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1. 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 view points, 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 well as now, as giving students access to real world experience. Perhaps the most pervasive concern, however, dealt with the institutions’ difficulties in developing a culture of data collection, analysis and forecast that could be seen in the management of enrollments, the development of budgets, the reviews of educational performance, and the ongoing institutional and departmental planning at the strategic and operational levels.

While many of the specific problems have been addressed and while various units of the university can show great improvement, larger issues that led to the problem are just beginning to find effective solutions at the institutional level.

It will come as no surprise, then, that the themes identified by the community in this current proposal all echo previous problems and look to create enduring mechanisms for continuous improvement. Woodbury needs to solve these most basic problems that threaten to compromise the university’s ability to function effectively in the future.

Woodbury has been successful in creating programs such as Architecture and Interior Design, which have grown to capacity; it has also achieved regional and national prominence and has graduated unusually successful students. The pressures for resources and for the assurance of consistent quality make pursuing the themes outlined below absolutely necessary.

2. Description of Outcomes

The re-accreditation process will allow Woodbury University to transform itself more fully and thus prepare the university for greater advances in the future. The community has formulated the following outcomes as those most desirable and most crucial:

1. Evaluate Woodbury’s Educational Mission and Core Values in light of an emerging educational identity. Though the University’s current mission and core values adequately reflect Woodbury’s institutional goals in a broad sense, they are not necessarily reflective of Woodbury’s emerging educational identity, as has been seen our institutional self-review. In light of this, the mission and core values of the University will need to be evaluated and redefined so that the framework for creating and developing departmental and programmatic missions, objectives, policies and procedures will become clearer and more structured. (See Themes #1 & #4)

2. Develop and implement a more effective teaching-learning environment at Woodbury by building on assessment of student learning outcomes. Although individual programs provide models of assessment, the university will develop university-wide standards and tools of assessment for student-learning outcomes in order to create a learning environment based upon a “culture of evidence.” The data obtained from our assessments will be used for individual program improvement, cross-curricular improvement, and faculty development. (See Themes #2 & #3)

3. Develop a clearer relationship between the university structure and the university’s goals of learning and improvement. The university will clarify the relationship and responsibilities of the different parts of its hierarchy and structure as they are brought to bear on the central enterprise of the university. Objectives of each part of the structure will clearly identify how their responsibilities advance student learning, increase the institutional body of knowledge, and can be held accountable to programs of assessment. This will allow the university to align its organizational and departmental structures, as well as policies and procedures, with the vision and mission of Woodbury University. (See Themes #1 & #4)

4. Encourage a recursive process of institutional inquiry, assessment and accountability. Based upon the institutional self-review, the university has determined that the collection and deployment of data is deficient at Woodbury University and must be improved to ensure future success. Therefore, it is the University’s intention to evaluate and adopt a model of cyclical inquiry, evaluation, and accountability that will sustain ongoing institutional advancement. (See Themes #1 and #4)

5. Create a greater degree of alignment between strategic priorities and the deployment of institutional resources (including prospective substantial contributions). The planning of appropriate instructional design and programs that are conducive to actively pursuing university goals and objectives are only a part of the equation that makes for a functional institution of higher
education. Another equally important part of the equation involves the facilities, physical resources, and human resources that allow for the educational process to thrive and flourish at a fundamentally sound level. Alignment between institutional priorities and the financial planning and fiscal responsibilities of the institution are necessary to ensure Woodbury’s success into the future. Therefore, the university will review current procedures for capacity planning and to make revisions in order to ensure future success. (See Theme #4)

3. Constituency Involvement

From the rollout of the process onward, the WASC reaccreditation effort has been characterized by involvement of a broad range of constituents and has been shaped significantly by the efforts of the faculty.

In May 2004, the community was alerted to the new process of accreditation. In August 2004, the faculty were invited to a workshop keynoted by Scott Evenbeck, one of AAC&U’s SAGE consultants. The invitation stated the workshop was particularly important “because it intersects with the commencement of our WASC review”:

Under the new WASC guidelines, the community, with the faculty helping to lead, identifies three to five projects that will improve students’ success. Greater Expectations is one of the frames for WASC’s new standards and creates an important framework for our efforts to institutionalize a culture of continuous improvement that accreditation now demands and that we would desire even without that demand.

In the fall, the CAO selected Barbara Bowley to lead the reaccreditation effort and to chair the WASC Reaccreditation Steering Committee (WRSC) and planning for the rollout of the effort began.

In January the chair of WRSC, the ALO, the Dean of Arts and Sciences, and the VP for Enrollment Management attended the WASC workshop on reaccreditation. A plan was formed to orient the community to the new culture of accreditation. The first presentation was made to the Faculty Senate in January 2005, with a discussion of the ongoing involvement of faculty leadership in the planning and preparation of the reaccreditation effort. It was decided that the WRSC Chair would report at each Faculty Senate meeting and request input from the Senate on an ongoing basis.

In February 2005, a town hall meeting was convened with faculty, staff, and administrators. The event introduced the community to the reaccreditation process and the development of the university as a learning institution with a culture of assessment and continuous improvement. The meeting also provided the first opportunity for data gathering for the Institutional Self-Review. A detailed qualitative survey instrument was administered at the meeting in the spirit of Appreciative Inquiry in order to assess community knowledge and attitudes toward factors key to reaccreditation. Participants were asked to identify unique aspects of the Woodbury culture, to reflect on their experiences with student learning, and to determine essential factors which could help improve our institutional quality. The survey was e-mailed to the community. A total of 44 responses were received and the data were used by WRSC in their Institutional Self-Review.

The Steering Committee was developed from key areas: five members from faculty, one from Student Affairs, one from University Advancement, and one from administration. The individuals were identified because of their capacity to work from an institution-wide perspective as well as their complementary strengths. For instance, the administrator was the CIO who had led the last strategic plan, while the representative from Student Affairs was the person most directly aware of the student development issues at the university.

To set the stage for Institutional Self-Review the committee was given a wide array of readings on the WASC reaccreditation process including trends and best practices in higher education, works on the concepts of liberal education, and the Greater Expectations initiative, among others. They also read the reports from WASC’s 1998 and 2001 visit and completed the Criteria for Review Worksheet in order to develop goals and outcomes for reaccreditation. A modified Delphi technique was used to extract the goals and outcomes from their list of priorities, a plan of work was established, and by March the reaccreditation website was developed as an area to document the process. The group developed a set of preliminary Themes in time for the WASC Annual meeting, which all of
Because it became clear early on in the Self-Review that there is a need to achieve institution-wide agreement on the educational objectives of the university, the WRSC Chair began to convene bimonthly meetings of the Academic Chairs beginning in March. The group reviewed the Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators and was given readings on the generally educated person. At their second meeting the group approved a set of institutional educational objectives derived from the Greater Expectations initiative as a guiding document and a first step toward developing institution-level alignment of educational objectives. The Academic Chairs will continue to meet and develop plans for issues such as program review and educational assessment, and will play a fundamental role in the Educational Effectiveness Review.

Continued communication of progress and development of feedback from all levels of the community has taken place in the first three months of the Institutional Self-Review. The President’s Council has been briefed on the emergent themes for reaccreditation, and they have been apprised of the need to build greater capacity for data collection and analysis. Regular reports by the WRSC Chair are planned. The WRSC Chair has also been appointed to the President’s Budget Advisory Committee, bringing specific recommendations for building institutional capacity in the 2005-2006 fiscal year, and these have risen to the levels of top priorities for the upcoming budget planning cycle.

After it attends the WASC Annual meeting, WRSC will hold a town hall meeting for faculty, staff, and students to comment on the four proposed themes. WRSC will also present the reaccreditation process at the next meeting of the Board’s Committee on Academic and Student Affairs. Ongoing meetings with the Dean’s Council are planned to foster a link between reaccreditation efforts and educational effectiveness across programs. Also student focus groups will be formed to provide input on specific actions derived from the Themes, especially around the uses of teaching effectiveness, student success, and institutional capacity.

To increase the overall faculty level of understanding of assessment in course design, this year’s workshop for all full-time and part-time faculty members will feature Dr. L. Dee Fink, Past-President of the POD Network, who will provide the faculty with skills in course design that fosters deep learning, including how to assess that learning. This will vastly increase the overall skill level of the faculty in assessment techniques. Ongoing efforts are also planned for the Institute for Excellence in Teaching and Learning to assist faculty with assessment and program review.

4. Approach for the Preparatory Review

(This section should describe how the institution intends to address the Core Commitment to Institutional Capacity. Flowing from the institution’s stated outcomes for this stage of the Review, this section should explain the approach the institution intends to use to conduct its self-review under the Standards of Accreditation (including, as appropriate, the Criteria for Review and Guidelines), and identify any special issues or areas of emphasis with respect to Institutional Capacity.)

(To be completed)

The University has developed a website that serves to communicate information about reaccreditation progress, ensure accountability, and to store data essential for the reaccreditation effort. The progress of each stage of WASC reaccreditation will be documented on the website, along with WASC responses. The site also includes essential readings on assessment, trends in higher education, and WASC reaccreditation materials. The website can be found at http://web3.woodbury.edu/library/id/accred/accred.html.

The website will also serve as a way to show the alignment of University reaccreditation with strategic planning and resource allocation and program review. Some key performance data are already available through the website, including basic descriptive data and the Common Data Set. Other information that will be included in the website will be emerging policies and assessment data relating to the four WASC Standards.

5. Approach for the Educational Effectiveness Review
Woodbury University will employ WASC’s Special Themes approach for our Educational Effectiveness review. We were attracted to this approach because, as WASC (2003) notes, it is “…useful to institutions which are just beginning to establish their institution-wide systems of assessment related to teaching and learning.” The process of Institutional Self-Review has shown us the scope of work we need to accomplish based on our core commitment to educational effectiveness, and we feel this is best expressed through four themes. These themes reflect our desire to focus efforts on both teaching and learning, on the development of the whole student, and the need to build systems of evidence and accountability to ensure educational effectiveness.

Through the exploration of the selected themes, Woodbury foresees the following outcomes:

1) A clearer educational identity;
2) More effective instruction;
3) A stronger focus on producing successful students; and
4) Greater alignment between educational aims and the institution’s strategic planning and resource allocation.

Theme #1: Educational Identity

Woodbury University is an institution that has been undergone considerable change throughout its recent past. What was once considered primarily a business school has now become a university with a diverse educational agenda, focusing on majors from architecture and design to politics and history. Although the university’s constituents are aware of the evolution of the curriculum, a formal review of what this evolution means for the university’s current identity has not been undertaken. Based upon the Institutional Self-Review performed by the WASC Reaccreditation Steering Committee, as well as feedback from the faculty and staff, it seems that Woodbury needs to more specifically establish the institution’s identity and its educational objectives. Without a complete review of what elements make-up Woodbury’s educational identity, it will be difficult to create and achieve the goals and objectives necessary to ensure Woodbury’s future success it its core commitments.

In order to give this theme a researchable framework in which to produce viable outcomes, it is necessary to establish a hypothesis:

Hypothesis: Due to the institutional and pedagogical changes Woodbury University has gone through in the recent past, its educational identity and educational objectives have also changed, even though a thorough account of this change has not yet taken place.

Action #1

Perform an analysis of the characteristics of the student body as they might relate to the educational identity of the university.

This action will require an evaluation of the educational, economic, and cultural backgrounds of all of the incoming and current students of Woodbury University. Although some assessment is already in place, the institution in its recent past has not undergone a systematic investigation into this arena. To aid in the understanding of what our data mean, our research should be placed in the framework of the current literature on trends in higher education. Through this evaluation, the University should gain invaluable insights into its student body make-up that can be used in reassessing and updating current educational missions, policies, and procedures.

Action #2

Research and develop an institutional historical narrative in order to account for the factors that contributed to Woodbury University’s current identity.

History has the distinct ability to inform both current and future situations. In light of the Institutional Self Review, it is clear that our current institutional challenges are not necessarily unique in academe, but the context for these challenges is not informed by a view of our institutional history. Woodbury University is an institution with a history that reflects its numerous successes and adversities, but there is not currently a record of our story that can inform our current perspectives and decision-making processes. Therefore, in order to remedy this situation, WRSC has determined that an institutional history would be immeasurably beneficial in guiding the University in its future endeavors.

Action #3
Undertake a review of Woodbury University’s institutional mission.

Like many other smaller institutions of higher education, Woodbury University has an identity that cannot be defined by sweeping generalizations of what a university is supposed to be. But in order to ensure its core commitment to educational effectiveness, it is vital for the university to take account of its own educational policies and to make sure that they are functioning optimally. This action should be informed by both Actions #1 and #2. The institutional mission, educational objectives, and core values will all need to be reviewed in order to appropriately align the core principles of the University with its educational environment. This reassessment will require participation from the faculty, students, staff, and the Board of Trustees of the University as well as any other constituents who have a stake in the current and future success of Woodbury University. By ensuring that Woodbury’s educational mission is current, accurate, and informed by research, it can be more effectively used when planning for current and future allocations of University resources.

Theme #2: Instructional Effectiveness

The faculty’s dedication to educating Woodbury’s students is a point of institutional pride. However, an institution-wide culture of assessment has yet to be developed to ensure effectiveness in teaching and learning. Because we value the education of our students, we look to assess and continually improve the ways in which instructional content is delivered. Through the process of affirming its core commitment to educational effectiveness, Woodbury University will become much more structured and cyclical in its review processes. This theme will culminate in the development and assessment of teaching paradigms that reinforce the development of a generally educated person and is informed by the educational identity of the university.

Hypothesis: Woodbury University’s instructional effectiveness is in need of improvement with regard to assessment, standardization, and modes of delivery.

Action #1

Explore optimal modes of instruction consistent with the University’s educational identity. This involves the delivery of instruction within the classroom environment, including collaborative and studio models.

As the landscape of higher education evolves, the importance of assessing instructional effectiveness in higher education becomes more apparent. Woodbury University will embark on a review of the needs of the current generation of students as reflected in our emerging educational identity, and develop optimal modes of instructional delivery according to this assessment. This evaluation will take place throughout the institution and in a manner in which communication between departments will be required and documented. Another important component of the assessment of instructional effectiveness will be that the results of this evaluation will be institutionalized.

Action #2

Perform a comprehensive program review.

As it stands, academic departments do perform program reviews, but they are done in within the context of their own discipline’s accreditation needs. As an institution that is turning its focus to a culture of standardized and continued assessment, Woodbury University will implement a policy of program review that adheres to standard models that reflect both the entire institution as well as individual departments. Program reviews will need to be much more collaborative and evidence-driven so that the University as a whole is able to move forward in improving its educational effectiveness rather than department by department.

Action #3

Develop the ability of faculty to deliver instruction based on standardized parameters of assessment and with regard to the institution’s educational objectives and desired learning outcomes.

Based upon the outcomes of Action #1, the faculty and staff will require development activities and rewards for their endeavors to institute meaningful educational assessment. Retreats, workshops, and collaborative meetings will be required of current and future faculty in order to ensure that a culture of educational effectiveness will be both significant
and institutionally appreciated and implemented.

Action #4

Develop mechanisms for assessing teaching effectiveness, which may include, but is not necessarily limited to, faculty portfolios.

As a means of assessment, faculty will need to prove that they have been involved in the improvement of their effectiveness as educators. Woodbury University values its devoted and capable faculty and will provide means to show they are accountable to the quality education of students. Means of assessment will provide the University with evidence that progress is taking place both individually and institutionally. Preliminary investigations into this action have steered the University toward implementing a system of standardized electronic portfolios for faculty, which will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Theme #3: Successful Student Development

This theme will involve the development of successful curricular and co-curricular practice that takes into account the personal development and personal mastery of the whole student. It includes an extension of the definition of holistic student development into the arenas of alumni satisfaction and success. Although this theme is similar to Theme #2 with regard to expected outcomes from our research and assessment, the focus of this theme shifts from the faculty to the students who will be the recipients of the improved effectiveness in their education. Our plan in focusing on this theme is to determine institutionally accepted norms that are indicative of student success, both within the context of the unique Woodbury environment and the greater educational, professional, and global community.

Hypothesis: Woodbury lacks both a universally accepted definition of what constitutes “student success” as well as evidence that it is in fact producing successful students through the educational process.

Action #1

Define “student success” in the Woodbury environment, taking into account research on best practices, as well as the unique Woodbury culture.

This action requires that Woodbury University, in relation to Theme #1, introspectively determines its own definition of student success based on the evaluation of its educational identity and in the context of definitions of student success accepted by the greater community of higher education. Woodbury University is very proud of its unique place in the educational landscape.

Action #2

Develop mechanisms of formative and summative assessment based upon best practices identified in Action #1.

In moving toward a culture based upon evidence, Woodbury University perceives a need to create mechanisms that yield a variety of information from its students that indicate how their development is taking shape as they progress in their learning career. This information cannot simply be limited to traditional means of assessment such as grades. Instead, instruments of measurement are required that extend beyond their graded work, which displays the culmination of a students educational experience as well as how their experience is taking shape as they travel down their respective educational paths. In our preliminary research, we have determined that the most appealing form of this instrument is manifest in electronic portfolios that match a proven means of assessment to a technologically progressive medium.

Action #3

Develop alumni tracking systems.

The alumni of Woodbury University can potentially yield a vast amount of information with regards to what we expect student success to embody as well as what changes need to be made institutionally in order to improve the development of student success. As it stands, the University has much work to do in gathering and analyzing alumni data. It has been deemed necessary to not only to track current alumni of the university, but also to put systems in place that continue to track this population. Tracking will take the form of quantitative and qualitative survey instruments as well as continued outreach and alumni activities planned for by University Advancement. An expected outcome
from this action will be more involvement and loyalty from the alumni population.

Theme #4: Institutional Alignment

This theme requires that the university makes certain that the allocation of resources in all areas of the institution are based on a strategic academic plan which is in line with the educational identity, objectives, and mission of the university. This will be attained through the systematic collection and assessment of data pertaining to resource management at all levels of the institution. A desired outcome that will be produced by this theme is all of the University’s departments will be held accountable to the whole institution and its vision of future educational success.

Hypothesis: In order to be more effective as an institution of higher education, Woodbury University must become accountable by creating “culture of evidence” at an institutional level, which will in effect allow for the proper planning for and allocation of its resources.

Action #1

Develop a “culture of evidence” derived from assessment of performance to enable sound planning and allocation of resources.

Like many rapidly evolving institutions, Woodbury University has encountered problems with regards to the allocation of resources that could have been avoided with more robust strategic planning. This problem will persist unless the University sets in place a system of institutional assessment, one in which evidence for resource allocation is both collected and analyzed on a continual basis. This information will also be made widely known so that a system of accountability will also be set in motion. It is believed that by setting in place mechanisms that allow for proper collection and analysis that the University’s resources will be more properly utilized. By more effectively managing its resources, the University will be able to move forward more purposefully and more fluidly as an institution of higher education.

Action #2

Review the existing strategic plan to determine those parts that reinforce assessment based upon a “culture of evidence” and those that may need amending to further strengthen these goals.

Action #3

Ensure the alignment of strategic decision making with the University’s evolving education identity educational aims.

6. Workplan and Milestones.

Timeline

December 2007 Completion of Institutional Self-Study for Preparatory Review
Spring 2008 Preparatory Review site visit.
December 2008 Completion of Institutional Self-Study for Educational Effectiveness Review
Spring 2009 Educational Effectiveness site visit.

WRSC will remain responsible for guiding the reaccreditation effort. The Academic Chairs Group will play a key role in establishing educational effectiveness indicators for the institution and guiding program review across the institution in order to maintain alignment with the University’s educational aims. The Senate will continue to serve as a one of the primary conduits for faculty input in the reaccreditation process. Other constituent committees will be tapped for their expertise during the process.

As Peter Ewell indicates in his 2004 report for WASC, an institution must have evidence to collect before it can become a learning organization. Because the University has significant work to accomplish to establish data collection and analysis that is robust enough to support the reaccreditation effort, a special Preparatory Review Committee will be empanelled to oversee this process. The Committee, composed of the Institutional Researcher, IT staff, faculty and a Cabinet member, will be charged with the development of a system of policies and procedures that will lead to enhanced capacity for the use of data in decision-making throughout the institution.

Task forces focusing on the themes will be established as soon as the Institutional Proposal is approved. These task forces will be chaired by a WRSC member and will oversee the development of the themes through the Educational Effectiveness Review.
7. Effectiveness of Data Gathering and Analysis Systems

Since the 2001 WASC visit, Woodbury has made progress in the collection and organization of institutional data. 2004-2005 represents the first academic year in which Woodbury has operated with a Student Information System. The SIS has made possible increased standardization of comprehensive student enrollment data collection. The hiring of a CIO in spring 2003 has enabled the SIS to function effectively as a basis for the use of student data, and the development of an Institute for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in spring 2004 has furthered faculty understanding of classroom assessment techniques.

Even as a result of the Institutional Self-Review process, improvements have been made in the standardization of data gathering, including financial data and student population characteristics. In the area of learning outcomes assessment, pockets of good data collection and analysis exist, in which data gathering in some programs is comprehensive and data are used recursively to improve practice.

However, the Universality needs to build substantially greater capacity in institutional data gathering and deployment as a foundation for becoming a learning institution. Planned for 2005-2006 are the hiring of an institutional researcher, (one of the year’s top budget priorities), as well as the purchase of and institutional assessment software system and e-portfolio software, for both students and faculty. These resources will be supported by continued community education in the culture of evidence, which has already begun through the Institutional Self-Review.

The Board of Trustees has directed the president and the administration to develop Key Performance Indicators for each department. In addition, however, a culture of accountability will need to be fostered and resources will be needed to further develop the academic units in the process of learning outcomes assessment. These issues will be fundamental to the Capacity and Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness review.

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