INSTITUTIONAL PROPOSAL

Woodbury University

prepared for

Western Association of Schools and Colleges
Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities

August 2005
Institutional Proposal
Submitted to the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)

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Institutional Context Statement

The community of faculty, staff, students, and administration at Woodbury University feels that Woodbury is an extraordinary place, different in ways that we have not yet adequately described and full of possibilities that we have not yet fully realized. Much of the promise comes from a strong history that provides a definite institutional trajectory and a strong underlying set of values embodied by the faculty.

In 1884, entrepreneur and educational pioneer Mr. Francis Chute Woodbury founded a college in downtown Los Angeles. The mission of Woodbury Business College (as it was initially named) was to increase the economic capacity of the region by providing education in key areas of business. In 1931, the college created a division of professional arts to support an emergent economy centered on entertainment and design. In 1974, Woodbury College became Woodbury University and added Architecture to its professional degrees in 1984. In 1987 Woodbury University moved to a 22.4-acre campus in Burbank where today it still retains its earliest commitment to growing the economic capacity of the Southern California region.

Through the years of punctuated equilibrium in Woodbury University’s educational evolution, the institution has adhered to core principles. The University offers a rigorous professional education that is grounded in the liberal arts. It takes place in an environment that values diverse people and viewpoints, that nurtures and empowers its students, and that promotes a sense of community informed by strong ethical values and social responsibility.

One change with which Woodbury University still deals occurred in 1972, when for-profit Woodbury College became a not-for-profit institution. While Woodbury’s strength flows from its historical sense of purpose and the principles that have persisted, its greatest weakness arises from never having fully embraced this change.

Woodbury University is unique among private institutions with regard to its diversity. U.S. News ranks it the fifth most diverse Masters II institution in the western region. During the 2004-05 academic year, Woodbury University enrolled 39% white, non-Hispanic students. It also enrolled 36% Hispanic students, 6% African-American, 12% Asian, and 7% International. The white, non-Hispanic students comprise diverse populations as well, including 30% Armenian. The majority of Woodbury’s students come from families of limited economic means, and they are the first in their families to go to college.

In serving this group of students and in striving to fill a role in the economic history of Southern California, Woodbury’s faculty has been called upon to be innovative, dedicated, and socially responsible. Woodbury’s ambition is to provide intellectual and human capital to the region that helps develop the emergent sectors of business, to offer opportunities to those who have the most to contribute but who have been traditionally marginalized, to offer its students a world-class education, and to sustain a socially responsible community that examines and tries to preserve the important ecologies of our region’s nature, society, and culture.

In March 2001 a special visit focused on five areas of concern: Financial Viability; Assessment and Program Review; Planning; Faculty; and Technology. In each case problems in those areas appear to have arisen from an imperfect transition from Woodbury’s past to its present. For instance, the university lacked an endowment that could help support operations and offer a measure of financial security. The university has advanced significantly from that phase by reaching the $10 million goal in its endowment and by having bolstered the staff and operations in the advancement area. Another area of concern was the heavy reliance on part-time faculty, which was a staple of the for-profit model and viewed then, as