Overview of the WASC Reaccreditation Process

The Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) is the final phase of the new three-part Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) reaccreditation process. Our last reaccreditation was in 1998 with a follow-up special visit in 2001 to address some particular issues related to assessment, faculty, finances, planning and technology. During this time the university developed its strategic plan for the first decade of the 21st century. This strategic plan has been continuously revised and updated, most recently in summer 2007.

The Institutional Proposal

We began the current reaccreditation process in February 2005, resulting in the completion of the first phase, the writing and submission of the Institutional Proposal (IP), in October 2005. The IP was prepared by the Woodbury Reaccreditation Steering Committee (WRSC): Barbara Bowley (chair), Ilene Blaisch, Claudia Campos, Paul Decker, Satinder Dhiman, Steve Dyer, Zelda Gilbert, Nick Roberts, David Rosen, and Randy Stauffer. The proposal promised that we would “present clear evidence that we have developed a culture of data collection, analysis, and forecasting to manage enrollment, develop budgets, review educational performance, and perform institutional and departmental planning at the strategic and operational levels.” (Italics added; Woodbury Institutional Proposal 2005, p. 5; the entire document can be found at http://web3.woodbury.edu/library/accred/docs/institutional_proposal.pdf)

According to the IP, the reaccreditation process would center around six outcomes:

1. “A refined university vision and mission” fitting our identity;
2. “greater alignment” of education and planning leading to controlled growth;
3. “more robust institutional inquiry,” a culture of assessment and accountability;
4. “use of data for institutional inquiry and quality,” including improved systems, collection, distribution, analysis
5. “improved” educational evaluation: learning outcomes and program review at the course, program and school level
This proposal was accepted by WASC and the second phase of the reaccredidation process, the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR), which is currently nearing completion, was begun in January 2006.

The Capacity and Performance Review

The CPR committee consisted of Steve Dyer (chair), Phyllis Cremer, Anne Ehrlich, Gerry Smulevich, Debra Abel, Jon Myers, Rao Chekuri, Greg Dotson, Linda King, Vanessa Payan, and Jerry Tracy. By mid-2006 WRSC had effectively handed over the reaccredidation process to the CPR committee and to David Rosen in his role as the university’s Accredidation Liaison Officer (ALO).

According to WASC, “to become and remain accredited, each institution is expected to demonstrate that it is committed to developing and sustaining Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness.” First of all, this means that the university can demonstrate a “Core Commitment to Institutional Capacity.” This commitment entails that “the institution functions with clear purposes, high levels of institutional integrity, fiscal stability, and organizational structures to fulfill its purposes... [considering] resource issues from a holistic perspective, and... capacity as an institutional attribute beyond minimum compliance and a review of assets.” (WASC Handbook of Accreditation 2001, 5; the whole handbook can be found at: http://www.wascenior.org/wasc/News-Events/NewandRevisedPolicies.htm)

In our IP, we saw that the issues behind the CPR included the ability to sustain growth and resources, to use “data more effectively” and to create “a climate of continuous improvement.” Our goals were to use the CPR process to help us renew our mission and vision; create “performance objectives for each unit” as well as “a greater capacity” to use data; and to institute “a mechanism for ongoing analysis” of resources and growth. (Woodbury Institutional Proposal 2005, p. 7)

The CPR phase conforms more closely to the previous method of accreditation in which universities demonstrated compliance to seven discrete yet interrelated standards. The new WASC model has reduced these standards to four:

1. Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives
2. Achieving Educational Objectives Through Core Functions
3. Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability
4. Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement
These Standards, according to WASC, “provide an opportunity to review institutional performance within a defined area [and] the framework of institutional capacity allows an institution to explore cross-cutting issues such as whether resources, structures and processes are aligned with the institution’s mission and priorities, and whether there is good evidence of effectiveness in their actual deployment. An important dimension of institutional capacity reflected in the Institutional Review cycle is the institution’s potential to define and sustain educational effectiveness.” (Italics added; WASC Handbook of Accreditation 2001, 5)

The CPR report is due to WASC at the end of December 2007 with a site visit scheduled for the end of February, 2008.

At the same time, the university revised its mission, values and identity statements as a result of the work of WRSC in late 2005 and early 2006. The results of the Identity Retreats, where much of the brainstorming for this change was worked out, are found in the current catalog (See Appendix 1).

The Educational Effectiveness Review

The task ahead of us is to complete the Educational Effectiveness Review. According to WASC, the idea of Educational Effectiveness centers on three principles:

“Articulating a Collective Vision of Educational Attainment

Centers on the degree to which the institution sets goals and obtains results for student learning at both the institutional and program levels that are:
- clearly stated and widely understood;
- appropriate for the type and level of the degree or credential offered; and
- adequately assessed to ascertain mastery of these levels.

Organizing for Learning

Centers on the alignment of appropriate institutional assets and characteristics with the goal of producing high levels of student learning, consistent with the mission of the institution, including:
- curriculum, pedagogy, and method of delivery;
- faculty recruitment, development, scholarship in support of improved teaching and learning, rewards, and incentives;
- organizational structures and processes;
- information resources and planning capacity;
- student services and co-curricular activities; and
- resources and facilities.
**Becoming a Learning Organization**

Centers on the degree to which the institution has developed systems—to assess its own performance and to use information to improve student learning over time—that:

- are systematic and regular;
- reinforce a climate of inquiry throughout the institution;
- reflect the input of stakeholders and an awareness of the distinctive characteristics of its students;
- identify key dimensions of performance that include student learning; and
- are based on standards of evidence that prominently feature educational results.”

(WASC Handbook of Accreditation 2001, 7-8)

Furthermore, the Handbook states that “the Educational Effectiveness Review is intended to ... invite sustained engagement by the institution on the extent to which the institution fulfills its educational objectives... [through developing] *clear and appropriate educational objectives and design at the institutional and program levels.*” In doing so we must show how we use program reviews and data collection at multiple levels of student development. The “specific purposes of the Educational Effectiveness Review” are to “review the design and results” of our academic program reviews, assessments and accreditation reports, including how we evaluate student learning, “to develop and share good practices” in how we use these results to improve our teaching and learning, “to examine the alignment of institutional resources” with educational objectives and activities, and “to promote sustained engagement with selected issues” regarding the effectiveness of our educational programs “consistent with Commission Standards.” (Italics in the original; WASC Handbook of Accreditation 2001, 44-45)

This language has been incorporated into our charge as a task force (see Appendix 2). The composition of the task force is also directed by the following: “In light of the primary emphasis placed on inquiry and engagement related to questions of teaching and learning in this Review, it is expected that *faculty will be deeply involved* in the design and implementation of the Educational Effectiveness Report and review process, as well as others at the institution connected to issues of Educational Effectiveness.” Thus the taskforce is composed of eight members, five of whom are full-time faculty (two professors, three associate professors, all with significant administrative responsibilities) and two of whom are adjunct faculty as well as senior administrators (an executive director and an associate vice president). Our mandate expires with the
submission of the report, which is due, “as developed and approved through the Proposal Review Process, normally [18] months following the Preparatory Review.” In our case, this is June 27, 2009. (Italics added; WASC Handbook of Accreditation 2001, 45; as amended)

In many ways our task is to assess our process of assessing our students’ learning and to examine our learning about their learning:

“The Educational Effectiveness Review is intended to enable institutions to explore topics or themes that are related to the institution’s own priorities and needs, with special emphasis on the assessment and improvement of student learning. The Commission Standards, especially Standards 2 and 4, serve as a frame for selecting topics to be examined in the course of the Educational Effectiveness Review. The format for the Educational Effectiveness Report will therefore vary significantly based upon the institutional context and model for review agreed upon through the Proposal Review Process. Examples of the most prominent models that have emerged from past WASC experimental visits are found on the WASC website (wascweb.org), along with their support contacts and material. Models for the Educational Effectiveness Review include:

1. Special Themes. Under this model, in addition to the required elements specified below, the institution will carefully select a limited number of topics for review in depth; identify expected areas of inquiry or researchable questions for each topic; select a methodology for engaging each topic; and carry out each investigation as a rigorous research-based study. Typically, three or more topics should be selected involving aspects of Educational Effectiveness. At least one of these must give explicit attention to student learning and be supported by concrete data on educational results;” (WASC Handbook of Accreditation 2001, 45)

This was the mode of review chosen by WRSC in our Institutional Proposal. Our special themes, as laid out in the IP, are:

1. “Institutional Identity:” to demonstrate our ability to “generate and share institutional information,” to create a clear picture of who we really are, and to develop a common vision and educational objectives;
2. “Institutional Alignment:” to be accomplished through the development of a Master Academic Plan (MAP) aligned with the University’s strategic plan and campus master plan with the MAP also used to adjust the latter two;
3. “Student Success:” a commitment to student success shown through creating detailed and systematic data collection and measurements, developing alumni tracking, and expanding the definition of learning to include a “holistic model” based on best practices of curricular and co-curricular programs under the guidance of a Student Success Task Force (SSTF); and

4. “Instructional Effectiveness:” through aligned assessment, program review and evaluation measures based on objectives and outcomes, guided by an Instructional Effectiveness Task Force that will explore the relationship between “modes of instruction in producing significant learning” and provide faculty with assessment tools and resources such as Educational Effectiveness Indicators (EEIs), the Institute of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (IETL), and electronic teaching portfolios. (Woodbury Institutional Proposal 2005, p. 7-11)

You can see that key elements of our current process: MAP, SSTF, our own EER (what is referred to above as the Instructional Effectiveness Task Force), and others are well underway. Our task is to take the big picture of all this, including the ways we assess student learning as part of our professional accreditation processes, and develop a perspective on the university as a whole, benefiting from our own intimate involvement in our own part of that whole. We are in effect charged with designing and writing a research project that incorporates all of these dimensions, generating hypotheses that are supportable by our data collection, and showing that what we claim to do for our students in terms of educational performance is what we (and our students) actually do.

Prepared by Douglas J. Cremer
October 30, 2007
Appendix 1

“MISSION STATEMENT

Woodbury University is committed to providing the highest level of professional and liberal arts education. The integrated nature of our educational environment cultivates successful students with a strong and enduring sense of personal and social responsibility. We prepare innovative learners who are adept at communicating and willing to cross the boundaries of knowledge in a rapidly changing and complex world.

IDEALS

- Integrity and ethical behavior
- Diversity
- Empowering students to determine and manage their own destinies
- Academic rigor
- Liberal arts-based professional education that effectively prepares students for careers
- Student focus in all aspects of its operations

EDUCATIONAL GOALS

The members of the Woodbury community have identified six principles that articulate more precisely what is necessary for the University to achieve its mission:

- Academic Quality...
- Innovation and Creativity...
- Communication...
- Transdisciplinarity...
- Social Responsibility...
- The Integrated Student…”

(Woodbury University Undergraduate Catalog, 2007-08, p. 1; the catalog can be found at http://www.woodbury.edu/s/131/index.aspx?sid=131&gid=1&pgid=1103)
Appendix 2

COMMITTEE NAME: Educational Effectiveness Review Task Force
Type: University (WASC Accreditation)
Status: Ad Hoc (until EER report submitted to WASC by July 27, 2009.)
Current Chairs: Doug Cremer; Paul Decker

Reports to/Recommends to: Accreditation Liaison Officer

Mission/Charge: To invite sustained engagement by the institution on the extent to which the institution fulfills its educational objectives. Through a process of inquiry and engagement, the Educational Effectiveness Review also is designed to enable the Commission to make a judgment about the extent that the institution fulfills its Core Commitment to Educational Effectiveness: The institution evidences clear and appropriate educational objectives and design at the institutional and program levels, and employs processes of review, including the collection and use of data, that assure the delivery of programs and learner accomplishments at a level of performance appropriate for the degree or certificate awarded.

Functions/Duties/Activities:
1. To review the design and results of institutional efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of educational programs;
2. To examine institutional practices for evaluating student learning and to develop and share good practices in using educational results to improve the process of teaching and learning;
3. To examine the alignment of institutional resources with activities designed to achieve the institution’s educational objectives; and
4. To promote sustained engagement with selected issues of Educational Effectiveness consistent with Commission Standards. These will have already been identified by the institution and approved through the Proposal Review Process. The institution is encouraged to select issues of importance to itself in this process, so the Review will be of maximum local utility.

(The “Charge” and “Functions” are quoted from WASC Handbook 2001, 45-46)
5. Help with preparation and submission of the EER report.

Membership
Composition: Representatives of key faculty and university groups: Schools, Institutes, and Office of Student Development (Institute of Transdisciplinary Studies, School of Business, School of Media, Culture & Design, School of Architecture, Office of Student Development, Institute of Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Office Institutional Research and Assessment, Dean of the Faculty)
Selection: Appointment by Chairs in consultation with the ALO.

Term: Until EER report submitted to WASC by July 27, 2009

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