WASC-CPR HIGHLIGHTS

There is room for progress in analyzing data and using it in decision-making. (6)

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… 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. (6)

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). (6)

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. (8)

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. (9)

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. (10)

*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* (11)

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). (11-12)

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. (13)

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. (13)

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). (13)

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). (14)

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. (14)

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. (15)

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. (15)

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. (15)

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. (16)

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. (20)

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). (20)

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. (22)

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. (23)

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). (24)

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). (24-5)

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 happening? How can the institution support improvements in these trends? (25)

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. (25)

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. (25-6)

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? (26)

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. (28)

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. (28)

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. (29)