pension plan and its impact on institutional finances.

The University recognizes the significant fluctuations in liability that could result year-to-year due to changes in investment performance, participant changes, or other factors. The team encourages Woodbury to continue its current review of this program, as well ensuring periodic reviews in the future, due to its potentially significant impact on the University’s bottom line.

The University has made good progress in building reserves. The Board-designated endowment is now $10,525,382 as of June 30, 2008. This compares to $4,064,321 as of June 30, 1999. Unrestricted reserves totaled $17,828,499 and $27,298,617 for the fiscal years ended June 30, 1999 and 2007, respectively.

The Board is to be commended for its serious attention to building reserves, primarily through investing in the designated endowment. The Board has set an informal goal of $20 million, with a
desire to have the endowment equal or exceed the annual budget of the University. The Board recognizes that the earnings from this endowment will not solve the matter of tuition dependency, nor will the earnings be sufficient to secure the financial future of the University.

For the fiscal year ended June 30, 2007, tuition was reported as 84% of total unrestricted revenues. Woodbury University recognizes the financial risks related to its significant dependency on tuition annually for operating funds. Enrollment has been steady with a slight positive trend reported over the past five years. Enrollment is projected to increase significantly during the next few years. Leadership will need to balance the target growth in enrollment with the goal of reducing the tuition dependency of its budget. There needs to be attention to planning on other revenue sources if Woodbury expects to also reduce its tuition dependency.

The Board and Administration are working to develop other sources of funds, such as endowments and fund raising. Woodbury has invested in development staff and views Advancement activities as an important part of improving the financial position of the University. The team recommends that the University Advancement efforts should include formal plans with specific targets for each of the major development initiatives. The Advancement plans should be an integral part of the financial planning and budget process.

Resources appear to be appropriately allocated. However, without sufficiently clear hierarchical relationships between the many University plans (strategic, master academic, campus, adaptive re-use), it is difficult to assure that resources are ideally aligned with the priorities of the University (CFR 3.5). Staff reported that they were engaged in ongoing budget reviews and budget management. The on-line budget reports referenced in the CPR Report are not yet available. There are plans to implement this program in the near future. Comparisons of budget to actual expenditures may be helpful.

The Budget Advisory Committee reported that it provided recommendations to leadership annually, at the beginning stages of the annual budget process. It was not clear how this advice
compared with the information that individual directors provided to their respective administrators. It was reported that there were no loop-back communication processes that provided the committee with information as to what was decided. The committee may be more useful to the University if it reviews the budget situation during the year as a continuous process. The team also notes that the Budget Advisory Committee did not have an updated strategic plan to use in their budget decisions.

**Technology resources**

Since the 2001 Special Visit, Woodbury University has markedly improved technology resources impacting faculty and students, mainly through securing Title V grants (CFR 3.6, 3.7). Faculty and staff reported that they are pleased with the improvements. Student and faculty feedback identify a number of usability issues that should be addressed. For example, problems with the website and email, including critical comments regarding the ability of IQ Web to easily support MAC platforms (which affects faculty’s ability to upload syllabi for review) and the portal were reported in both student and faculty feedback sessions. Students have also reported problems with lab technician qualifications and customer service skills, hardware problems, and limited access hours (Focus group, April, 2007).

**Balance of full and part-time faculty & faculty workload**

Woodbury has done a commendable job in fostering faculty loyalty among full-time and adjunct faculty. Students reported that full-time and adjunct faculty were equally committed to students’ academic and personal success; the team noted this widespread dedication of Woodbury’s faculty as well. Some students and faculty commented that advising by faculty could be better (especially part-time faculty in the non-professional degree programs), but praised the quality of peer mentors and staff advisors (CFR 2.12). Staff attributed the uneven quality of advising to faculty workload issues (CFR 3.2).

The team notes that faculty workload and the full-time to part-time faculty ratios have been persistent issues for the institution over the past decade (CFR 2.1, 3.1). A number of academic
programs have only one or two full-time faculty involved (CFR 2.1). While this full-time faculty ratio meets the minimum standard for accreditation for some programmatic accreditations, Woodbury would benefit from increasing the number of full-time faculty in strategic areas and implementing solutions to alleviate the heavy faculty workload. Faculty administrators, such as chairs and program directors, indicated that their time is heavily affected by advising and committee work, impacting their ability to provide higher quality teaching and advising to their students. Architecture and Design faculty felt strongly that there were excessive workload requirements for many administrative faculty, including time-consuming facilities oversight.

Woodbury currently uses a formula of one full-time faculty per 750 credit hours offered. The team recommends that Woodbury reflect on the workload of academic administrators, taking into account advising duties and administrative service, and determine whether the existing numbers and allocation of personnel are sufficient (CFR 3.1). A recent faculty workload and salary survey was received with mixed reactions from faculty. Apparently part-time faculty will be receiving 30% raises over three years. However, full-time faculty felt that there was no improvement in realistically measuring individual workloads and making allowances for the total range and amount of work that faculty do.

An action plan and timeline for addressing faculty workload should be communicated, as staff reported that it was “hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel” on this issue. Leadership spoke to the need to increase full-time faculty numbers at Woodbury; however, the process appears to involve many years. In the meantime, faculty have suggested that new administrative support staff and professional advising staff would be possible strategies to improve the academic productivity of faculty. Increased use of participating adjuncts (who advise and participate in committee work) is another possible short-term remedy, as are course release and streamlining committee structures. Addressing the workload issue will improve Woodbury’s ability to offer a uniform and quality education. For example, approving syllabi and checking on the quality of teaching is currently the responsibility of the department chairs. Faculty reported that this system was largely effective,
though there were instances reported of adjunct faculty not delivering intended course outcomes or filing incomplete syllabi without appropriate follow-up by the department director (CFR 3.2, 2.4). The team suggests that Woodbury would benefit from assuring that each program sufficiently orients all adjunct faculty to the learning outcomes and relationship of sequential classes, especially classes taught by multiple instructors.

Woodbury faculty work on a contractual basis, with a four course per semester teaching load. Full-time faculty may be awarded one-year, three-year, and five-year contracts, renewable upon demonstration of continued performance at the required level in teaching and scholarship. Although full-time faculty are carrying heavy administrative responsibilities (supporting the effectiveness of the University), this service is not directly recognized in the contract renewal process. Faculty unanimously reported that this was an issue in need of attention.

Woodbury has taken steps to create a supplementary system of participating adjunct faculty, paying 22 part-time faculty for additional time to advise students and serve on University committees. This is a positive step. Ensuring that all adjunct faculty are sufficiently oriented to expected course and programmatic outcomes, and finding ways to include more faculty in annual assessment activities, are important next steps.

The team noted that the system for evaluation and renewal of contracts for full-time faculty is clearly laid out. However, performance evaluations are not conducted for the majority of the faculty, who are adjunct. Implementing a formal feedback process, moving beyond reliance on student course evaluations, could positively impact the teaching effectiveness of adjunct and participating adjunct faculty (CFR 3.3, 4.7).

The team agreed with the observations in the CPR Report that the University would benefit from implementing a systematic and regular evaluation process for staff and academic and administrative leaders (CFR 3.3). Leadership reported that the staff merit salary study, currently underway, will provide a foundation for staff performance evaluation. Management identified the lack of connection between
compensation and performance in the current evaluation process (CFR 3.3). The staff reported that the University is looking into merit pay compensation.

Organizational Structures and Decision-Making Processes

Overall, Woodbury University has appropriate organization structures (CFR 3.8) and qualified leadership (CFR 3.10). The Board is engaged and provides appropriate oversight (CFR 3.9). The institution is undergoing major changes and faculty and staff are supportive of the directions that the University has chosen to take (many of which were suggested by the community as a whole). The faculty exercises appropriate academic leadership in administrative matters, and the team observed faculty work well with administrators in multiple planning and decision-making bodies (CFR 3.11).

Many faculty and staff serve on multiple committees. While the workload appears to be heavy, the team noted that complaints about committee work were few, apparently because faculty feel that the governance structure is effective in bringing forward important issues for consideration by the leadership. Throughout the organization, the constituents report that they feel heard and that their concerns are considered carefully and thoroughly.

There are enough new committees that there is the potential for duplication of effort over time. In order to maintain enthusiasm and effectiveness, it will likely be necessary to phase out committees whose work is complete and to merge committees where the work overlaps. Also, in order to sustain energy for the specialized and regional accreditation processes, it likely will be necessary to identify overlapping requirements and streamline the workload.

Standard Four: Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement

Interviews and artifacts from planning processes indicate that the President and his leadership team involve the various campus constituencies in decision-making (CFR 4.1, 4.6, 4.8, 3.8). The team found evidence of action on recommendations emerging from various areas of the University, such as the reorganizations of academic departments and the creation of new oversight committees. Many
avenues for feedback were open, including standing committees, ad hoc task forces, and targeted surveys, focus groups, and brainstorming opportunities.

An atmosphere of respect and collegiality was evident in the team’s interviews with the major University committees. The institution places high value on collaboration and crossing boundaries of knowledge, not just for students, but also for staff. For example, Woodbury has encouraged innovative partnerships between student development and general education, and also supports “learning communities” of faculty, staff, and student leaders, who study a particular area and recommend actions for improvement. This promising model for sustained inquiry could be used more as the University moves toward becoming a culture of evidence.

In the last six years, Woodbury has made significant progress in identifying individuals and committees responsible for monitoring and sustaining planning activities per the 2001 WASC Commission action letter (CFR 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5). In response to the 2001 Special Visit, Woodbury hired a Vice President for IT and Planning, whose contributions have substantially increased Woodbury’s ability to plan based on quality information. For example, Woodbury has developed a Student Information System that has increased standardization of comprehensive student enrollment data collection since Fall 2004. Faculty chairs and deans have been trained in the use of enrollment, cohort tracking, retention, graduation, and academic calendar reports, which are available to the entire campus community, making governance and management more transparent. Data reports have been put online. The University portal established in Fall 2007 is being used by a variety of offices on campus to share data and coordinate projects (CFR 4.4, 4.5).

The team commends the hiring of the Vice President for IT and Planning, and also the hiring of an institutional researcher in 2006, a key step in Woodbury’s ability to understand its own performance and act for improvement (CFR 3.6, 4.3, 4.6). The institutional researcher ensures that the appropriate information is routinely collected and centralized and disseminates data that is requested to support University decision-making processes.
As a result of the above efforts, more information is being collected and reported in a consistent manner. Over the past four years, Woodbury University has made good progress in developing a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for all major operational areas. These indicators include data on enrollments, graduation and retention rates, operating resources, endowment, and alumni participation and giving. The indicators are posted in an online dashboard for the campus community. Based on interviews with various constituents and a review of planning documents, the team concluded that Woodbury is still at the beginning stages of integrating the use of KPIs into evaluation and decision-making (CFR 4.3). For example, the Budget Advisory Committee does not use currently financial KPIs or key financial ratios in determining their recommendations and budget priorities.

There is a good precedent at Woodbury for seeking out information about educational effectiveness and acting for improvement. In 2004 Woodbury administered the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to assess the University’s learning environment. The NSSE data showed high satisfaction among Woodbury students in four of the five NSSE benchmark areas, including level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, and supportive campus environment, but less satisfaction in the area of enriching educational experiences, particularly senior capstone courses (which was surprising to the faculty). Based on the NSSE data, the University implemented changes to improve curricular and co-curricular activities, enhance advising for the seniors, and improve the capstone courses offered in all disciplines (CFR 4.6). The team recommends that Woodbury track the efficacy of these specific initiatives to improve the capstone experience. The University plans to participate in NSSE again to measure its performance and help evaluate the results of program changes.

The NSSE results were used by the University’s BEAMS project (Building Engagement and Attainment of Minority Students), which evolved into the Student Success Task Force, a standing committee of faculty, student, and staff members from the Office of Student Development that
monitors student success and suggests improvements in the learning environment. The Student Success Task Force has sponsored faculty, staff, and student learning communities to examine how learning occurs inside and outside the classroom and campus, and how learning may be improved by linking curricular and co-curricular activities, gathering additional data from surveys and focus groups (CFR 4.6).

The team found this ongoing, collaborative support for students’ holistic college experience to be an area of best practice for Woodbury. The team also commends Woodbury for securing two Title V grants to improve student and academic support and create a richer technological infrastructure. Staff and faculty report that these grants resulted in substantially improved technological resources in support of academic programs.

While the University’s capacity to plan has grown and areas of effective practice exist, the University is aware that it requires greater analytical capacity. The relatively new Office of Institutional Research has centralized a good deal of information; the next step for the University is to identify what information is most useful in planning and decision making, and to engage constituents in analyzing and making meaning of the relevant data (CFR 4.3, 4.5, 4.6). Based on probing interviews and a review of evidence presented in the team room (existing program reviews and assessment plans 1998-present), the team concludes that both the Master Academic Planning (MAP) and the Academic Program Review (APR) processes undertaken in the last two years require an expanded institutional research capacity and support for routine analysis of student learning results at the program level (CFR 4.1, 4.2, 4.3).

A robust infrastructure must continue to be developed for assessment and program review (CFR 2.7, 4.4), which will in turn support a growing culture of evidence focused on improving student learning (CFR 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8) Two examples of specific areas that would benefit from greater analysis are the performance of transfer students, an area of concern widely mentioned by faculty and staff, and the performance of male students and international students,
which did not appear to be receiving attention on the Woodbury campus (CFR 4.3, 4.5, 2.6, 2.10, 2.11, 2.13, 2.14).

In probing interviews, a number of key staff reported simply that Woodbury was “doing fine” in terms of its graduation rates. The team noted the institution’s commendable work in graduating ethnic minority students at a relatively high rate compared to peer institutions (Education Trust’s cohort tables). It also noted that Woodbury’s overall graduation rate has improved 10% in the past two years. However, the team draws Woodbury’s attention to the graduation rate for men, which dropped 10% over the period 2002-2006, and the figures for international students, who appear to have been graduating at a sharply reduced rate from 2004-2006. While Woodbury’s relatively small number of graduates is perhaps skewed by annual variations, these trend figures are worth inquiring into: Why might this be this happening? How can the institution support improvements in these trends?

Woodbury faculty and staff consistently expressed concern about the performance of transfer students (CFR 2.10, 2.14). Forty to forty-five percent of Architecture students (Woodbury’s largest major) are transfer students. Even students who enroll as freshmen at Woodbury consistently take GE courses elsewhere, for financial reasons. However, there is little disaggregated information available to indicate how well transfer students are succeeding (CFR 2.10, 2.11, 2.12, 2.13, 2.14). The institutional researcher reports that retention and graduation rates of transfer students are not known. The Curriculum Committee commented that it is difficult to tell from available electronic student records which students are transferring credits from community colleges.

Faculty and leadership observed that Woodbury’s ability to achieve institution-wide learning goals (particularly in general education) is a challenge given the number of transfer students. The Office of Institutional Research should explore opportunities to make information on transfer students more readily available. Inquiry into this area would also have implications for the kind of learning results looked at in programmatic and GE assessment activities.
Finally, it is important for the campus to understand the meaning of Woodbury’s graduation rates. Time-to-degree for many students is reportedly being affected by financial aid pressures. Student Development staff estimated that nearly 80% of all entering students (freshmen and transfers alike) need remediation in mathematics, English, or both. When students take remedial courses or re-take pre-requisite courses to get a passing grade, they fall behind others in their cohort. This lengthens the time to degree, especially for students in the 5-year B.Arch. program (the largest major). Institutional research could provide a clearer picture of Woodbury’s graduation rates falling just outside the IPEDS measurement zone: Are the rates substantially increased? And if so, what can the institution do to help more students graduate in a timely manner, but still with the necessary level of achievement?

SECTION III. SUMMARY OF TEAM CONCLUSIONS AND MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CAPACITY & PREPARATORY REVIEW

The team was impressed with the collegiality, energy, enthusiasm, and commitment of the faculty, staff, students, and administrators with whom they met. The team was particularly struck by the focus on student success and with the ongoing steps the University is taking to meet the needs of its diverse student population. The use of the NSSE, the recent reorganization combining student affairs with student development and academic support, an early warning system for students experiencing academic difficulty, and new leadership courses are all positive.

Woodbury appears also to be on the right track financially. Having increased its endowment to $13 million, and having stated a goal of reaching $20 million, is also positive. There has also been at the University a strong focus on developing planning processes that will work alongside financial stability to provide ongoing support.

Woodbury is also to be congratulated for its ambition. The team saw evidence again and again that Woodbury is not standing still, but that it is working to make its own future. Its professional
programs are all seeking accreditation through their respective agencies and faculty have noted that even non-professional programs seek to meet standards similar to those set elsewhere. Finally, Woodbury wishes to have some of its well-established programs such as architecture ranked as “one of the three best” nationally and the team applauds the University for setting this ambitious goal.

While all institutions face challenges, the team believes that three issues in particular merit sustained attention at Woodbury. The first of these has to do with faculty workload. This report has already addressed this concern, and the team wishes to reiterate how key this is. As one faculty member noted in regards to this issue, “it is hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel.” It is especially important for Woodbury to make progress in this area to sustain the quality of academic programs and advising, avoid faculty burnout, and provide opportunities for professional engagement and enrichment (CFR 2.1, 2.8, 2.9, 2.12, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4). In order to continually improve teaching and learning, the institution also needs to develop formal and periodic performance appraisal processes for adjunct and participating adjunct faculty (CFR 3.3, 4.4, 4.7).

The second area of concern is related to financial support on two fronts. The University needs to increase financial support for students and, as they have already acknowledged, continue to build the endowment. Thus, while the team applauds the aim of reaching an endowment of $20 million, it also believes that the endowment will have to grow at a steady rate beyond that level.

The team’s advisory statements and suggestions are italicized in the previous pages of this report. The team’s major findings and recommendations, three of which are in response to the three themes the University has identified for its review, are noted below:

1. Planning: the University needs to build on the progress it has made with planning and seek to focus its energy on key challenges, issues, and questions. The team recommends that the University focus its planning efforts in purposeful ways in three areas:
a. It is essential for the University to develop and apply consistent program review practices across all departments and programs. Moreover, these program reviews must demonstrate how evidence regarding student learning is being used to increase educational effectiveness.

b. Institutional research will need to focus on key questions, such as data related to the graduation rates of male students or the success rates of community college transfer students, to provide information that can be used to make deliberative and useful adjustments.

There is a great deal of planning occurring at Woodbury; however, the institution would be well served to move planning beyond collecting data broadly to raising questions about which data can be collected toward what specific ends. The team’s recommendation is for Woodbury to move from a culture of planning to a culture of inquiry that informs planning.

2. Woodbury must improve its focus on student learning outcomes and assessment. While many good assessment activities are underway at Woodbury, in architecture and in writing, for example, it is important for assessment to take place in all departments and programs. Further, it will be necessary by the time the team returns for the Educational Effectiveness visit to show that the results of assessment are systematically being used in a number of areas to improve student learning and achievement.

3. Woodbury must also maintain its focus on its general education program. Since this program is taken by all students regardless of major, it is important that student learning in this program be assessed. Additionally, the University needs to ensure that students understand the importance and value of general education as it relates to their major. Thus, the team recommends that learning outcomes in the major reinforce those in general education and vice versa.
SECTION IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW

The team was pleased to see the progress that Woodbury has made in moving from the institutional proposal stage of WASC accreditation to the capacity stage. In preparation for the Educational Effectiveness visit, Woodbury needs to focus on several key challenges and, by the time of the next visit, to provide evidence that those challenges have been addressed. Chief among these is a focus on student learning assessment, as has already been noted in this report. The University will need to show, at the time of the Educational Effectiveness Review, that it uses the findings of faculty assessment activities, departmental self-studies, external review activities, and program reviews, to improve teaching and learning. To meet this goal, assessment plans and schedules need to be developed for the various program learning outcomes in each department and deadlines should be set for collection and discussion of student work.