Standard Ten: Public Disclosure

Description

Communications and Dissemination Information
Eastern Connecticut State University is committed to ensuring that students, prospective students, faculty, staff, alumni, public officials, taxpayers, and other University constituencies have complete, accurate and up-to-date information about the university’s educational programs, activities, and services. The University believes its mission as a public liberal arts university brings with it a responsibility to meet the educational needs of students from diverse backgrounds and to apprise the public of its programs, services, and activities. As a public institution funded in part by state tax revenues, Eastern feels obliged as well to account for its use of public funds. Through public disclosure, Eastern fosters community awareness of its values, mission, and commitment to Connecticut residents, as well as of its value as an educational resource for students of all ages and backgrounds.

The names and positions of administrative officers are included in the catalog, President’s Annual Report, Student Handbook, and the University website. The members of the Board of Trustees are listed in the catalog and in the President’s Annual Report. Contact information for general and specific inquiries can be found throughout Eastern’s website. General phone/web information about the University also can be found in all publications and advertisements. The University complies with all reasonable requests for publications and information within its governing guidelines. The Office of Planning and Institutional Research and the Office of University Relations cooperate in complying with appropriate requests for information.

All of Eastern’s printed materials and electronic media, as well as the University website and other communications reflect the University’s liberal arts mission, authorized by the CSU Board in 1998. Revised in Spring 2007 as part of the University’s strategic planning process, the University’s mission statement reflects Eastern’s role as Connecticut’s public liberal arts university. The revised mission is included in the 2008–13 Strategic Plan and on the University’s website (abridged mission statement). Communications also demonstrate the University’s commitment to diversity, and its pledge to provide truthful, complete information to the public.

Public information materials produced by the University routinely include information concerning the University’s academic programs, admissions procedures, expected educational outcomes, student tuition/fee information, degree requirements, contact information for offices and departments, student rights and responsibilities, and other mission-critical information. In all of its print, video, audio, and electronic media, the University strives for accuracy, transparency, and integrity. Ensuring that information is accurate and current is a collaborative effort of the Office of University Relations; the Office of Planning and Institutional Research; and client offices such as the Office of Admissions and Enrollment Management; the Schools of Arts and Sciences, Education and Professional Studies, and Continuing Education; the President’s Office; and others. Indicative of Eastern’s commitment to providing information is the fact that it was an early adopter of the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) College Portrait.

The current catalog, published in August 2008, spans the two-year period 2008–10. (A new online catalog will be published in June 2010.) The catalog contains educational objectives and expected educational outcomes, along with requirements, procedures, and policies related to admissions and transfer of credits. It contains student fees, charges, and refund policies for both graduate and undergraduate students; information on withdrawal from the institution or individual classes; academic programs and courses currently offered; academic policies and procedures; requirements for degrees and other forms of academic recognition; requirements for graduation; and a current list of faculty indicating
departmental or program affiliation, degrees held, and granting institutions. A two-year course projection in the catalog indicates the semester in which listed courses are available. This course grid is in direct response to NEASC concerns expressed in the 2000 Self-Study report that some courses advertised in the catalog had not been offered for two or three years. Departments update these course projections each time the catalog is revised.

As a resource for current students, the catalog is supplemented by documents like the Student Handbook and Housing Handbook, which detail important policies and services affecting students’ academic and personal lives. The Student Handbook includes the academic calendar, contact information on offices and services available to students, academic standards and procedures, attendance policy, student conduct policy, the academic grievance procedure, and contact information for academic departments. The handbook also outlines students’ rights and responsibilities, and the institution’s policy and procedures in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974. The catalog and the Student Handbook present the university’s programs, services, and policies in such a way that students can make informed decisions about their academic plans. In addition to outlining ground rules for dorm life, the Housing Handbook provides students with practical information about life on campus and in Willimantic, and also reminds students of an array of support services available to help them succeed at Eastern.

The University creates a range of publications to provide information to specific groups, such as prospective first-time undergraduates, transfer students, international students, nontraditional students, athletes, and parents. Along with information about the University’s overall academic programs, these publications include information of particular interest to the targeted population. The Viewbook provides prospective undergraduate students with information regarding the size and characteristics of the student body, the campus setting, physical resources, tuition and fees, academic support services, and co-curricular and nonacademic opportunities. Similar information is provided in condensed form in the Admissions “Search Piece.” The pocket-sized University Guide (“Fast Facts”) booklet offers a concise overview of university demographics, budget, facilities, accreditation and other information. Other Eastern publications that are produced to assist University constituencies include media guides for the University’s 17 varsity sports teams, the Visitors Guide, “Eastern Returns,” EASTERN Magazine (the alumni magazine), the Faculty Handbook, Crime Statistics and other Campus Police publications, and the library newsletter. Care is taken to ensure that each publication appeals to its audience, and that all information is accurate, and presented clearly.

Increasingly, Eastern uses its website to provide comprehensive, up-to-date information at the University. All major publications (including all of those mentioned above) are now accessible on the website in PDF format. The entire website was redesigned in 2006–07, with a common architecture and navigational hierarchy, as well as easily accessible links to calendars, course information, and other important, student-centered data. The website also contains information on admissions procedures, tuition, and fees, as well as current information for each academic department, support service, and administrative office. Online applications and online registration, virtual tours, and an online faculty/staff newsletter are other enhancements to Eastern’s website. Overall, the website is designed for user convenience. In addition to prominent locations for popular information (calendar, schedule of classes, admissions, etc.) and the common template, key constituencies have their own portals, i.e. Current Students (“MyECSU”), Faculty/Staff, Prospective Students, etc. In addition, the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (PIR) website also provides demographic information on Eastern’s student body.

Eastern’s goals for students are published in print and/or online in the form of broad statements, such as those at the Admissions web page and in more detail related to the goals of the Liberal Arts Core and for specific majors. Information on retention, graduation, and other measures of student success is available at the Office of Planning and Institutional Research web site in a number of reports (for example, this report on One, Two, and Three Year Retention Rates), in the Common Data Sets, and in the Voluntary
System of Accountability College Portrait. Information on the total cost of education is available at the Office of Planning and Institutional Research web site via the Common Data Set as is information on student indebtedness.

Academic department pages all have the same organization, including faculty/staff information (including part-time faculty), information on all majors/programs of study, and links to current course descriptions from the Banner system. This web-enabling of Banner data allows for the same course/program data that is found in print publications to be accessed on the web. Users can see which faculty members are teaching what classes each semester, and current enrollment levels in real time. Archival data for past semesters is also available online.

Accountability and Transparency
Statements that appear in University publications and other documents disseminated by the Office of University Relations are derived from information provided a number of departments in the University, including the Office of Planning and Institutional Research, the Office of Academic Affairs, the Office of Admissions, and others. Accurate and explicitly worded statements about the University’s current accredited status are contained on the University’s website and in the University catalog. Publications are reviewed and updated on a regular basis. Care is taken to ensure that all information in each publication is complete, accurate, and current. The website is also reviewed frequently for currency of data and information. Publications produced independently of the Office of University Relations may or may not have valid documentation available. Eastern is implementing procedures for complying with the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA) requirement that a list of all required and recommended books and other course materials for all classes offered at the institution be posted.

Appraisal
The University has made a number of improvements related to public disclosure since the 2000 reaccreditation report. These include providing contact information for part-time faculty on academic department web pages, adding information on sabbaticals on websites, adding names of Board of Trustees members on the President’s Annual Reports and expanding Eastern’s website content.

Communications and Dissemination of Information
The catalog, Student Handbook, Viewbook, search piece, targeted admissions publications, continuing education and graduate course schedules, President’s Annual Report, EASTERN (the alumni magazine), print ads, videos, and other major publications are comprehensive and carefully written, and are designed to ensure that target audiences are provided with complete, easy-to-read information. These documents are updated on a regular basis and reviewed carefully for accuracy. Input from faculty, staff, students, and persons outside the University community helps to ensure that information is complete and accurate. To further promote accuracy and consistency, the Office of Planning and Institutional Research is consulted on a regular basis for current statistics about the University and its students.

The Office of University Relations works closely with other University units to maintain consistent style, messages, and accuracy of information in Eastern publications. In order to promote more consistent visual/graphic and written standards, the Office of University Relations has published a Written Style Guide and a Graphic Standards Manual and posted both to the office’s web pages. In addition, briefings on the two resources have occurred with all academic chairs and with administrative departments. While most publications are routed through the Office of University Relations, some departments produce publications independently. In these instances, the accuracy and timeliness of information cannot always be confirmed. The University also provides server space for faculty members’ own personal pages, whose contents and design are the purview of individual faculty.
The Office of University Relations also administers the University’s media relations function through the office’s public relations staff, and has extensive contacts with local, statewide, regional, and national news media, including print, radio, and television news outlets. The Office of University Relations strives to ensure that the University mission is reflected in its communications with the press. The office also maintains an online Media Guide, which features potential University experts in a variety of subjects.

Producing the University catalog is a cooperative effort, led by the Office of Academic Affairs, with input, updating, and review by all deans, department chairs, and administrative offices of the University. Ten years ago, in consideration of cost efficiencies, the University instituted a two-year publication cycle for the catalog, which had previously been printed annually. The catalog includes a two-year projection for planning student schedules, and some majors show the full four-year sequence. For the most part, courses listed in the catalog are being taught within the covered two- and four-year periods. Of 176 active undergraduate courses not offered in the 2006–08 period but listed in the 2008–10 catalog, 62 are being offered over the 2008–10 period, 21 are being offered by arrangement, and 62 are offered as needed. Only 13 of 176 are not currently planned to be offered over the next two years. On the graduate level, of 41 similar courses, five are being offered, eight others are being offered by arrangement, and 28 can be offered as needed. Course schedules, produced three times a year by the School of Continuing Education and Office of Graduate Programs in cooperation with the Registrar’s Office, also contain current information about new programs and tuition.

The Viewbook, produced by the Office of University Relations in conjunction with the Office of Admissions and Enrollment Management, with input from other university units, includes current information for prospective undergraduates. The University established a four-year design cycle for the Viewbook in 1996, wherein the second through fourth years of the cycle used the same design introduced in year one, with copy/photo updates. Due to budget constraints, the most recent viewbook was used for six years rather than the desired four, but a new Viewbook is currently being designed and will be available for Fall 2010.

Inevitably, print production schedules sometimes result in out-of-date information appearing in print publications. Several publications (including the catalog and the alumni directory) were being reprinted at the time the University’s mission statement was being revised, for instance, and will include the new statement in their next editions. The new mission statement is found on the University’s web site, however, which is symptomatic of the ways that the web site has increasingly become the most current and accurate source of up-to-date information about Eastern—a fact that students, faculty, and the general public have largely come to take for granted.

Information that changes during the catalog’s two-year production cycle, for instance, is easily updated on the University’s website, avoiding the need for mid-cycle printed inserts. Information about noncredit programs is updated regularly at the School of Continuing Education web site, and the online course schedule reflects the most current and accurate information about sections being offered. Likewise, each academic department’s website features detailed information on the majors offered by that department, including the courses required for the major and any preferred course sequence, along with links to the course description and the semester course schedule databases found in Banner. Department web sites also include contact information for all faculty members (including part-time and temporary faculty, who are not routinely listed in print publications) and current information concerning faculty on sabbatical or other leave.

In recognition of the ways that students, faculty, and the public have come increasingly to turn to the University’s web site as a source of current information, the catalog for AY 2010-11 will be published in its entirety online, with sections (including those on Academic Policies and Procedures) distributed in print. Archived copies of catalogs back to 2002 are currently available online and this procedure for
providing access to prior catalogs will continue. Similarly, as of the 2009-10 academic year, the Student Handbook is available online only. Compiled and updated by the Division of Student Affairs, the Student Handbook is both a contract with students and an information resource about activities, services, policies, and responsibilities. More and more, students turn instinctively to the University’s web site for such information, obviating the need for a print publication.

Although the University’s web site is extensive in content and recognized by students and others as fairly easy to navigate, some web pages on Eastern’s site are not updated as frequently as would be ideal. To address the NEASC 2000 visiting team’s recommendation to hire a full-time webmaster, the Office of University Relations hired two part-time web designers to assist in migrating the University’s web site to its new design template. In addition, website maintenance is supported by staff from ITS, Continuing Education, Admissions and other departments and offices. Rather than purchase a proprietary Content Management System (CMS), Eastern developed its own solution and has a standard template that includes locked content areas, along with areas on each page that can be populated and updated by staff who do not need a high degree of technical training. In this way, after the Office of University Relations designs each site, departments can maintain their own pages. Since 2006, more than 60 departments have been upgraded to the new template. Existing staffing is challenged to keep up with the ongoing demand for new content and new webpage designs, and even more so with the demand for newer technologies that are becoming increasingly common online (such as RSS feeds, podcasts, streaming video, and integration with social networks like Facebook and Twitter). Though some of these more dynamic features have begun to filter into the sites of various departments and centers, the University’s web site does not incorporate new technologies of this sort as fully as it could.

The Media Services Department assists university departments in producing videos and other media presentations to promote their programs and services, and has recently created an extensive digital warehouse of streaming videos (student creativity, events, performances, promotions). Another vehicle used to communicate information about the University is Eastern’s cable TV station, Channel 22. Several student-run televisions programs highlight campus news, and can be viewed on the Charter cable system in the local service area. Media Services also maintains an iTunes site.

Accountability and Transparency
The Office of Planning and Institutional Research (PIR) offers the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) each spring to freshmen and seniors; senior data is included on the College Portrait Voluntary System of Accountability website. Systematic assessment of academic programs is conducted through the Academic Program Review Committee and the University Assessment Committee. Data indicating the achievement of mission-critical institutional goals, including retention and graduation rates, can be found on the Office of Planning and Institutional Research website, as well as on the Voluntary System of Accountability website.

The University makes every effort to respond in a timely manner to reasonable requests for publications and for information, within the limitations of the Federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), which prohibits releasing student records without student consent. Because Eastern is a public institution, much of the information about the university is available through Freedom of Information statutes. The most recent audited financial statements can be obtained through the University’s Office of Administration and Finance, the Connecticut State University System Office, and the Office of the State Auditors. Budget information is also found on the Office of Fiscal Affairs website.

The University indicates in its catalog and other recruitment materials that it is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. Major university publications undergo regular revision. The catalog, reviewed by every department on campus, is updated every two years. The Student Handbook, Housing Handbook, view book, search piece, graduate and continuing education course
schedules are updated yearly. The President’s Annual Report of Donors produced by the Office of Institutional Advancement, and the President’s Annual Report, which is based on each department's annual report, are new each year. In addition, the University maintains frequent, ongoing communications with alumni through the Office of Alumni Affairs, which uses its website, events, and the alumni magazine — EASTERN — to stay in contact with alumni.

Request for Comment
In the spirit of open communications and full public disclosure, and in keeping with NEASC policy, a request for third-party comment regarding Eastern Connecticut State University’s 2010 Self-Study and the upcoming fall 2010 NEASC Site Visit is being published in several local newspapers, in the campus newspaper, and in Eastern’s alumni magazine.

Projection

Communications and Dissemination of Information
Visual, print, and audio materials contain information about the institution that is complete, accurate, and clear. Although the two-year cycle of the catalog has resulted in problems with the timeliness of some information, other publications, produced more often, provide current information for students. The online catalog will be updated annually beginning in Fall 2010, alleviating many of the difficulties created by the comparative “slowness” of print publication.

The University’s web site will never displace printed materials entirely from Eastern’s communications, of course. Historically, Eastern’s Viewbook has been redesigned every four years, but current budget constraints have forced the University to extend the Viewbook’s production cycle to six years. As soon as fiscal circumstances permit, the University hopes to return to four-year cycle. While the Viewbook’s primary audience—high school seniors—rolls over each year, secondary audiences such as guidance counselors may not give Eastern’s Viewbook as much attention as they do to publications from institutions that update their designs more frequently, which could compromise the University’s ability to attract prospective students. Keeping the design of its print publications fresh, then, is an important part of the University’s efforts to communicate key messages and information to its core constituencies.

Though print publications will continue to play an important part in the University’s communication efforts, it is clear that Eastern’s web site, if properly maintained, can be positioned as the most current, accurate source of information about Eastern. The University’s web site has made great strides in the past decade, with a great deal of information now available online that wasn’t before, including informative descriptions Eastern’s programs and facilities, its demographics, and the co-curricular and nonacademic opportunities it offers students (e.g. student clubs), as well as all of the information students need to contact their professors, whether full-time or part-time faculty. To better ensure consistency, accuracy, and completeness on the University’s website, however, Eastern hopes to hire a full-time webmaster in the Office of University Relations when fiscal circumstances permit.

Accountability and Transparency
The University will continue to comply with all reasonable requests for publications and information about itself, including its most recent audited financial statements. The university will also continue to be accurate and explicit in regard to its accreditation status. Indeed, Eastern has plans to expand its transparency in such matters. The University’s accreditation status will be added to more publications, including the Student Handbook and the Viewbook, and to more web pages. One strategy under consideration would create a new “About Eastern” page on the web site to present in one place information about Eastern’s accreditation status (using an official, NEASC-approved statement), its mission and core values, and recent awards and recognitions. The University also plans to include the new
mission statement in the next editions of the Alumni Directory, Catalog and Student Handbook, as well as on the back of business cards.

In addition to the Voluntary System of Accountability College Portrait, other repositories of Eastern information include the Banner system, as well as the Planning and Institutional Research website, which maintains two years of College Portrait data and three (soon to be four) years of Common Data Set reports. Each year, accountability reports are provided to the Connecticut State University System Office, the Connecticut Department of Higher Education, and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. Additional information that could be added to the University’s key data set includes NSSE reports, full-time equivalencies, etc. As the repository for university information, the Office of Planning and Institutional Research already includes a Request for Service on its website (http://www.easternct.edu/pir). Additional information on cost of education will be provided via a cost calculator that will be posted at the web site of the Office of Financial Aid once a final determination is made about which calculator to use and what figures should be standardized across the CSU campuses.

To enhance reliability of published information, documentation for all statements about achievements of students and faculty should be forwarded to the Office of University Relations, with a courtesy copy to the Office of Institutional Planning and Research, which is the primary source for nonfinancial statistical information for the campus. A new web site has been created that will provide information on faculty publications, presentations, and grants. This will updated semi-annually if not more frequently. The Library, Office of University Relations and Vice President of Academic Affairs will consider the purchase of digital repository software that could be used to provide this information. Information on textbooks has been posted as required by the 2008 HEOA.

**Institutional Effectiveness**

Eastern Connecticut State University continues to enhance its communications to its various constituencies and the general public. In particular, it is working to leverage the currency and convenience of the internet to distribute and share important information about the University. In all its communications, Eastern seeks to provide accurate, consistent information on a timely basis and its success in doing so is evaluated through a number of formal and informal processes. The effectiveness of the online student handbook and course catalog will be assessed in 2010-2011.