Standard Three: Organization and Governance

Description

Organization and Governance: Eastern, the CSU System, and the Board of Trustees. Eastern Connecticut State University is an institution where the different levels of governance enjoy substantial cooperation. Administration, faculty, staff, and students have generally maintained a close working relationship that has been mutually beneficial and has allowed the institution to grow and change in pursuit of its mission. The basic organizational design and governance structure currently in place has been consistent for more than 20 years.

Eastern is one institution of a four-campus system known collectively as the Connecticut State University System (CSUS). The CSU System operates under the aegis of a single Board of Trustees, headed by a chair who is appointed by the governor of the state. The board has 18 members, 14 of whom are appointed to six-year terms by the governor and confirmed by the Connecticut General Assembly. The four remaining board members are student trustees, one from each campus, who are elected by their fellow students.

The CSUS Board of Trustees works in consultation with the State of Connecticut’s Board of Governors for Higher Education, represented by its staff vehicle, the Department of Higher Education (DHE), which is headed by the Commissioner of Higher Education. The Department of Higher Education is charged with ensuring academic quality and fiscal efficiency in higher education and that higher education is accessible to the state’s students and responsive to the state’s economic needs. In addition to conducting licensure and accreditation reviews of all higher education programs in the state (public and private), DHE prepares system-wide operating and capital budget requests to the legislature for public institutions; operates state and federal student financial aid and minority recruitment programs; maintains a data base for budgeting and policy studies; preparing legislative proposals on issues of concern to higher education (including the monitoring of graduation and enrollment trends); and oversees the operations of state private occupational schools.

The Board of Trustees works to ensure that the activities of the CSU System institutions are aligned with statewide policies and priorities, as articulated by DHE. There are six standing committees of the Board: Academic Affairs, Audit and Risk Management, Development, Executive, Finance and Administration, and Student Life. The Board also maintains a Committee on Collective Bargaining. The Board meets eight times a year, with meetings rotating among the four universities and the System Office. Board meetings are open to the public. The Board has the authority to determine the general policy of the university system, review and approve institutional budget requests, set tuition and fees, and appoint the chancellor of the system and the university presidents.

The Board maintains a system staff with the Chancellor functioning as the chief executive officer. The Chancellor implements board policy and is responsible for the successful operation of the system. The Chancellor and the Board receive advice and counsel from a system of various councils that meet monthly to recommend policy and comment on pending issues. These councils are: Presidents, Academic Affairs, Finance and Administration, Student Affairs, Employee Relations, Information Technology, and Institutional Research. The administrators in these areas maintain constant communication to ensure that system efforts are aligned where necessary and reflect different campus perspectives where appropriate.

The Presidents of the four CSUS institutions report to the Chancellor, but have broad discretion in the management of affairs at their respective campuses. As such, the role of Eastern’s President will be discussed in the following section.
The relationships among the Board of Trustees, the administration, faculty, and staff of the CSU system, as well as their relative authority and responsibilities, are described and governed by Board of Trustees policies and procedures, which incorporate (in addition to the Board’s own policies) state statutes and regulations, collective bargaining agreements for faculty and administrative staff, and personnel policies and procedures for non-union management and confidential employees.

Although there is currently no formal process for assessing the work of the Board of Trustees, the Board seeks to monitor its own effectiveness through the periodic evaluation of the Chancellor and the four university Presidents. The board sets priorities, goals, and objectives for the Chancellor and the Presidents. The four Presidents are evaluated annually (with a respective in-depth evaluation every four years), which provides the occasion for assessing the extent to which the activities of the four campuses advance the mission of the system as a whole. The evaluation of the Chancellor serves as an occasion to gauge the effectiveness of the CSU System’s policies, including the System’s relationship to the branches of state government, and to adjust them if necessary.

Organization and Governance within Eastern. Eastern has been led by Dr. Elsa M. Núñez since her appointment as the University’s sixth President in 2006. The President is assisted in the administration of the University by a senior management team consisting of an Executive Vice President, four Vice Presidents (of Academic Affairs, Finance and Administration, Student Affairs, and Institutional Advancement), and a Chief Information Officer, as well as an Executive Assistant who also serves as the University’s Chief Diversity Officer. In all matters affecting educational quality and the University’s mission, governance is shared between the Administration and the University Senate, a principle enshrined in the collective bargaining agreement between the CSU System and the AAUP. Together, the Senate and the Administration share responsibility for University policy in areas such as curriculum; degree requirements; academic standards; admissions policies; academic freedom; tenure, promotion, and continuing appointment; budgeting; planning; and organizational structure.

The University Senate consists of members drawn from the instructional faculty, the administrative faculty, the Student Government Association and the administration. There is one representative from each academic department (including one for the Library and Counseling faculty, and one for the Athletics Faculty), three senior administrative officers, the President (who holds a non-voting seat), five representatives from the administrative faculty, four at-large members elected by the instructional and administrative faculty, and three students selected by the student government. The Senate presents its decisions in the form of bills and resolutions. Bills require the approval of the president to become University policy.

The Senate elects and oversees standing committees, each of which has jurisdiction over a specific area and studies issues and problems within that area for the purpose of proposing policies and recommendations. Standing committees include Academic Affairs Committee, Academic Program Review Committee, Budget & Resource Allocation Committee, Curriculum Committee, First Year Program Committee, Information Technology Committee, Liberal Arts Program Committee, Liberal Arts Works Committee, Organizational Committee, Personnel Policies Committee, Student Academic Advising Committee and Support Services Committee, Elected at-large committees organized through the Senate include Academic Misconduct, CSU Professorship Awards Advisory Committee, Faculty Development Committee, Grade Appeals, Individualized Major – Advisory Committee, Information Technology Committee, Promotion & Tenure Committee, Research Reassigned Time, Sabbatic Leave Committee, Termination Appeals Committee, University Writing Board Committee, Academic Excellence Awards, Excellence Awards Committee, Honorary Degree, and Planning and Priorities Council.
The Senate undertakes periodic (but not regularly scheduled) examinations of its constitution and by-laws to ensure that the system of governance is mindful of the institutional mission and serves the needs of the organization. For example, the Senate reviews its constitution and by-laws each time a new faculty collective bargaining agreement is approved to ensure compliance with contract provisions. In recent years, the Senate has revamped its committee structure to address changing needs; new committees on the First-Year Program, on academic advising, and on Information Technology have been formed in response to curricular revisions and strategic planning initiatives.

The University’s organizational structure and system of governance are subject to adjustment as the need arises. Recommendations can be made either to the administration or to the University Senate, and implemented through the normal procedures of each. A third avenue for review lies externally, with the Board of Trustees. Both the Academic Affairs and the Finance and Administration Committees of the Board of Trustees may review the University’s organizational structure when needed, and implement policy changes as necessary. The Academic Affairs Committee of the BOT has jurisdiction over policies relating to academic matters and the Finance and Administration Committee of the BOT oversees policies governing Management and Confidential Professional personnel that fall outside union jurisdiction, and is also charged with examining the distribution of personnel across the various functions of the University.

Personnel matters at the university are governed by six collective bargaining agreements pertaining to unclassified (AAUP and SUOAF) and classified employees. For employees not covered by contracts a document HR Policies for Management and Confidential Personnel provides information regarding employment policies. Each of these documents provides policies and guidelines affecting working conditions, benefits, and responsibilities of such employees.

Members of the University community may address concerns about University policy to the University Senate. When issues are brought to the attention of the Senate Executive Committee, they are typically referred to one of the standing committees for investigation. The standing committee consults with interested parties within the faculty and administration, and also accepts input from any member of the University community. If the standing committee feels a policy change is appropriate, it can submit a bill to the Senate for approval. It is thus the standing committees of the Senate that monitor the University’s programs and policies on a wide array of issues.

Eastern’s academic programs are divided among three schools: Arts and Sciences, Education and Professional Studies, and Continuing Education. Each school is headed by a Dean who reports to the Vice President of Academic Affairs. All of Eastern’s academic departments are housed in either the School of Arts and Sciences or the School of Education and Professional Studies. Each department is represented by a chair, who, according to the terms of the CSU-AAUP Collective Bargaining Agreement, is responsible for leading the department in fulfilling its responsibilities in academic and personnel areas and for facilitating the functioning of the department. The School of Continuing Studies houses no departments of its own; rather, the Dean and Associate Dean of Continuing Education work closely with the other two academic deans and with department chairs to arrange course offerings (e.g. off-campus, continuing education, distance education, evening, or week-end classes), to facilitate the development of new courses and majors for students enrolled in the School of Continuing Studies, and to coordinate other matters of academic policy. International course offerings (study abroad and travel courses) are under the supervision of the School of Continuing Education (travel courses) and the Intercultural Center (study abroad).

Basic control over the curriculum at Eastern is lodged with the faculty, subject to approval for new degree programs by the President, Trustees, and Board of Governors. This responsibility is spelled out in the CSU-AAUP Collective Bargaining Agreement, particularly with respect to faculty responsibility for
academic programs and curriculum. Policies relating to matters of educational programs, faculty personnel, and other appropriate aspects of institutional policies are established through the University Senate.

*Student Government and Student Interest.* In addition to sending three representatives to the University Senate and electing one student member of the CSUS Board of Trustees, Eastern’s students have their own governance system in the form of the Student Government Association (SGA). The goal of SGA is to connect students to faculty, to the administration, and to each other in order to advance student views and interests. The Preamble to the SGA constitution stresses the bond among students, faculty, and administrators—an essential feature that is in keeping with the university’s mission as a liberal arts institution. The SGA encourages a club and organization structure that emphasizes activities wedded as much as possible to the University’s academic program and to the ideals of civic engagement expressed in its mission.

SGA is made up of an executive board and senate. The executive board consists of a President, a Vice President, a Secretary, a Treasurer, and a Business and Management Chair. The number of Senate seats is determined by enrollment, with one student representative for every 200 students. Elections are held in the Spring and Fall; students must hold a minimum GPA of 2.5 in order to run for office. Four committees make up the Student Government Association: Budget and Management (BAM), Internal Issues, Student Issues and Promotions. Important matters and questions that arise are referred to the appropriate committee for further research, discussion and debate and are reported back to the full Senate at a future meeting.

SGA also appoints senators to a number of University committees as requested by the University administration. These committees include, but are not limited to: Faculty Senate Committees, Honorary Degree Selection Committee, Student Center Advisory Board, and the Design Review Committee. As part of the strategic planning process, the SGA President was a member of the President’s Advisory Committee and was part of the team making decisions on initiatives at the highest level.

The SGA President meets regularly each semester with the University President. The Executive Board is periodically invited to attend the President’s staff meetings. In conjunction with the President’s office, SGA also sponsors two to three President’s Breakfasts each semester. Representatives from the 50 student clubs and organizations are invited to share information and ideas with the University President and other senior administrators.

**Appraisal**

*Organization and Governance: Eastern and The Board of Trustees.* The Board of Trustees maintains a clear understanding of Eastern’s distinctive mission and purpose. The Board approved Eastern’s mission as the State’s public liberal arts university on November 6, 1998. The Board holds the authority to ensure that that mission is accomplished, as well as the right to approve any modifications of Eastern’s mission. Eastern (like all of the CSUS institutions) produces regular reports for the Board of Trustees on the institution’s operations. Board members can thus consider operational events in light of the University’s mission and purpose to ensure that Eastern’s actions and policies are consistent with its mission.

The current system of committees and councils works well to ensure that information is shared and policies and actions are coordinated appropriately, both among the campuses and between each CSU campus and the System office. The Board’s committee format and (where appropriate) its consultation with advisory committees and task forces serve to involve numerous campus and system office personnel in the drafting and discussion of new policies, as well as in the revision of existing policies. Before the
Board delivers its final approval of any policy change, the appropriate Board committee holds a final drafting meeting where campus representatives are present. The organization of the CSU system has operated in a coordinated fashion without much change since the last self study. The system calls for the Board of Trustees to develop—and for the Chancellor to execute—broad policy directions, while leaving the Presidents of the four campuses considerable latitude to manage their institutions’ own affairs and develop their institutions’ own distinctive characters. The success of the entire enterprise rests on the effective functioning of individuals and groups at both the campus and system levels, as well as the cooperation among those groups.

Organized and Governance within Eastern. Eastern’s organization and governance structure has worked effectively over the last ten years to allow input from both administrators and faculty into the University’s academic program. The system in place allows input from diverse constituencies across campus in both critiquing existing policy and offering proposals for new policies. The existing system has worked effectively to produce clear policies on matters as divergent as proposing new courses or majors, applying for sabbatical leave, and procedures for applying for tenure and promotion. The Senate governance process allows a voice for all members of the Eastern community in the running of the University.

The adoption of the new Liberal Arts Core Curriculum (LACC), which replaced the previous General Education Requirements, provides a good view of Eastern’s governance system at work on a large scale. A number of proposals were vetted through Senate committee meetings, public forums, and the Senate. The program currently in place was ultimately adopted by the Senate and approved by former President (now Chancellor) David G. Carter. Implementation of the LACC is now overseen by the Liberal Arts Program Committee, a standing committee of the Senate, which approves proposals for courses to be accepted into the LACC, and has a policy for periodic review of those courses that are accepted to ensure they continue to fulfill the goals and objectives of the Liberal Arts Program.

If anything, the transparency and the participatory character of Eastern’s governance has increased under the leadership of Dr. Núñez. Since her arrival, President Núñez has worked aggressively to ensure that all campus constituencies have access to her office. In addition to holding open office hours in which any member of the community can present issues to her in a private meeting, the President has maintained an ambitious schedule of meetings with different groups: one meeting a year with the residents of each residence hall; regular breakfast meetings with key members of the Student Government Association; periodic meetings with members of the various employee union stewards; regular breakfast meetings with members of the faculty; and yearly meetings with each academic department.

In addition to maintaining good employee relations through open lines of communication, President Núñez recently set the terms for an extraordinarily participatory strategic planning process, described in greater detail in Chapter Two. The design and implementation of the strategic plan’s 18 initiatives involved the efforts, all told, of more than 250 employees serving on numerous committees, each of which shared its work with the rest of the University by posting the minutes of its meeting online and by holding open forums. While the incorporation of multiple perspectives could at times seem to slow down the strategic planning process, the end result was a set of policies that have earned the support of faculty, staff, and administration. All changes recommended through the Strategic Plan implementation process that affect academic policy or other areas under the jurisdiction of the University Senate have been approved by the Senate. Assessment of the strategic planning process will be accomplished through careful development of assessment plans for each initiative with oversight from an appointed Strategic Plan Assessment Coordinator (appointed in June 2010).

The effectiveness of Eastern’s organizational structure related to this curriculum is currently being reviewed through the implementation of the Strategic Plan. Similar review was effected by the strategic
planning process, for as proposals were advanced by implementation committees, organizational changes were recommended as needed. These proposals were then reviewed by two oversight committees: the Strategic Plan Implementation Steering Committee (SIPS) and the President’s Advisory Committee (PAC). While the primary purpose of both SIPS and PAC was to review each proposal with an eye toward the effectiveness of each in achieving the goals established by the strategic plan, both committees, and especially PAC, were also required to oversee any organizational changes to ensure resources are allocated in the most effective manner possible. Within this process, SIPS acted as an advisory committee to PAC, and PAC acted as an advisory committee to President Nunez.

*Student Government and Student Interest.* SGA has made progress with regard to greater visibility for and attention to student needs, although more needs to be done to identify the issues that are of greatest concern for students. The number of students participating in the student Senate has grown, but more outreach is required to engage the still-substantial commuter student population. The most recent election saw contested offices for all Executive Board positions, as well as increased turnout by students. SGA continues to review its constitution and bylaws annually.

The process of allocating funds to clubs and organizations was also improved this year with a move to an online request form. SGA needs to continue to make the student body aware of what is happening within the organization.

**Projection**

*Organization and Governance: Eastern and the Board of Trustees.* It is projected that the trustees will continue to operate generally as they have in the previous ten years both in terms of organization, their relationship to Eastern and to the DHE. Since there have not been any serious proposals advanced at the legislative, DHE, or system levels to alter the current system of governance and management, it seems reasonable to expect that current policies and procedures will remain in place.

*Organization and Governance within Eastern.* The University expects to continue its record of effective governance, drawing on its good relationships with its governing board, the State’s Department of Higher Education, and those internal organizations, such as the University Senate that function as bodies establishing or monitoring policies or playing advisory roles.

Eastern has generally promoted and maintained a climate where all organizations and individuals in the University community have been able to participate meaningfully in the development or revision of policy. In the 2009 survey, *Great Colleges to Work For*, Eastern ranked in the top ten of medium-sized institutions in the area of collaborative governance. While a number of organizational changes will likely emerge from the strategic planning process, there is no reason to expect any change in Eastern’s fundamental character, which promotes the participation of the entire community in discussions about University policy. Organizational changes that are anticipated include a shift in responsibility for event scheduling and for oversight of the Liberal Arts Core.

There is currently no regularly scheduled, formal process for reviewing Eastern’s organizational structure and system of governance. In an effort to ensure more systematic review in the future, the University Senate will propose an amendment to its bylaws charging the Organization Committee with a review of the Senate’s bylaws and committee structure every five years in order to ensure that the Senate’s structure continues to fit the governance needs of the University. Based on such reviews, the Organization Committee may from time to time make recommendations to the University Senate to improve the system of governance as needed.
**Student Government and Student Interest.** SGA will seek out membership from commuters and encourage the creation of an organization for this group of students. Traditionally Eastern has not experienced a strong and sustainable commuter association. While the new Student Center has resolved the need for space for commuters an association/organization has not been an outcome. While commuters do have many places on campus to spend time between classes with other students (residents and commuters) they simply have not pushed for an association/organization. SGA conducts commuter student forums once a semester whereby they solicit input from commuter students. The Budget and management Committee will continue to review existing policies and make improvements in the allocation and funding process for student clubs and organizations. While SGA organizes forums to gather student input and has an active web-based campaign inviting students to express their concerns and opinions and present new ideas, a needs assessment should be part of SGA’s future plans. This will likely take the form of a "quality of student life study" that captures students’ assessments of their needs more formally.

**Institutional Effectiveness**

Eastern’s external and internal governance structures are clear and stable. There is substantial agreement and goodwill among the administration, the faculty and the support staff. The institution works to make changes to its governance structure when needed and has been sensitive to creating needed changes. Assessment of the need for changes in governance at the campus level takes place periodically through Senate committees, administrative review, and as part of the systematic Strategic Planning process.