

## **I. MISSION AND PURPOSES**

### **DESCRIPTION**

As a result of Western New England College's strategic planning process (described in Standard II), a new mission statement was endorsed by the Board of Trustees in September 1998. The mission includes the College's statement of purpose, a definition of its position among institutions of higher education, four defining characteristics that are unique to the institution, and a listing of its commitments. The full mission statement is displayed in all campus buildings, is available as a separate brochure, and appears on the College's Web site and in institutional publications, such as the College catalogue.

The difference between the new statement and the College's previous mission statement is that the emphasis has now been placed on a learner focus. Specifically, the College's stated goal is to facilitate student learning to enable students to bring multiple perspectives of understanding to the challenges and opportunities in their careers and in their personal lives.

The College further commits to being a leader regionally and recognized nationally in providing integrated professional and liberal learning. This integration will be achieved primarily through collaboration of its programs in Arts and Sciences, Business, Engineering, and Law. In addition, the new mission statement places an emphasis on learning beyond the classroom, where students will be afforded opportunities for reinforcing and applying the lessons of the classroom outside the course setting. Additional strategic initiatives are in the areas of alliances and partnerships forged with the business and civic community, such as the Mason Square Economic Development project and the Springfield Mentoring Partnership.

In addition to these learner-focused goals, the mission places strong emphasis on teaching, while encouraging faculty scholarship to enhance teaching and intellectual contribution. The teaching activities of the faculty are complemented by their service to the College and to the wider community.

The new learner-focused mission provides direction to the curricula and other activities. In line with this direction, the General College Requirements Committee is reviewing objectives for the undergraduate core, including specific objectives that better define the integration of liberal and professional learning and learning beyond the classroom.

The graduate programs provide students with the opportunity to gain knowledge and competencies required for career advancement. Programs and instructional methods are tailored to meet the distinctive needs of professionals in law, engineering, and business. To complement the strong professional learning component, program objectives are developed to ensure that students have a breadth of educational experiences that foster the development of insights and multiple perspectives on ideas, issues, and events.

Programs such as 3+3 (undergraduate and law program) and the joint MBA/JD degree are examples of collaboration among the Schools, another key strategic initiative.

The new mission provides direction as well to Student Affairs, particularly in the learning-beyond-the-classroom initiative. Through an academic and student affairs partnership, activities on campus and in the community are recognized as important arenas for reinforcing theories and concepts discussed in the classroom.

In addition to the College mission statement, many academic units within the College have their own mission statements that are based on the College statement but focus on specific components within their areas of responsibility. Mission statements have been developed by the Schools of Business, Law, and Engineering. These are reviewed as required by each School's accreditation agencies. AACSB (for business) and ABET (for engineering) review processes are linked to the College's stated mission, which focuses on learner achievement, assessment, and continuous improvement. The ABA evaluates the College's law programs according to its published standards for approval of law schools.

Many of the support units, such as the Library, Student Administrative Services, the Office of Freshmen and Transfer Students, Marketing, and Advancement, have mission statements, which are extensions of the College's mission and which focus the activities of the unit. On an ongoing basis, each unit reviews its performance against objectives and reports on the unit's progress in supporting the learning environment. This process is part of the College's integrated institutional effectiveness system, which is described in Standard II.

Lastly, the new mission statement reaffirms the College's commitment to the integration of liberal and professional learning in light of dramatic changes in the environment. The emphasis on learning beyond the classroom, strategic partnerships and alliances, diversity, and technology reflects commitments based on environmental trends in academia, business, and society. To determine the content and pertinence of the College's mission, the Strategic Planning Oversight Committee is charged with reviewing the mission against changing local, regional, national, and international environments on an ongoing basis.

## **APPRAISAL**

The College's core mission guides program development, resource allocation, the activities of all support units, and facility planning, such as the facilities master plan. The mission defines the distinctive nature of the College, drawing on its history and roots as a professional school. It sets forth learner-focused goals that are in line with changing societal, technological, and educational environments.

The mission statement and the strategic initiatives associated with it are widely distributed and form the basis for the mission statements of academic and support units across the campus. The College-wide effort to assess institutional effectiveness based on

student learning outcomes and in line with the College's mission and strategic initiatives is underway. As a result of the institutional effectiveness reporting system, all units (academic and otherwise) have demonstrated how their activities relate to implementing specific strategic initiatives. To ensure that planning and resource allocation enhance the College's efforts to achieve institutional purposes, several areas need attention.

First, a mechanism for centralizing and integrating findings, specifically in the area of assessment, is needed. Having the information centralized would create a resource available to all units. Continuous improvement requires communication, and, at this time, activities and planned improvements are known primarily within units and Schools but not across the campus. To ensure an integrated institutional assessment effort, communication among all units is essential.

Another area needing attention involves institution-wide performance standards related to the mission. When the strategic plan was written, several goals and measures to assess institutional effectiveness were suggested. These included revenue percentages, endowment goals, and continuous improvement measures such as stakeholder perception inventories, scores of students on standardized tests for graduate admission, results on tests of professional certification, and employment and graduate acceptance records. However, these measures have not been further developed or used systematically to assess performance.

As noted earlier, individual mission statements focus the activities of the Schools and other campus units. However, not all units at the College have developed their own statements and thus have not formalized their linkage to the College's mission.

Finally, while many of the graduate programs include objectives to ensure that students have a breadth of educational experiences that foster the development of insights and multiple perspectives on ideas, issues, and events, not all programs have articulated objectives clearly tied to the College's mission.

## **PROJECTION**

In order for the College to sustain its assessment of institutional effectiveness and evaluate its success in meeting its mission-defined learning objectives, a number of steps will be necessary. First, an information and communication mechanism, which may include but is not limited to electronic retrieval and distribution, should be set up at the College. This centralized data collection point would also provide access to information about assessment efforts across the campus. Periodic reports should be issued that summarize the progress of the College toward achieving its mission based on information contained in the database.

Next, systematic use of institution-wide performance goals and standards should be made. As part of the ongoing planning and evaluation effort, the President and his Vice Presidents should continuously monitor the institution's effectiveness in pursuing its mission.

With these commitments to centralizing assessment information, communicating results, developing performance standards, and ensuring that all units have stated purposes and programs with objectives linked to the College's mission, the College's integrated system to assess institutional effectiveness should be greatly enhanced.

Mission statements should be created by those Schools and units that have not yet done so. These statements should focus on the specific areas of responsibility within the units and provide a vision for these entities that coincides with the College's mission.

Finally, statements concerning all graduate programs, except law, should be reviewed by the Graduate Council to ensure that program objectives are clearly tied to the College's mission.