Standard Four: The Academic Program

Description

Organization and Oversight of Academic Programs. Eastern’s academic programs are consistent with its mission as the state’s public liberal arts university. The University offers 31 undergraduate majors, ranging from standard disciplinary offerings like Biology, English, and Economics to a new interdisciplinary major in Labor Relations and Human Resource Management; students may also design individualized majors to pursue a course of study cutting across traditional disciplinary boundaries. At the undergraduate level, Eastern also offers 53 minors (including eleven in interdisciplinary fields), and eight undergraduate teaching certification programs. Additionally, the University’s Graduate Division offers ten graduate degree programs (including three involving teacher certification).

The majority of Eastern’s academic programs are housed in departments in either the School of Arts and Sciences or the School of Education and Professional Studies. Such programs are administered by chairpersons elected by department faculty, and are under the oversight of an academic Dean. Departments are required by the CSU-AAUP Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) to have by-laws describing their structure and procedures. Procedures for addressing deficiencies in departmental bylaws or disputes related to them are delineated in the CSU-AAUP CBA. The CBA also defines the responsibilities of chairpersons and directors of interdisciplinary programs.

A small number of programs are not housed in individual academic departments. The First Year Program and the Liberal Arts Core are overseen by committees primarily composed of teaching faculty (the First Year Program Committee and the Liberal Arts Program Committee, respectively). In lieu of department chairpersons, the First Year Program is administered by an appointed faculty member, while the Liberal Arts Core has been administered by a faculty member elected by a Senate committee (a committee that is, in turn, elected by the University Senate). The Individualized Major and Bachelor of General Studies programs are administered by the Deans of the appropriate schools in conjunction with faculty from appropriate departments.

Policies related to academic programs and requirements are generally approved through an appropriate Senate committee (e.g. Academic Affairs, Curriculum, Liberal Arts Core, or First Year Program Committee.) Policy changes come from these committees as recommendations to the University Senate.

When a new program is proposed, the coherence and quality of its goals, structure, and content are evaluated, first by the academic department that would house it, and subsequently by the University Curriculum Committee (which is composed mainly of teaching faculty), the appropriate academic Dean, the University Senate, the President, the Connecticut State University Board of Trustees, and, ultimately, the Board of Governors for Higher Education. Any changes in a program’s goals or structure, and any significant changes in its content must be reviewed and approved by some or all of the above listed bodies, depending on the scope of the changes proposed. The University Curriculum Committee, for instance, reviews and approves all new courses and all revisions to existing courses; courses in the Liberal Arts Core are subject to additional oversight by the Liberal Arts Program Committee. The CSU system office identifies low-enrolled programs on an annual basis and requires justification for program continuation. If it were determined that a program should be discontinued, that decision would go through the same process required for program approval.

Learning goals developed by department faculty for discipline-specific programs and by relevant committees for interdisciplinary programs are posted on a common web site. Program requirements are published in the university catalog (print and online since 2002, online only beginning Fall 2010), at department web sites for discipline-specific programs, and at program web sites for interdisciplinary...
programs. To make it easy for students to understand program requirements all web sites have a standard format.

With an average class size of 25.8 at the 100- and 200-levels and of 19.1 at the 300- and 400-levels, Eastern is comparable to its Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC) peers, which have averages of 23.7 and 16.3, respectively. While a full-time teaching load at Eastern is 12 credit hours per semester, after adjusting for non-instructional assignments, full-time faculty at Eastern teach 9.8 credit hours per semester on average, compared to 12.7 across COPLAC schools (see COPLAC Data Profile; a further discussion of credit hours taught is in Standard Five). Instructional expenses plus research and academic support services comprise 35% of the University’s total operating expenses. Allocations of faculty lines, physical space, and program resources are made by the Vice President of Academic Affairs in consultation with the Deans, Program Directors, and President. Physical space is allocated through the Space Allocation Committee consistent with the University’s Master Plan.

A handful of programs at Eastern (Accounting, Business Administration, Business Information Systems, Communication, Education, the Physical Education certification program, Social Work, and Digital Art and Design) have their own admission and retention requirements. These requirements align enrollment with resources and are aimed at identifying students with skills and abilities needed for success in the major.

With the exception of certain classes in the Department of Modern and Classical Languages, all instruction at Eastern is conducted in English. Successful completion of a degree thus requires proficiency in English. Eastern’s undergraduate admissions requirements for international students include a minimum TOEFL score of 550 (or 213 on the computer-based test). Moreover, all students must demonstrate their facility in written English by completing the University’s three-stage Writing Across the Curriculum requirement (described below in the discussion of the undergraduate program). Further details about admissions policies can be found in Standard Six.

Ongoing evaluation of existing programs is handled by assessment at the departmental level, with results communicated to the University administration through annual reports. All academic programs are also subject to periodic evaluation by the Academic Program Review Committee (APRC). The APRC assesses each program with regard to seven criteria ranging from the appropriateness of the required curriculum to the adequacy of program staff, facilities, and equipment. A new level of programmatic review—the Exemplary Academic Program Review process—will be opened to the campus in the Fall of 2010, and will provide departments with the opportunity to demonstrate the ways that they meet criteria of excellence, and to outline plans to move beyond APRC expectations. A more detailed account of programmatic review at Eastern is provided under Standard Two. Where appropriate, Eastern’s programs also pursue discipline-related accreditation. The Education and Social Work programs are the only programs on campus with such external accreditation at this time. The Education program is accredited by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), while the Social Work program is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE).

Eastern has a long tradition of offering a limited number of courses at several sites in Eastern Connecticut to accommodate the needs of adult and commuting students. While these off-campus options provide important opportunities for some students, they represent a very small portion of total enrollment. Eastern also offers courses for teachers in Jamaica.

Though Eastern offers online courses in most academic programs, online offerings—taught by faculty and staff who teach on-ground courses—represent only a small percentage of total course offerings (1.6% in Fall 2009). Still, the number of students enrolling in online courses is on the rise, with 1,913 students taking an online course between Fall 2008 and Fall 2009, up from only 163 students two years earlier.
With the exception of the Master’s in Educational Technology, however, no program is offered more than 50% online. A new Senate committee was created in 2009-2010 to make recommendations for policies and procedures to ensure that online courses maintain an appropriate role in the curriculum. Eastern ensures that students have necessary information and technical literacy through requirements that are built into the Liberal Arts Core as described below.

**Undergraduate Degree Programs.** As detailed in the University Catalog, all students in Eastern’s baccalaureate degree programs complete 120 credits of coursework to graduate, at least 30 of which must be completed at Eastern. Students in baccalaureate programs must take at least 60 credits of coursework at the intermediate or advanced levels (i.e., 200-, 300-, or 400-level courses), with at least half of those credits at the advanced level (i.e., 300-level or higher). Students may take as many elective classes as they desire, consistent with the completion of other degree requirements. Students must complete both the University’s Liberal Arts Core requirements and an academic major (for the BA, BS, and BGS degrees) or academic concentration (for the AS). First-year full-time students participate in the First Year Program. The University’s writing requirement specifies that all students must take a general introductory course as well as an intermediate and an advanced writing-intensive course appropriate to their disciplines. With implementation of the new strategic plan, students will also complete a pre-professional experience to satisfy the Liberal Arts Work (LAW) requirement and fulfill a Global Citizenship requirement.

**General Education.** Eastern’s general education requirement has been revised since the last self study to be more consistent with the University’s liberal arts mission. The 46-credit Liberal Arts Core (LAC) has three tiers. Tier I requires students to explore the Arts and Humanities, Historical Perspectives, Social Sciences, Mathematics, and the Natural Sciences as disciplines. These courses make the development of critical and analytical modes of thinking their central learning objective. At Tier II, students are required to synthesize and apply the knowledge they gained in their first-tier classes in five areas: Applied Information Technology, Creative Expression, Cultural Perspectives, Individuals and Societies, and Natural Sciences. Tiers I and II include offerings that focus on the subject matter and methodologies of the disciplines as well as on their relationships to one another. Tier III requires that students reflect on and draw connections to their liberal arts education in an upper-level capstone course. Eastern’s Liberal Arts Core requirements thus ensure that all students not only take courses from a range of disciplines but also synthesize what they have learned through independent inquiry at an advanced level.

The LAC requires that incoming students demonstrate basic technological literacy. For the first two years of the program (2007-08, 2008-09), these skills were evaluated through a self-assessment and students who needed skill development were offered self-guided workshops administered by the Office of Information Technology. In Fall 2010 the evaluation and skill development will be completed through embedded assessments in FYR 174, a one-credit course taken by all first-time students. The Tier II Applied Information Technology requirement requires students to apply information technology in problem-solving, the pursuit of knowledge, and the communication of ideas. A further discussion of information and technological literacy (including programs offered by Eastern’s library) can be found in Standard Seven.

**The Major or Concentration.** Where the Liberal Arts Core gives students a substantial and coherent introduction to the broad areas of human knowledge and their theories and methods of inquiry, each student also pursues an academic major requiring in-depth study in at least one disciplinary or interdisciplinary area. Eastern’s major programs have varying credit requirements, ranging from 33 to more than 50 credits. All programs require a progression from introductory to advanced coursework, and most include a capstone experience in which students synthesize what they have learned in the course of their studies. With permission from their departments, students may apply two courses from their major to the Liberal Arts Core requirements, encouraging a synthesis of disciplinary knowledge with a broader
liberal arts perspective. In some cases, a department’s own capstone course can serve to fulfill the Tier III LAC requirement, prompting students to reflect both upon the modes of knowledge and methods of their own discipline and the relation of that disciplinary knowledge to the wider field of liberal studies.

While the new Liberal Arts Work requirement will ensure that all students have a significant pre-professional experience, programs designed to provide professional training have traditionally included requirements for practice in the field. For example, Business Administration and Communications programs require that students complete an internship. Education and Health and Physical Education majors complete a field experience requirement, as do Social Work majors. In Economics and in Labor Relations and Human Resource Management internships are highly recommended.

Eastern's commitment to liberal education is anchored in three principles: Engagement, Integration, and Independence. Students become engaged academically through their work in class, which requires imagination and intellectual commitment; they become engaged socially through participation in a variety of clubs, athletics, and co-curricular activities; and they become engaged in the community through projects and programs that address the needs of Willimantic and the region. The University’s liberal arts core curriculum (LAC), majors, and co-curricular programs emphasize the relationships between diverse fields of study as well as the impact of people, ideas and events. These programs make connections among courses and between campus and community life. The academic and personal realms of students’ lives are integrated, so that students can see their studies as a part of who they are and who they may become.

**The Graduate Program.** The Graduate Division, part of the School of Education and Professional Studies, administers graduate programs at Eastern. Graduate education represents only a small percentage (6.5%) of the University’s total enrollment. Two departments in the School of Education and Professional Studies offer master’s programs in their disciplines. The Education department offers Master of Science degrees in Early Childhood Education, Educational Technology, Elementary Education, Reading and Language Arts, Science Education, and Secondary Education. The Business Administration department currently offers a Master of Science in Organizational Management (the department’s Master of Science in Accounting program has been suspended pending analysis of student demand and availability of qualified faculty). These graduate degree programs are planned and scheduled so that students may pursue them on either a full- or part-time basis.

Admission to a graduate program is based upon an applicant's previous academic achievement and evidence of ability to successfully pursue advanced study in the proposed field. The applicant must hold a baccalaureate degree from a regionally accredited institution of higher education in the United States or an equivalent degree from a recognized institution in another country. Students may be admitted provisionally to teacher preparation programs offered by the Graduate Division, though provisional admission does not guarantee full admission into a graduate program. Students on provisional status may enroll for a maximum of twelve (12) credit hours. To move from provisional to full admission status in graduate programs in Education, students must apply for and be accepted by the Committee on Admission and Retention in Education (CARE) without restriction.

Upon formal admission to a graduate degree or planned study program of any kind, the student is assigned a faculty adviser. Following the established requirements of each program, the adviser and the student develop a plan of study for the degree. Though specific degree requirements differ from program to program, all graduate programs at Eastern require a minimum of 30 credits of approved graduate-level courses. All graduate programs have core course requirements covering the seminal issues and knowledge in the field and the research methods appropriate to the discipline, culminating in either a comprehensive examination (Plan A) or a master's thesis (Plan B); professional degree programs also require internships and clinical practica. In some programs, the required coursework is extensive, leaving
little room for elective courses; in other cases, students work with their advisers to choose elective courses that add depth to their course of study. After the Dean of Education and Professional Studies approves the student's plan of study, it is recognized as the student's official planned program of courses and/or project requirements.

Comprehensive examinations and thesis/portfolio submissions typically occur twice each year, once in the Fall semester and once in the Spring. Graduate students who do not pass the comprehensive exam/portfolio may rewrite again the following semester. If the student fails for a second time, however, no additional opportunities to retake the exam are given and no degree is granted. Students taking the comprehensive examination in Organizational Management who fail three or more of the five exam questions are considered to have failed the entire exam. Students who fail one or two questions have the opportunity to be reexamined on those content areas within 20 days. Failure of either one or both of the repeated content areas will result in a failure of the entire exam.

The development of new graduate programs and changes to existing graduate programs follow essentially the same on- and off-campus review processes that undergraduate programs follow. The Graduate Division is responsible for the administration of all graduate programs at the University, a function that is shared with academic departments in the School of Education and Professional Studies. The Graduate Division office staff currently consists of the Dean of the School of Education and Professional Studies, an administrative assistant, and a secretary.

The University does not have a formally defined graduate faculty, but faculty must hold a doctoral degree to teach graduate courses. This degree requirement can be waived only with permission of the appropriate department chairperson and the Dean of Education and Professional Studies. In these cases, individuals (full-time and part-time) must have a demonstrated equivalent level of competence in the specific subject area. The faculty is responsible for student advising and all areas of instruction. Departments assign graduate advisers in the various academic programs on the basis of their credentials, research, and professional interests.

The degree to which departments offering both undergraduate and graduate degree programs must negotiate the distinction between undergraduate- and graduate-level work varies by subject. The Business Department’s Master of Science Degree in Organizational Management is only tangentially related to the undergraduate business program, for example. Students enrolled in the graduate Organizational Management program come from many different undergraduate academic backgrounds. Because the Organizational Management program may be a student’s first exposure to “business” courses, that program must provide students with the foundations of the discipline even as it moves them into advanced work in the field. The Education department’s graduate programs, by contrast, are reviewed annually according to the conditions set by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Those accreditation standards require the department to define the relative emphases in program objectives for the graduate and undergraduate programs, as reflected in curricular, scholarly, and program requirements.

Eastern’s graduate programs focus on preparing students for professional practice in related fields, and the evidence suggests that they are generally effective in achieving their objectives. The Organizational Management program has articulated specific objectives outlining the skills and abilities the program’s students should develop, and assesses itself annually to insure that those goals are met. All master’s degree programs in Education have very clearly articulated matrices of performance assessment measures aligned with the education unit’s conceptual framework, with Connecticut statutes, and with standards articulated by NCATE and other professional associations (e.g., National Council of Teachers of Mathematics). Anecdotal evidence indicates that graduates of Eastern’s graduate and professional programs succeed in entering or advancing in jobs in their fields.
Integrity in the Award of Academic Credit. Eastern’s undergraduate and graduate degrees (and other forms of academic recognition) follow the practices common to American institutions of higher education in terms of both length and content of the programs. Classes are structured to meet for 15 hours for each credit.

The courses the University offers are described in the Undergraduate and Graduate course catalog. The catalog is revised every two years to ensure the accuracy and currency of its descriptions. A recent review did reveal some disparity between what is listed in the course catalog and actual offerings in recent years; some courses that appear in the catalog had not been offered in some time. None of the gaps that were found would have impeded four-year graduation rates, however, either because the courses that had not been offered were electives or—when those courses did fulfill requirements—because other courses fulfilling the requirements were available. University Senate policy does not currently stipulate removal of courses from the University Catalog if they are not offered within a specific amount of time. A more detailed discussion of the University Catalog (including the ways that that document is increasingly supplemented by online resources) appears under Standard Ten.

Once courses are created and approved by the appropriate supervisory bodies (discussed above and under Standard Two), each department is responsible for supervising the delivery of courses. Department chairs can access Banner reports to monitor grade distributions for each class and to identify courses that have a high risk of failing students. All courses offered each term are submitted to the Dean of the appropriate school who has final say on the schedule.

The CSU-AAUP collective bargaining agreement (page 25) requires student opinion surveys of all courses. Instructors are also encouraged to seek peer review of their teaching. Both the peer and student evaluation processes are key sources of information regarding course delivery, and are also used to assess teaching effectiveness as part of the renewal, promotion, tenure, and post-tenure review processes.

Academic policies relative to academic probation and dismissal; adding and dropping courses; withdrawing from the University and requesting a leave of absence are all clearly spelled out in the catalog and the Student Handbook. Eastern has established clear policies and procedures regarding academic misconduct, including plagiarism. Plagiarism policies and procedures are available in the University Catalog, Student Handbook, and the Faculty Handbook as well as on a university website. Eastern has also created the Office of Judicial Affairs, which reports to the Dean of Students, to educate the university community on plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. Cases of plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct are reported to and tracked by the Office of Judicial Affairs. University policy currently allows the faculty member to decide what sanctions should be imposed for academic misconduct, including a failing grade in the course. After two instances of a failing grade or three or more instances of a report of academic misconduct to the Judicial Affairs Office, additional sanctions such as academic probation, suspension, or expulsion are considered. An Academic Misconduct Committee deliberates on student appeals of academic misconduct charges.

The university supplements its focus on course integrity and faculty supervision and support with a focus on students. The Admissions Office seeks to admit only qualified students to the University—students who will be able to succeed at Eastern. Departments have also been encouraged to work with the Advisement Center regarding students on Academic probation and to identify high risk classes (courses where a substantial percentage of students are at risk of failing). Recently, the University has embarked on an ambitious retention and four-year graduation program. A full discussion of admissions, recruitment, and retention policies and procedures is provided under Standard Six.
Eastern is governed by the Department of Higher Education regulations as stipulated by the Regulations for Licensure and Accreditation of Institutions and Programs of Higher Learning. These include specific regulations for off-campus and distance learning courses. Eastern has only one program (the Master’s in Educational Technology) that is offered more than 50% online, and has limited course offerings at off-campus locations. Courses offered for credit off campus are administered by the School of Continuing Education (SCE), and maintain the same academic standards as courses offered at the Willimantic campus. All off-campus classes administered by the SCE are taught by regular Eastern faculty, although the percentage of part-time faculty teaching off campus is higher than on the main campus. All hiring decisions for off-campus classes are made by the academic departments, which also evaluate all off-campus offerings.

The mission of the School of Continuing Education is part of the larger mission of the University. The SCE does not have the authority to offer for-credit courses of its own—all courses carrying Eastern credit are housed in academic departments—but coordinates with department chairs to ensure that courses are offered at times and in formats that meet the needs of part-time and adult students and provides advising for those students. The SCE oversees undergraduate certificate programs for individuals who want to study a specific area in a shorter period of time than would be required to earn a degree. All courses in an undergraduate certificate program may be applied to a degree program at a later time.

Mechanisms for evaluating prior learning and criteria for the award of academic credit are outlined in the University Catalog. Students may be awarded a maximum of 60 credits for various types of non-traditional learning ranging from Advanced Placement (AP) examinations to credit for Lifelong Learning. The Registrar’s Office reviews and applies credit transferred from other universities for undergraduate programs. Individual departments can assign credit to fulfill major requirements for their programs at the discretion of the department chair. The Advisement Center can waive LAC requirements for full-time students and the School of Continuing Education for part-time students. Credits transferred from other institutions are not included as part of the student’s GPA and are not counted towards the 30 credits that a student needs to take at Eastern in order to graduate. Students may receive credit by participating in the Academic Exchange Agreement after approval from the Advisement Center. Courses taken as part of the Exchange Agreement from any other CSU school, regional Community College or the University of Connecticut are counted toward the number of credits needed to be taken at Eastern in order to graduate.

Assessment of Student Learning. Because academic programs offer different learning models, the nature, quality, and extent of student learning and achievement in Eastern’s programs are assessed using a variety of methods and reporting procedures. This variety is evident in the E-Series Forms included as part of this self-study. Every academic department articulates learning goals and reports on their efforts to assess those goals. Academic programs evaluate student learning through the Departmental Assessment Plan and share their assessment results in their annual reports, which are submitted to and reviewed by the Vice President of Academic Affairs. Some academic programs independently collect alumni and employer feedback and interview students to meet certification and/or accreditation requirements. Any such data collected are added to the appropriate Annual Reports.

The University Assessment Committee (UAC) was established to support programs in the assessment of student learning. The UAC is primarily composed of faculty with some administrative members and one student. The UAC coordinates some assessment activities, with the exact nature of their work changing as committee membership and leadership changes and as new assessment needs arise. The committee coordinates the CSU Assessment grant process on campus, has coordinated workshops and programs that supported departments that were developing new assessment plans, and, in the last year, has assisted with administration of the Collegiate Learning Assessment.
At the institutional level, the Academic Program Review process and external accreditation of some programs (Education, Social Work) demonstrate the institution’s approach to student learning, as will the Exemplary Program Review process, when it is fully instituted. The Academic Program Review Committee (APRC) is charged with oversight of the assessment program for all academic programs. The data on student learning outcomes that departments supply in their annual reports becomes part of the overall departmental assessment system used for the Academic Program Review and, if a department chooses, the Exemplary Programs process. The Office of Planning and Institutional Research administers and reports on results of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) each year. These results are being used to inform program modifications. More information regarding assessment may be found in the University Assessment Report.

Quite apart from such institutional assessment measures, students have several venues for demonstrating their mastery of the knowledge and methods of their chosen disciplines. Students share their work with their peers, their professors, and the public at the Arts & Sciences Research Conference and Exhibition, the Education and Professional Studies Excellence Expo, Honors Thesis Presentations, and external conferences and competitions.

Appraisal

The university is effective in delivering its academic program. The implementation of a campus-wide Academic Plan will be a crucial component that will bring together the various aspects of the University’s academic program and ensure that the University mission is coherently addressed at all levels. The Academic Plan was accepted in Spring 2010 and will be implemented in the Fall of 2010. Among other issues not directly related to curriculum, the plan will focus resources and attention on incorporating high-impact practices into instruction and curriculum review to promote four-year graduation.

Organization and Oversight of Academic Programs. Eastern’s internal curriculum approval procedures and those mandated by the CSU System and the state’s Board of Governors for Higher Education ensure that programs offered are consistent with the University’s mission and resources. Approval and modification policies and procedures apply equally to undergraduate and graduate programs. Though the broad framework of program approval and modification is quite sound, the University’s Curriculum Committee process could be streamlined to operate more efficiently. Currently, numerous copies are made of each form for the committee. Work on making fillable forms with the capability to add digital signatures and to send the documents electronically should be continued, with the goal of the curriculum approval process being largely paperless by 2020. Current procedures do not require approval for an existing course to be delivered in an online format. This issue is addressed in a set of recommendations made by the ad hoc Distance Learning Committee and will be considered by the Academic Affairs Committee in Fall 2010 when it reviews the recommendations. The Distance Learning Committee also made recommendations regarding procedures that will ensure that added online courses do not create the possibility that a program can be completed more than 50% online.

The APRC process requires each academic department to reflect on the appropriateness of its curriculum for the field of study, and also prompts departments to analyze the results of regular assessment. The 2008-2013 Strategic Plan included the development of an Academic Plan that calls for departments to complete a curriculum review to ensure that current major requirements are consistent with four-year graduation and faculty expertise. When fully implemented, the Exemplary Program Review process will provide further incentive for thoughtful reflection on programs’ curricula and learning outcomes.

The Strategic Plan called for alignment of the First Year and Liberal Arts Core programs and administration. In the case of the First Year Program it is clear that the First Year Program Committee develops policy and the appointed faculty member (Director of the First Year Program) administers the
program consistent with those policies. The Liberal Arts Core has been administered by an elected chair of an elected committee, resulting in a blurring of the policy-making and administrative functions. A special committee created in response to the strategic plan recommendation for an alignment plan has proposed that the functions be separated for the LAC as they are for the FYR with the elected committee developing policy and an appointed faculty member administering the program. This recommendation will be acted on in Fall 2010.

Relative to other public liberal arts colleges, Eastern has adequate resources to sustain and improve its academic programs. Resources are allocated based on enrollment, discipline-specific standards, and expectations for particular physical resources (e.g. laboratory or studio space). The University attempts to balance student credit hours per full-time faculty member across departments and to ensure that all programs have the physical resources necessary to provide high-quality educational experiences. Eastern’s facilities for the visual and performing arts are most in need of expansion and modernization, but a Fine Arts Instructional Center is in the near-term plan, with funds for design having been approved by the state bond commission in Spring 2010. More detailed discussion of faculty teaching is provided under Standard Five, and facilities are addressed more fully under Standard Eight.

The Undergraduate Program. The university has taken great strides to ensure breadth and depth of education for students across a range of subjects. In the last ten years, Eastern has emphasized the expansion of its undergraduate curriculum, including the creation of the Liberal Arts Core curriculum, the Global Citizenship requirement, and the Liberal Arts Work requirement.

General Education. The LAC was designed specifically to address a lack of clarity in the old General Education Requirements and to create a general education program more appropriate to the institution’s mission. The 46-credit LAC continues to cover a breadth of knowledge, but the articulation of the three tiers serves to structure students’ exposure to a variety of disciplinary perspectives and the comparison and synthesis of those perspectives. The LAC is now in its final implementation phase, with departments developing and offering Tier III courses. So far, the transition from GER to LAC has gone smoothly with the exception of some transfer courses from the community colleges.

The Mathematics competency requirement has been affected by new Math SAT placement cut-off scores standardized across the CSU schools and community colleges. With the new cut-offs more students are placed in developmental and remedial math. In response, the math department is developing new courses to ensure that all students can complete a college level math course in their first year. A new approach to the Technical Literacy competency requirement is being employed in Fall 2010. This uses assessments embedded in the FYR 174 course. Integrated curricular elements have been developed with varying levels of success. Greatest success has been achieved with information literacy, largely due to the support and advocacy of library staff.

The Major or Concentration. The cohesiveness and effectiveness of major and minor programs are evaluated periodically through the Academic Program Review Process; through ongoing review of program enrollment, retention and graduation rates; and through assessment of student learning. Several programs, including Psychology and Biology have been modified in light of results of these assessments to enhance student knowledge and understanding of the discipline. The Liberal Arts Work requirement will ensure that all students see the application of skills and knowledge they acquire in their major to the world beyond the university.

Major and minor programs are added only when there is demonstrated student demand and when there are adequate resources. Recent additions include the creation of separate Music and Theatre majors to replace a Performing Arts major and an interdisciplinary Labor Relations and Human Resource Management major. An interdisciplinary Women’s and Gender Studies major is making its way through the approval
process. All of these programs are consistent with Eastern’s mission, use existing faculty expertise, and, for the most part, take advantage of available seats in existing courses, thereby increasing students’ choices and also increasing the probability that upper level courses have sufficient enrollment to be offered as scheduled.

Eastern’s academic program helps students to develop both intellectual and social independence. *Active and collaborative learning produces graduates who are self-initiated learners and reflective, independent thinkers. These abilities enable Eastern graduates to take active roles in their personal lives, their workplaces and their communities.*

**The Graduate Program.** Eastern’s graduate programs, appropriately for a University of this sort, emphasize professional practice in their curricula and in their scholarly and programmatic requirements. These programs provide students with the opportunity to master a complex field or professional area through planned programs of study. The capstone requirements of the thesis or comprehensive examination challenge each student to demonstrate his or her ability to analyze problems related to the area of specialization and to present results in an appropriate manner. The University’s insistence that all faculty teaching graduate courses hold the Ph.D. or equivalent credential ensures that these faculty are qualified to offer graduate-level instruction and supervise graduate research.

All graduate programs have clearly stated learning goals and all students are subject to assessment of their learning and abilities. Evidence from external certification, positive evaluations of students in student teaching, successful employment, etc. indicates that Eastern’s teaching oriented graduate degree programs are successful at teaching practice. During Academic Year 2008-2009, the University submitted all required special program area (SPA) reports (including specific reports for each graduate education program) for its joint site visit from NCATE and the State Department of Education in Fall 2009. The Master’s in Organizational Management also trains professionals for practice, but data documenting success are less available, as the program does not require external accreditation.

**Integrity in the Award of Academic Credit.** As a constituent unit of the Connecticut State University, Eastern adheres to all the requirements for academic integrity as specified by the Connecticut Department of Higher Education. These standards are detailed and Eastern is in compliance with DHE standards for Graduation Requirements as per Section 10a-34-17 of state law.

Eastern employs multiple methods to ensure consistency and integrity in awarding academic credit and provides students with opportunities for earning credit through transfer, testing, Credit for Lifelong Learning, etc.. All mechanisms for awarding of credit have clear guidelines and criteria and appropriate offices are designated responsibility for the awarding of credit. The closely monitored process for the awarding of credit for prior experience has been institutionalized and has been successful in helping qualified students progress toward timely graduation.

The University has consistently worked with local two-year colleges to establish consistency and clarity in the transfer of academic credits. Eastern is part of a [Transfer Compact Program](#) that promotes transfers from the Connecticut Community Colleges to CSU institutions. An [online course equivalency](#) tool is available to assist potential transfer students to plan their coursework. As part of an initiative by the four CSU schools and the Connecticut Community College campuses, Eastern has identified a set of courses that are being incorporated into a Common Course Numbering system.

The University informs students and faculty about grading procedures using both printed and electronic materials. The University has implemented the Academic Performance Notification network to identify at-risk students and a Risk of Failure system in the Banner reporting system to identify courses that should be supported with tutoring or supplemental instruction. The full implementation of the First Year
Program is also serving as a point of information for students in understanding grading policies as well as policies regarding academic misconduct.

The quality of accelerated and distance courses is subject to the same standards as other courses. All are offered under the supervision of an academic department and all are taught by regular faculty of the university. The majority of accelerated courses are offered during Summer and Winter sessions, and the vast majority of those courses are taught by full-time faculty. For example, of the 19 accelerated courses taught during Winter session 2009, 14 were taught by full-time faculty and only five by part-time faculty.

Currently, there is only one academic program that students can complete almost entirely online. However, with the proliferation of online courses, there needs to be better monitoring of the number of courses individual students take online in order to honor the terms of our accreditation. To that end, a campus and system-wide committee system has been established to monitor online course offerings. The committee on campus is a mix of administrators, support staff and teaching faculty.

**Assessment of Student Learning.** Eastern’s program review and program approval/modification processes ensure that each educational program meets or exceeds the institution’s expectations for quality. Assessment of student learning and achievement, however, is evaluated using different measures across departments and, while variation is to be expected, the quality of and depth of assessment is uneven as is evident in the E-series forms. Some programs do an in-depth assessment of a range of learning goals and have been consistently completing annual assessments, while others are only now finalizing assessment protocols.

The University has been taking steps to develop a more even culture of assessment across the campus. The Assessment Committee and the assessment coordinator assist departments in the evaluation and implementation of assessment procedures. The identification of learning goals has become an important element in the assessment of learning outcomes. Reporting requirements related to assessment have become more standardized with the introduction in 2009 of a new template for reporting assessment of learning outcomes in department annual reports. The template requires specification of learning outcomes, performance criteria, assessment methods, and related program modifications.

Then, too, the University’s program approval and review processes have begun to build in greater focus on assessment, prompting departments and programs to consider questions of assessment as part of all their programmatic activities. The experience of the Liberal Arts Program Committee (LAPC) is instructive in this connection. Eastern’s Liberal Arts Core is only three years old, and methods for assessing and, where necessary, remediating the program have not been finalized. Assessment of the LAC has begun with two years of administration of the Collegiate Learning Assessment, but since seniors who have taken the test in the last two years did not complete the LAC, the results are not helpful in assessing the LAC. Likewise, as discussed under Standard Seven, information and technological literacy programs need to be further developed to meet all LAC goals. Recognizing the shortcomings and incoherencies of some of the initial assessment plans, the LAPC will develop a new plan for assessment that will be implemented in AY 2010-2011.

On the whole, the university has begun to take a broad-based and systematic approach to the assessment of student learning, one that is focused on educational improvement through understanding what and how students are learning through their academic programs and through the new Liberal Arts Curriculum. The current system for evaluating student learning appears to be working smoothly at the various levels (departmental, programmatic, and institutional) with little overlap or duplication. Work remains to be done, however, in ensuring the consistency of assessment activities across academic programs.

**Projection**
Organization and Oversight of Academic Programs. The University's mission as the state’s public liberal arts institution is the backbone of its new strategic plan, which is formulated to shape the University through 2013 and beyond. Eastern will continue to offer major programs that reflect its role as Connecticut’s public liberal arts university. These majors include traditional liberal arts disciplines as well as pre-professional programs that are consistent with the University’s history, mission, and resources as well as with the workforce needs of the state. The institution’s degrees and other forms of academic recognition will continue to be appropriately named and will continue to follow practices common to American institutions of higher education in terms of both the length and the content of the programs.

Eastern’s system of academic administration and faculty participation will continue to reflect the provisions of the CSU-AAUP CBA and University Senate policies and procedures. Procedures for program development and approval at Eastern have shown themselves to be efficient and effective, and are not likely to change significantly. Proposals to add or delete academic programs will continue to be reviewed at at least five different levels. The entire approval process will continue to be guided by questions of the need for a program and the University’s ability to support it. Existing University Curriculum Committee procedures will continue to guide the review and approval of courses for the award of credit. Guidelines will be developed for approval of online courses.

Current processes for the periodic review of programs—internal review by the APRC and, where appropriate, certification and/or accreditation by external bodies—will remain in place, but will be supplemented by the new Exemplary Program Review process. In the process of fully implementing the Exemplary Program process, the initial rubric employed in the program pilot will be developed into a more sophisticated set of tools for evaluating program effectiveness. While the Exemplary Program Review process will be voluntary, it will provide an additional opportunity for programs to evaluate themselves and consider possibilities for programmatic modifications. The Exemplary Program Review process will provide a tool to support decisions about resource allocation and will be aligned as closely as possible with the existing Academic Program Review process.

Any modifications in academic programs will be carried out through established procedures based on the results of learning assessment studies, changes in student demand, the strengths of the faculty in departments, and the availability of resources.

The Undergraduate Program. In the next few years changes in the undergraduate program will reflect the implementation of the Liberal Arts Work and Global Citizenship requirements, required participation in the First Year Program, and full implementation of the Liberal Arts Core. Eastern will promote international experiences for students as part of the Global Citizenship initiative.

General Education. There is no expectation that the LAC will be changed significantly in the near future. As with major and minor programs, however, the program may see some modifications or adjustments as learning assessment data become available.

The Major or Concentration. While majors and minors may be modified in response to learning assessment data, no significant changes in existing programs are anticipated. The curriculum review process called for in the Academic Plan will encourage departments to review program requirements with an eye to promoting four-year graduation rates and aligning curriculum with faculty interests and expertise. New interdisciplinary majors may be approved where consistent with the university’s mission and resources. More majors programs will incorporate internships or pre-professional experiences in response to the Liberal Arts Work requirement.
The Graduate Program. To attract and build part-time graduate enrollment, the University will develop a plan for more “accelerated” programs, work out more flexible, innovative scheduling patterns, and explore the possibilities for increasing the number of distance-learning courses in existing programs.

Two graduate programs, the current Master’s of Science in Organizational Management and the dormant Master’s in Accounting programs, will be the focus of discussion in the near future. A member of the Business department is currently researching options for the programs, and the Vice President of Academic Affairs will coordinate discussions among Business faculty in the Fall of 2010 to consider options for expanding, modifying, or eliminating the programs. These discussions will focus on determining the extent to which the programs meet a need in the state and promote Eastern’s mission with its focus on undergraduate education; the discussions will also consider whether the programs can be supported with existing staff.

Integrity in the Award of Academic Credit. Eastern will continue to approach the awarding of academic credit with an eye towards enabling qualified students to earn degrees in a reasonable amount of time, consistent with maintaining the high standards appropriate to the University’s role as a public liberal arts institution. To facilitate a relatively seamless transfer experience for students coming from Connecticut’s community colleges, Eastern and the other CSU campuses will continue the development of common Transfer Compact applications, a common informational web page, and a common CSU/CTCC transfer equivalency matrix.

Eastern’s resources for information resources and technology are of very high quality. The library and IT staff are very responsive to faculty and student needs, and will continue to make changes in offerings based on assessments, student demand, changes in technology, and the availability of resources. Technology will increasingly be incorporated into the curriculum through various modalities such as Adobe Connect through Eastern’s Blackboard/Vista platform. On-ground courses will use a mix of technologies and will increasingly become hybrid in nature, while online course offerings will increase in most academic programs.

Many institutional issues, practices, policies and procedures will need to be addressed internally at Eastern regarding delivery of course materials online, however. At this stage, it is certainly possible to affirm that no student will be able to complete more than 50% of any program online unless an application for a substantive change to that program has been made and approved. Any such online program, moreover, would be offered primarily for non-traditional students. To ensure the quality of online course offerings, the University’s administration will consider and act on the recommendations of the Senate-appointed ad-hoc Online Course Committee. The institution will need to develop a clear plan for monitoring online course offerings and student registration in online courses.

Assessment of Student Learning. Departments will continue to use effective methods for assessing student learning outcomes based on changing expectations and requirements of the APRC, the University Assessment Committee, and the Eastern and CSU administrations. Regular assessment of both the breadth (LAC) and depth (Major) of students’ learning will become more consistent to ensure that students are leaving Eastern with adequate training in both the liberal arts generally and their field of study specifically. Student learning assessment across academic departments will become more consistent in the next five years. A clear assessment plan for the LAC should be in place for the LAC by the Fall of 2010, and a process to assess the LAC on a regular basis will be established in the next five years.

Eastern is committed to the premise that any curricular changes be based largely on the results of assessment and the availability of resources. Changes to the curriculum (such as the recent decision to
shift the mid-level writing requirement from a portfolio to a writing-intensive class in the major) will be assessed for effectiveness, and any changes made will be based on the results of those assessments.

The University needs to further develop data collection methodologies for Alumni and Employers in all areas of study to determine the adequacy of programs in preparing students for future study and employment.

**Institutional Effectiveness**

Eastern has policies and procedures in place that promote assessment of the quality, integrity and effectiveness of academic programs. Although assessment of learning outcomes remains uneven, great strides have been made in the last ten years. Program review has become more systematic and the Exemplary Program process will result in the development and use of more sophisticated tools for program assessment.