

Overview

The NEASC visiting team will arrive on the campus of Roger Williams University in the midst of our 50th Anniversary Celebration. In truth, as a four-year college and as a university we are much younger. The 50th anniversary celebrates 1956 as the year of our Charter as a non-residential junior college based in Providence. However, the institution actually became a four year baccalaureate granting institution in 1967, and only in 1969 did our first students move to the campus in what was then rural Bristol. Since that time our history has been one of rapid and continuous growth and change.

In 1996, the year of our last full NEASC accreditation visit, Roger Williams was still a fledgling university already experiencing rapid change. Roger Williams College had been renamed a University only two years earlier with the opening of Rhode Island's only law school. In fact, the school's entire academic structure, with separate colleges, an administrative system with academic deans, and a faculty with rank and tenure, was still fairly new. The only advanced degree the school offered was the professional degree in law. That year, the small liberal arts university had an enrollment of 2,215 full-time undergraduates and 116 full-time and 82 part-time faculty. At this time, the school's endowment was embryonic at \$28.5 million, and annual donations averaged less than \$600,000. A number of capital projects had been recently completed, including the construction of a new University Library and a Student Services building. Academic programs were also under review, with the University Core Curriculum introduced as the new general education requirement.

Since 1996, the pace of change has accelerated, driven in part by the rapid growth in the size of the student body, which in turn has led to growth in every other area: faculty and staff, facilities, budgets, endowment, and academic programs and offerings. Today the University employs approximately 1,550 faculty and staff and enrolls nearly 4,000 full-time students and 1,500 part-time students. The size of the full-time faculty has grown to almost 200. Its current endowment has reached \$90 million, and annual donations for the past year topped \$7 million. Academic offerings have grown to 35 undergraduate majors and seven graduate degrees (Law, Architecture, Education (2), Justice Studies, Public Administration, and, this fall, Forensic Psychology) through eight colleges:

- Feinstein College of Arts and Sciences
- College of Continuing Studies
- School of Architecture, Art and Historic Preservation
- Gabelli School of Business
- School of Education
- School of Engineering, Computing and Construction Management
- School of Justice Studies
- Ralph R. Papitto School of Law

The University has expanded globally as well, with a Study Abroad center in Florence, international initiatives in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Turkey, and a high percentage of students participating in Study Abroad programs all over the globe.

This growth in size has been accompanied by a growth in quality. Over the past decade many of our programs have sought and received accreditation from their professional organizations. Most recently this included approvals for the schools of business and law to join two elite groups, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business and the Association of American Law Schools. Today we have more accomplished students and a growing faculty that each year is better credentialed and more professionally engaged. The University has also grown in public recognition and reputation. This recognition has led to a much larger applicant pool and, despite a markedly lower admission rate and expansion of the size of the student body, we today have a student body which comes to us with better high school records and test scores than ever in our history.

This rapid growth has not been without its challenges. It has created pressure on every area of the University. There has been pressure for more student housing, graduate and undergraduate, expanded dining and recreational facilities, more classrooms, improved academic support and information, and more faculty offices. It has also meant that administrative systems that suited a small college needed to be transformed and new systems developed where formerly personal relationships and a phone call were sufficient. It has also raised scholarly expectations for both our academic programs and for our faculty. We have been challenged to transform a small campus into a center of activity providing a variety of educational, cultural, athletic, recreational and support possibilities for an increasingly diverse student population.

In the area of facilities, the University's development has completed a number of major capital projects including:

- Construction of the Marine and Natural Sciences Building
- Expansion of the administration building
- Construction of the 500 bed Bayside Apartment Complex
- Construction of the Stonewall Housing complex with 380 beds
- Construction of a new 124,000-square-foot recreation center and swimming pool
- Addition of nearly two dozen high-tech classrooms throughout campus
- Creation of two state-of-the-art trading rooms in the Gabelli School of Business
- Renovation of the North campus, with new offices for HR, facilities and public safety
- Creation of a learning platform in Mount Hope Bay for research and teaching purposes.
- Leasing the Baypoint Conference Center in Portsmouth adding offices and housing for 230 students
- Opening of a 330-space campus parking deck
- Newly smoothed playing fields for athletics
- Creation of new classroom space in the former Student Union
- Launch of a 44,800 gross-square-foot Dining Commons for students and faculty
- Upgrading students housing in several units on campus

Some of these initiatives were the result of the installation of our eighth President Roy J. Nirschel in 2001. Shortly after arriving, President Nirschel initiated a round of strategic planning meetings which drew together constituencies from across the

campus. Out of these meetings came a redefinition and focusing of our core values, a set of strategic goals and a number of initiatives which, with some additions and corrections, have been our road map for the past five years. Through it we reaffirmed our identity as a liberal university, combining the practical focus of professional programs with the breadth of the traditional liberal arts. We also affirmed other values that are part of our philosophy of what it means to be educated in the 21st century.

A focus on global experience and learning, for instance, led to the creation of the Center for Global and International Programs; a new emphasis on Study Abroad and on bringing international students to campus through recruitment and through international programs; the development of more foreign language options; initiatives to “bridge the world” such as the initiative to education Afghan Women and the collaboration with the American Pacific University in Vietnam; and our joining the Rescue Scholar and State Department Plus Programs. It continues today with our current effort to assess the state of globalization in the curriculum.

We are a stronger and better institution than we were ten years ago. We have a clearer sense of our identity. The rapid expansion and change we have experienced has been both exciting and unsettling. While we are proud of our nimbleness and openness to new ideas and opportunities, the changes that have occurred at RWU have not always been smoothly implemented, completely understood, or universally accepted or applauded. After our last 5th year interim report, NEASC asked for a focused visit in the areas of strategic planning and governance because our work in these areas had not kept pace with our growth. The report that resulted from this visit was a very positive one but was a reminder of the importance of planning for growth and building the infrastructure to sustain it.

More is expected of us today as a university than was expected of us in the past. This is as true of each of the University’s component parts as it is of the institution as a whole. The last decade has been a very successful one, but we know that the future will offer many challenges as our enhanced size and status moves us to a new Carnegie definition and with it a more a demanding set of peer institutions. We know as well that in the near future the demographics in our region will shift away from the type of students who have made up the bulk of our student body and we must be prepared for that shift.

As we mature as an institution, we must be prepared to face these new challenges even while we are still adjusting to our recent growth. To that end, the University’s planning efforts are focusing on:

- A comprehensive campus master plan
- major construction projects for both academics and student life
- continued enhancement of our assessment efforts
- relocation on campus of parts of at least three of our schools
- redesigning of the University Library as a “learning commons” with an integration of information technology services and academic development services
- stabilizing of undergraduate enrollment
- refocusing and expansion of continuing education and graduate programs

- enhancement of the cultural and artistic life on campus
- a continued focus on the quality of all our academic programs
- clarification of procedures and expectations for faculty development
- expansion of our development and alumni fund raising efforts

This partial list is an indication of how we are planning for our future and how we are attempting to put the structures in place that will not only support our past growth but also prepare us to be a stronger institution in years to come.

The following is a brief summary of the contents of each standard:

Standard 1: Mission and Purposes

Roger Williams University combines the strengths of a small liberal arts institution with the benefits of a comprehensive university – integrating liberal and professional education. In 2002 the President led a cross-section of the University community in a planning process that confirmed its central core values: love of learning, preparation for careers and further study, collaborative undergraduate research, community service, and an appreciation of global perspectives. The mission statement was widely discussed by the entire community, revised according to that discussion, approved by the Board of Trustees in 2005, and widely disseminated to the university.,

Standard 2: Planning and Evaluation

The University has improved methods of planning and evaluation and communication of decisions since 2001. A strategic planning initiative resulted in a 2002 report by presidential task forces composed of a cross-section of University constituents. In 2004-2005 progress on the strategic plan was reviewed. Via the president's strategic updates, planning recommendations are prioritized. Capital and operating budget processes were aligned with the overall plan and a revised organization structure, including new administrative positions have been achieved. Recognizing the scope and speed of positive change, improved awareness of plans or projects being implemented is anticipated. Better coordination between academic assessment and program review processes is underway.

Standard 3: Organization and Governance

The University is developing both the decision-making models and communication processes that are necessary to improve its ability to fulfill its mission in an efficient and productive manner. Many committees that have curricular impact now have memberships that combine administrators and faculty members, furthering the University's commitment to a shared governance model. As defined within the most recent faculty union contract, faculty and University administration will continue to articulate expectations for the evaluation of teaching and research through the shared governance embodied in the new Faculty Review Committees and Merit Review Committees. Institutional governance has been strengthened by the reconstituted Faculty Senate. The administrative Steering Committee, senior staff meetings, Deans Council (for academic program management), and a recently-formed Graduate Council provide a variety of means for institutional governance and communication

Standard 4: The Academic Program

Undergraduate and graduate programs are conducted via eight academic entities (five professional schools, the Feinstein College of Arts and Sciences, the School of Continuing Education, and the School of Law). The School of Continuing Studies oversees the part-time and degree completion undergraduate programs. The Ralph Papitto School of Law is Rhode Island's only such institution. Many of the career and some liberal arts programs have been accredited by their respective professional associations. General education (core curriculum) applies to all undergraduate majors, as well as a required core concentration (which promotes interdisciplinary study). Progress toward academic program and student-learning assessments has been uneven. The University is moving toward a formal assessment model that would apply across all programs. Master's programs are a relatively new addition to RWU, the oldest program having been created in 1999. The Graduate Council has been tasked with providing a connection across graduate programs and articulating appropriate standards for faculty teaching graduate courses. ,

Standard 5: Faculty

The revitalized faculty governance structure, the introduction of program chairs and department heads, the implementation of new standards and procedures for promotion and tenure, and the influx of new ideas, attitudes, and energy associated with the growth of the faculty are significantly changing the fabric of the RWU faculty. Faculty members are involved in every aspect of student development including advising, course and program development, and extracurricular activities. Faculty-student engagement in scholarly activity is a particular strength of the University and is receiving added support. Tenure-track faculty positions have increased from 123 FTE (1996) to 189 (2005) with 86.5% holding terminal degrees. Faculty are members of a collective bargaining unit (NEA) with the current contract subject to renewal in 2008. Faculty appraisal is based on teaching, advising/program development, scholarship, and service. Student/faculty ratios have grown from 16.6 (1996-97) to 21.7 (2005-06), and the percentage of instruction delivered by adjunct faculty increased from an estimated 20% in the years prior to AY00-01 to its current level of 40%.

Standard 6: Students

The character and size of the student body has substantially changed since 1996, with the number of full time undergraduate students increasing to almost 3800 -- a growth of 22% in the past five years. This significant growth has strained the University's infrastructure (housing, services, classrooms, academic support, etc.). The University does not intend to grow the undergraduate enrollment beyond its current size. Admissions initiatives have resulted in increasing selectivity for each entering class since 1996. However, improvements in student retention and graduation rates are still sought, and a Student Advocacy Office and Center for Academic Development support student progress from matriculation through graduation. Residence Life contends with overcrowded housing, despite the addition (2001) of four new residence halls (380 beds) and a variety of off-campus housing units leased since 1996. All areas of Student Life

have grown and its programs expanded to meet the dual challenges of both our increased enrollment and of the different demands that our changing status imposes.

Standard 7: Library and Other Information Resources

The University maintains two distinct but highly collaborative departments for information resources and their services: the University Libraries, reporting to the Provost, and the Office of Information Technology, reporting to the President. Recent and sustained improvements in library acquisitions funding and its strategic management of collections, and a revitalized user instruction program have reinforced the Library's capacity to respond to the increasing information service demands of faculty and students. IT implements a systematic plan for technology upgrades and replacements, and Media Services (reporting to the Library) supports an increasing number of "smart classrooms" throughout the campus to enable faculty to incorporate multi-media technology into their teaching. Training faculty and students in the use of new technologies will become a priority.

Standard 8: Physical and Technological Resources

The University's main campus in Bristol, RI consists of 140 acres with 27 major buildings. A continuing education component is housed in Providence. Continuing growth has placed stresses on many of the institution's facilities. There are 41 assignable classrooms with an 84% usage rate (a scheduling challenge). The campus master plan, undergoing its third update, addresses residential, teaching, facilities maintenance, and faculty/administrative office needs. A repurposing of the former Student Union building will provide approximately 40,000 sq. feet of classroom and faculty office space. A long term residential and enrollment forecasting model will be developed by spring 2007. Planning has begun on program development for a 350 bed residence complex. A number of other additions or expansions are also being considered.

Standard 9: Financial Resources

The University has sufficient financial resources to sustain its current operations. With a \$90,000,000 endowment, surplus operating revenue is annually directed toward its enhancement, to early debt retirement, and to other initiatives consistent with the mission of the University. The debt repayment schedule has been accelerated, and the institution's bond rating has been upgraded. It is also less reliant on tuition income than previously, and the annual budget process is more transparent. With a new Director of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving in place, various alumni initiatives will be implemented. The Finance and Audit Committee of the Board of Trustees, along with the General Counsel, plans to develop a written code of ethics and a statement of independence for the Board of Trustees. The institution's review of risk management policies and procedures will foster a comprehensive risk management plan.

Standard 10: Public Disclosure

The University is reviewing and reconstituting its communication practices to keep pace with its dynamic growth. It employs a variety of electronic and print media to communicate with current and prospective students, parents, alumni, faculty and staff and the general public. The Web site is the primary means for public information about the

University. Web site needs have been studied and a new Web site is under construction. Other means of communication include “My RWU”; regular group e-mails (including the 2005-initiated “DAILY DOSE” message to the campus community); The *University Catalog* (produced annually and available both as a print and an electronic document, with archived issues available on the University Web site); the Student Handbook; a weekly “Events Calendar”; and the biweekly “University Update.” NEASC-mandated public disclosure information is available on the Web site under “Fast Facts.”

Standard 11: Integrity

The University has striven to improve the campus intellectual and cultural climate. Evaluative employee measures have been revised to ensure a more open and transparent process to assess job performance, including a new position classification and performance-driven salary program system. The 2004-2008 faculty contract brought about myriad changes, with a new emphasis on performance assessment, and with scholarship taking a more prominent place alongside excellence in teaching as an important measure of faculty for tenure, reappointment and promotions. New University policies have been developed, including the Indemnification Policy, Sexual Harassment Policy, References Policy and Conflict of Interest Policy. The Grants Policy Committee was formed (2004) and produced a set of guidelines in response to the growing number of grants and contracts.