

NEASC STANDARD ONE MISSION AND PURPOSES

Mission Statement of the University:

Roger Williams University is an independent liberal arts university that combines the unique strengths of small liberal arts colleges and those of larger comprehensive universities and where liberal and professional education are enhanced by their integration and the recognition of their unity.

At the foundation of the institution is a set of core values that play a central role in guiding a respectful, diverse, and intellectually vibrant university community:

- Love of learning as an intrinsic value
- Preparation for careers and future study
- Collaboration of students and faculty in research
- Commitment to community service
- Appreciation of global perspectives

The Roger Williams University Education:

The University strives to educate all students to become productive citizens of the social and professional communities in which they will live and build their careers. To participate in a lifetime of such citizenship, it is the goal of Roger Williams University to prepare our students to:

- Communicate clearly in a variety of formats
- Appreciate the ability of the humanities to stir the soul
- Advocate effectively through civil discourse
- Acquire new information and perspectives through traditional research techniques and the use of information technology
- Contribute productively in team projects through leadership and cooperative efforts
- Understand how different cultures, philosophies and historical experiences affect the perspectives of others

Legacy of Roger Williams (1604 – 1684):

Roger Williams, founder of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, was the first major figure in colonial America to argue forcefully the need for democracy, religious freedom, and for the understanding of America's native cultures. Roger Williams University has dedicated itself to principles advocated by our namesake: education, freedom and tolerance. Through his scholarship in language, theology, and law, Williams' life reflected the value of learning and teaching. The University honors the legacy of Roger Williams by modeling a community in which diverse people and diverse ideas are valued, in which intellectual achievement is celebrated, and in which civic responsibility is expected.

DESCRIPTION

Roger Williams University is a community that aspires to be recognized by three defining characteristics: *respect, diversity, and intellectual vibrancy*. To acquire these attributes, the University continues to refine its mission so that these essential qualities are evident in its philosophy and practices and are pronounced in the University's core values and educational goals. The current Mission Statement was composed by a Mission Statement Committee consisting of members of the Faculty Senate Steering Committee, 2003-2004. Committee notes document the steps of a careful, collaborative process that commenced with a clear charge (See *Mission Committee Minutes and Reports* in Online Evidence Center, Standard One, Doc.14). The Committee made regular reports to the Faculty Senate and involved the RWU community in the reflection and drafting process. For example, using the forum of the Faculty Caucus, an all-faculty meeting, (December 2003), and the Campus Cruiser, an online network, the Committee solicited feedback on components of the statement. The Committee's work culminated in a presentation at a strategic planning session in February 2004. The revisions continued with Board involvement in the drafting process. (The NEASC Visiting Team will have access to minutes of the meetings of the Board of Trustees.) The current Mission Statement displays a set of core values, the essence of which is consistent with that of earlier mission statements. Since 1996, four significant revisions have occurred, each further clarifying the values and goals that impel the institution's programmatic, curricular, and physical transformations (in Online Evidence Center, Standard One, Doc. 32). Among those enhancements are the development and inauguration in 1995 of a Core Curriculum Program--including six interdisciplinary courses--the institution of the Feinstein Service Learning Program (1998), the accreditation of several professional schools, the development of graduate programs, the expansion of the Study Abroad program, and the construction of a Marine and Natural Science building. In the 2000/01 *Undergraduate Catalog*, the University names its core purposes, intentions that are divided into two categories: the *ethos of inquiry* and the *ethos of civic responsibility*. A more concise set of values was set into relief during a University-wide planning process that President Nirschel initiated shortly after he began his tenure at the University, in 2001. This condensed set of values appears in the 2002/03 catalogue. The values explicitly mention the development of a worldview consistent with the expanding Study Abroad program. In addition, during this period, the University announced its commitment to diversity in the campus community. Core values stress "an insightful worldview [that] teaches the interconnections of today's borderless global village and the importance of ethnic and cultural diversification" and "foster[ing] a caring, friendly community where all people are supported and respected."

The objective of the periodic review and revision has been to ensure that the Mission Statement makes perceptible the institution's values and vision. The current Mission Statement distills the values stated in earlier versions and articulates the educational goals students should realize during their tenure here. The Mission Statement now consists of four components: a general statement of purpose, the core values, the institution's educational goals (listed under the heading "The Roger Williams University Education") and a description of the University's legacy. The inclusion of the legacy reinforces the University's longstanding convictions and links past and present

ideals in a continuum. The Mission Statement has been made more prominent on the University's Web site, in its catalogue, and featured in publications such as the Convocation Program.

APPRAISAL

The statement of purpose in the Mission Statement attempts to capture the relationship between liberal and professional studies at the University, especially the integral role of the Core Curriculum Program in each student's program of study, regardless of major. The core values are widely recognized as integral to the institution's identity, and they are expressed in public addresses and publications, confirmed in institutional practices, and signified by key initiatives. To date, the *Core Values* and *Educational Goals* have inspired several initiatives. The "love of learning" as an intrinsic value is evident in the institution's development of The John Howard Birss Memorial Lecture Series, funded by an alumnus of the institution. Presidential Fellowships, the Library Fund, Socrates Café, and a Civil Discourse Lecture Series are other examples. Initiatives such as the Core Curriculum Assessment Project ensure that this value is inherent in the Liberal Studies Curriculum. "Preparation for careers and future study" and "collaboration of students and faculty in research" are supported and reinforced by the Provost's Fund for Undergraduate Research, the establishment of a Human Subjects Review Board, and the Academic Showcase, a celebration of academic achievement open to all students and sponsored by the Honors Program. The institution's "commitment to community service" impels projects such as "Community Connection," an all-day service endeavor held during orientation, involving first semester students, faculty, administrators, and staff. To ensure that service continues to be an ongoing commitment, the University maintains a Service Learning office at the University, directed by a full-time Service Learning Coordinator. The core value of "Appreciation of Global Perspectives" is evident in the Initiative to Educate Afghan Women and serves as a catalyst for continued expansion of Global and International Programs, the institution of an Events Series; an Islamic Forum, a Civil Discourse Lecture Series, the *Reason and Respect Journal*, and the Center for Macro Projects and Diplomacy. In addition, evidence that the Mission Statement is understood and that the values it supports "provide direction to the curricula and other activities" of the University is plentiful in the Mission Statements of the University's constituent schools and colleges. The convictions inherent in the University's mission surface as recurrent themes in those texts and find expression in the decisions and activities of those entities. (See discussion in Standards Four and Five). The strategic plans for each school and for the University Library exhibit further evidence of the way the University's mission influences decisions regarding curriculum activities and pedagogy (See *Strategic Plans of Academic Schools and Library*, in Online Evidence Center, Standard One, Doc. 20). The *Educational Goals* are assessable and specific enough to offer guidance in planning and evaluations. The yearlong assessment project conducted by the Core Curriculum Committee in 2005 is an example of such implementation. The Standard Four report discusses student outcome assessment efforts in more detail; Standard Five discusses the alignment of faculty expectations with the core values and educational goals.

The Mission Statement is communicated in its entirety in a number of venues, most notably the *University Catalog* and the University Web site. The latter inclusion

occurred during the NEASC self-study process. The length of the combined sections of the text—Mission Statement, Core Values, Educational Goals, and Legacy of Roger Williams—may present some problems in terms of consistency, especially as space limitations may necessitate that parts and not the whole appear in other venues. Nonetheless, the institution is committed to ensuring that the message is consistent. For example, the University has taken steps to align print publications that, at the outset of the NEASC self-study process, raised questions regarding which statement constituted the Mission Statement. Discrepancies apparent when comparing the Convocation Program, Orientation Guides, and *University Undergraduate Catalog* have been rectified. Some inconsistencies persist on the Web site, however. The number and language of the core values appearing under the link “Core Values” differs from the text of the official Mission Statement. A similar inconsistency is apparent on the Public Affairs site, on the University Fact Sheet found in the “Newsroom” link and in the Grant Resource Center “Boilerplate” information. A recent request made by the Provost to the Public Affairs Office (Martin, 2/24/2006 in Online Evidence Center, Standard One, Doc. 33) should result in alignment.

As the University moves forward and continues to strengthen the language of the Mission Statement so that the text precisely communicates the institution’s strong attributes and the symbiotic relationship of Liberal and Professional Studies at the University, it will continue periodically to review its mission. The documents generated by the Mission Statement committee posted on the NEASC evidence Center site should offer guidance concerning that particular coherence. The process that guided the revision of the Mission Statement was inclusive, reflective, and rigorous. The University should continue to employ this method. The steps taken in the interludes between submission of draft from committee, revision at the administrative/board level, and final approval by the Board should be similarly inclusive and public. The appointment of Robert Avery as Secretary to the Board of Trustees is intended to improve communication in that regard.

In practice, the mission/core values guide critical decisions. Evidence of this is available in the assessment that the Strategic Planning, Communication Planning Group 2005/05 conducted regarding the degree to which recommendations emerging from the 2001 Strategic Plan were taken to fruition (See *Communication Planning Group Executive Summary, Strategic Plan 2005 in Online Evidence Center, Standard One, Doc. 24; Communication Planning Group Report, Doc. 23*). Another important example is the set of procedures in place for embarking on curricular changes. All petitions for new programs and courses must contain a clear articulation of the ways that they affirm and advance the University’s mission and the mission of schools and colleges. (See *Final Curricular Changes Flow Chart, Doc. 18; Final Curriculum Policies, Doc. 19 in Online Evidence Center, Standard One*).

PROJECTION

The University Web site reaches the largest audience and, therefore, is a primary means of publicizing the mission. The Web site is a work in progress and refinements of the online distribution of the mission continue. The University plans to partner with a communications firm to redesign the Web site and to identify outcomes that demonstrate the ways the mission and core values inspire and guide the actions of all members of the campus community (in Online Evidence Center, Standard One, Doc. 34). Consistency

of message should be addressed during the restructuring process. (Further analysis of the Web site and projections for improvement can be found in Standard Ten.)

Other mechanisms will continue to elicit information regarding the realization of the core values and educational goals in curricular, co-curricular, and University-related activities. To assess the degree to which students and faculty perceived that the “institution’s mission and purposes are concrete and realistic and further define its education and other dimensions, including scholarship, research, and public service,” the NEASC Mission Planning Task Force developed and administered a campus-wide survey in March 2006. This task force devoted several months to the development of the survey in order to elicit information regarding the faculty and students’ familiarity with and understanding of the University’s mission. Their work culminated in a survey consisting of eleven multilevel questions focused on the key components of the mission—the core values and educational goals. Specifically, the committee wanted to determine the degree to which the faculty and students perceived these values and goals to be acquired and achieved in the Core Program, the disciplinary majors, Study Abroad, and campus activities (See *Mission Survey in Online Evidence Center Standard One*, Doc. 30). Although less than 1% of the students (26/3779) and 26% of the faculty (49/189) completed the survey, the results did yield some useful insights. Most faculty credited the catalog with their knowledge of the mission, and secondly the Web, while most students surveyed credited other sources with their familiarity with the text. Overall, respondents recognized the Core Program and the majors as the venues for developing most of the Core Values and for achieving the Educational Goals. The results are located in the Evidence Center (*Mission Survey Results*, Document 31). Because aspects of the revised Mission Statement are derivative, data collected by the consulting firm of MaGuire and Associates, using the former mission as a basis of assessment, is valid and should be of use to committees engaged in future strategic planning efforts (See *Brand Analysis in Online Evidence Center, Standard One*, Doc. 25). The study indices include the perceptions of faculty, administrators, staff, alumni, and prospective students and their parents. A summary of this information was presented to administration, NEASC Steering Committee, and task force chairs at the June 2005 planning meeting and is available on the NEASC “Evidence Center” Blackboard site. Findings of interest include those that tested the associations made between the slogan “Learning to Bridge the World” and the Core Values. Respondents made strong links to a global perspective and weaker associations to undergraduate research. Faculty and staff, though, made strong associations with the core values. When the findings were used to benchmark the University against its “competition set,” Roger Williams University placed favorably, “on par or exceeding” all but Northeastern University (*Brand Analysis...; A Research-Based Assessment...*, Maguire Associates in Online Evidence Center, Standard One, Doc. 25). The National Survey of Student Engagement, which the University began conducting in 2004, elicits equally useful information regarding the rigor of academic programs, experiential learning opportunities, research activities. The results of the 2005 NSSE are available on the Blackboard Evidence Center (*NSSE Data in Online Evidence Center, Standard One*, Doc. 29). In brief, the survey examined student perceptions of the frequency of engagement in learning practices promoted by the Core Values, and it elicited impressions of the intellectual environment that fosters and reinforces the mission. These experiences included research, writing, group work, experiential

learning, engagement in learning objectives such as analysis and evaluation, social and cultural experiences, and interaction with support services. Again, benchmarked against aspirant institutions, Roger Williams University fares well, in line with selected peers and the NSSE mean. For example, academic practices such as process writing, collaboration with peers and faculty, and the use of technology met or exceeded the norms. The full report is posted to the Evidence Center, Mission/Planning link (NSSE Data, 2005 Means and Frequencies Report, Doc. 29, Report 1). Data generated by this study and those conducted in subsequent years will be equally valuable.

Further assessments of the effectiveness of the mission will be obtained by the “Vision Memo” the Office of Public Affairs intends to distribute to each school and college. This office will gather information from the various bodies in order to reveal commonalities amongst schools and colleges and to help them develop shared definitions (in Online Evidence Center, Standard One, Doc. 36). The data will help deans, faculty, staff, and students “clearly see the alignment of their work” Such data will be useful for future refinements of the mission and for projecting the University’s next steps relative to extending the influence of the mission within and beyond the University.