

Preface

Roger Williams University will welcome a visiting team in October 2006 from the Commission of Higher Education (CIHE) of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) in the regular ten year re-evaluation process of the University's accreditation. The visiting team will use the following self study and its supporting documentation as the basis for its three-day on-campus review and, in turn, make its own recommendations to the CIHE. The self study process is designed to foster the University's own internal review in a deliberate, open, and collaborative manner. Participants have attempted to conduct the self process in the spirit in which it is intended: to examine the present state of the institution in order to provide a picture of our current status (the Description section of each standard), to celebrate our strengths and achievements and to acknowledge our challenges and shortcomings (the Appraisal section), and use this knowledge to plan for our future through a series of concrete plans (the Projection section). While the University often uses competitors to measure its progress, the measures herein are against internal goals and expectations. NEASC asks that the University define itself and then use that definition for its self assessment with the understanding that an institution is never static but is always in a state of dynamic change.

Following this guidance, the preparation of this self study was designed to be as inclusive as possible. In the past many decisions at the University had not been transparent, and it seemed especially important given recent rapid growth and change to use the self-study process to model and assess our maturation as an institution. The process began two and a half years ago in the spring of 2004. Provost Edward J. Kavanagh, with the approval of President Roy J. Nirschel, appointed the Associate Provost to lead the self-study effort. Over the summer, discussions were held regarding the process to be followed, and a Steering Committee was assembled. The committee was made up of faculty members and administrators chosen for a number of factors: their area of specific knowledge of the University, their experience with NEASC, their knowledge of assessment, and their ability to enlist others in the self-study effort.

The RWU NEASC Steering Committee:

Associate Dean Tracy DaCosta, Enrollment Management
Dean Peter V. Deekle, University Library Services
Professor Roseann Evans, Architecture
Associate Provost Jeffrey B. Martin (Chair)
Dean Kathleen McMahan, Dean of Students
Professor Richard Potter, Chair, Department of History and Chair, Faculty Senate
Dean Maling Ebrahimpour, Gabelli School of Business*
Associate Vice President Peter Wilbur, Planning and Administration

* Dean Ebrahimpour replaced Dean Timothy Reagan from the School of Education, who left the University early in the self study process.

A sub-group of the Steering Committee (DeCosta, Potter, Reagan, and Martin) attended the annual NEASC Self-Study Training Workshop in October 2004, sharing what they learned with other Steering Committee members. The committee then set parameters and timelines for the process. In order to keep the process broadly based, the eleven NEASC standards were assigned to eight task forces each co-chaired by one administrator and one faculty member drawn from a variety of University constituencies and possessing a range of experience.

The RWU NEASC Task Force Chairs:

A. I	Mission	Dean Stephen White (SAAHP)
II	Planning	Prof. Nancy Nester (Assoc. Prof. of Writing Studies)
B. III	Governance	Jeffrey Gillooly (Executive Assist. to the President) Prof. Susan Bosco (Asst. Prof. of Finance)*
C. IV	Academic	Dean Ruth Koelle (Dean FCAS) Prof. Dianne Comiskey (Assoc. Prof. of Creative Writing)*
D. V	Faculty	Dean Robert Potter (Dean SECCM) Prof. Susan Pasquarelli (Assoc. Prof. of Education)
E. VI	Students	V.P. Lynn Fawthrop (V.P. Enrollment Management) Prof. Jeffrey Meriwether (Assist. Prof. of History)
F. VII	Information Resources	Dean Elizabeth Learned (Assoc. Dean Library Services) Prof. June Speakman (Assoc. Prof. of Political Science)
G. VIII	Physical/ Technological Resources	V.P. John King (V.P. Student Affairs)
IX	Financial Resources	Prof. Barbara Poole (Assoc. Prof. of Financial Services)
H. X	Public Disclosure	Mirlen Martinez (Assist. General Counsel)**
XI	Integrity	Prof. Anjali Ram (Assist. Prof. Communication)*

*since the beginning of the process Drs. Bosco and Ram have been promoted to Associate Professor and Dr. Comiskey has been promoted to full Professor.

** Ms. Martinez replaced Ms. Kim Greene, a member of the general counsel staff who left the University early in the self study process.

While chairs were being drafted into service, the President issued a call for volunteers to work on the various task forces. The Task Force Co-Chairs assembled their teams from this list supplemented by other members of the community recruited for their

expertise. In addition to the co-chairs, each task force was composed of an average of seven members.

In January of 2005 a self study workshop was held on campus led by Dr. Patricia Obrien, who was then Associate Director of NEASC's CIHE, to orient the Task Force Chairs to the scope and purpose of the project.

During the winter of 2005 the Steering Committee established procedures for the Task Forces for handling documentation, and deadlines for requests for documents and focus groups. The decision was made to collect and manage as many evidence documents as possible electronically. The University Library was designated as the document repository with all electronic versions collected on a Blackboard Web site. Assistant Professor and Librarian, Mary Wu, agreed to supervise the Evidence Document Center. As the spring progressed the task forces gathered data, held focus groups, and began to assess what they were discovering.

Late in the spring of 2005 each task force began to draft their "findings" for a June University Strategic Planning Session. They were each asked to present an overview of their standard and of issues which they thought the University should address, particularly those which would allow us to better comply with NEASC Standards. These were presented to an assembled broad group of University personnel that met on June 5. Many of their recommendations were adopted and implemented.

Over the rest of the summer and into the fall, while their general work on the standard was proceeding, the task forces were asked to produce an outline of the appraisal and projection portions of their standards for public discussion. At the end of September these outlines were posted on the University Web site and distributed in printed form. During the following month a series of public meetings in all sectors of the University were hosted by the Steering Committee to solicit feedback to the outlines. In addition, written feedback was solicited by e-mail. All the responses were collated and presented to the full Steering Committee and to task force chairs, who incorporated what they had learned into their assessments.

Simultaneously during the Fall 2005 work was proceeding on drafting the report for each standard. In early October deadlines and page breakdowns were established. The first draft of the each standard began to reach the Steering Committee in early December. Over the next month the drafts were reviewed by the Steering Committee, and members were assigned to work with the task forces chairs on revision. Second drafts of the standards were finished beginning in March. After some revision the draft of each standard was posted on the RWU web site for public comment in early May accompanied by announcements to the University community. At the same time the draft was reviewed by Dr. Obrien at NEASC.

Dr. Obrien's objective comments and feedback from the Web posting helped guide the summer process as each standard went through a number of drafts. A member of the Steering Committee, the chair, and Dr. Deekle reviewed each draft and worked with the task force chairs on each refinement.

In August of this year the process moved into its final phase. Working with an outside editor, Dr. Janice Okoomian, and with Professor Wu in the Evidence Document Center, each draft went through a final revision. In the editing process the decision was made that while consistency of format was a worthy goal that, given our goal of openness

and inclusiveness, it was also important to preserve the individual voice of the authors of each standard. The resulting document, therefore, is a composite of a variety of points of view and interests, a document which we believe represents the University collectively. Over one hundred members of the community had a hand in its composition and they took seriously their charge to represent the whole community in the document. While the report presents to the University a cohesive image of itself, it contains a cross-section of opinions and values and concerns that is a true reflection of the dynamic nature of a university in a state of growth and transition.

(Documents reflecting the process are in the Online Evidence Center, NEASC Self-Study Process and NEASC Self-Study Process: Feedback.)