



Conclusion



Conclusion and Request for Re-accreditation

As the self-study process unfolded the deeply-interrelated nature of the five criteria for accreditation became more and more clear. Discussions about the re-examination of UWSP's mission statement merged naturally into observations about current attempts to improve campus-wide implementation of strategic planning. Discussions of effective teaching and documentable learning were illuminated by evidence of the University's continued and increasing dedication to outreach and service-learning, itself an indication of UWSP's awareness that as its constituencies and their needs shift and change, the University must plan systematically in order to be able to continue meeting them.

Engagement has become in fact a crucial concern for UWSP and the entire public university system. In an era where economic pragmatism, not to say shortsightedness, may render the intrinsic value of a liberal education less obvious to many of the publics that the public universities serve, it is centrally important for those institutions to demonstrate that the tax dollars that enable their survival are being productively spent. In this regard UWSP is aware that it must not only trumpet the value and importance of a liberal education but also the institution's own uniqueness and its commitment to listen to the evolving requirements and desires of its external constituencies.

UWSP demonstrates that it recognizes and is responding to these concerns in many ways. *Vision 2015*, the University's plan for the next decade, specifically connects the mandates to partner with others "for a vibrant economy" and to prepare students to be "global citizens" with a focus on the campus's "history and values." (Chapters 1 and 2 provide more detail on *Vision 2015*.) Chapter 5, focusing on engagement and service, reveals ample and mutually productive engagement between UWSP and a host of external constituents. Surveys to assess demands by external constituents are regularly promulgated by Office of Institutional Research (formerly the Policy and Planning Analyst) (see section 5a-1). The large number of programs at UWSP that lead to professional licensing, certification, or accreditation also demonstrate productive collaboration between the University and its external constituents, as do the numerous internships undertaken by UWSP students and the programs offered by Continuing Education.

Central to this atmosphere of collaboration is UWSP's commitment to serving the various communities of which it is a part. In addition to increasing opportunities

and requirements for students to engage in service-learning experiences as a component of various degree programs, private volunteerism by UWSP faculty and staff and also student community involvement through the Association for Community Tasks, is widespread. Further, the operations of the AmeriCorps* VISTA Service-Learning Office helps coordinate faculty and students on projects that benefit the public.

Beyond this UWSP strives to maintain accountability and credibility within the communities it serves, and to maintain an ongoing, productive internal dialog about this and the other aspects of its mission. As pointed out in Chapter 1, UWSP adheres to state, local, and campus regulations in terms of open meetings and the availability of records, ensuring complete public access to the University's functions except in exceptional circumstances. As declared in its mission statements (see Chapter 1), UWSP's mission, and that of the entire UW System, is to serve the good of the state, the nation, and the worldwide community. As Chapters 1 and 2 suggest, this goal has for a time been more implicitly than explicitly implemented, but recent efforts to establish more systematic campus-wide assessment and planning indicate UWSP's awareness of the importance of articulating its goals and challenges, especially among its own constituents.

As Chapter 2 indicates, systematic strategic planning is one of UWSP's primary challenges. Although undertaken in good faith—if in a rather *laissez-faire* fashion—by previous administrations, strategic planning has had a difficult time finding its feet on this campus. As Chapter 2 also suggests, this is due partly to lingering faculty suspicion about de-allocation and the desire to protect tenure lines entrenched by fief-like GDR requirements. As recent efforts to implement and embed long-term planning structures demonstrate, however, awareness of the importance of this process is growing. In re-visiting its conception of its mission (as discussed in Chapter 1) and the structure of its GDR requirements (Chapter 3), UWSP indicates that it recognizes that changing demographics require an appropriately defined mission and a clear understanding of the centrality of that mission to its continued success in serving its constituencies.

Central to that mission is creating the environment and providing the tools and guidance that enable student learning. As Chapter 3 demonstrates, the central thrust of UWSP's redoubled efforts at strategic planning focus on defining and assessing student learning outcomes. Beyond this UWSP continues to develop new and innovative academic programs and to enhance its infrastructure to ensure that it is providing students and faculty with access to the facilities that will ensure a comprehensive learning experience. Besides technology-equipped classrooms, practice spaces, athletic and fitness facilities, radio and television production facilities, and presentation and lecture auditoriums, UWSP strives to foster learning in a number of less-traditional spaces, including its off-site environmental education facilities, its residence hall-centered mentoring programs, its community-based service-learning and internship programs, and its developing

distance-learning programs. UWSP is primarily—and proudly—a teaching institution, an emphasis unmistakable in its vast and varied array of programs designed to enhance student learning.

UWSP also recognizes that an important part of enhancing student learning is ensuring that both students and faculty understand the importance of continued scholarly engagement, both as part of the learning process and throughout life *ex muris*. Faculty are provided the resources to pursue research through programs like the University Personnel Development Committee and also through support from the UW System. Travel support through the various departments and units and matching funds for purchasing library materials are other examples of UWSP's commitment to faculty research and lifelong learning. This kind of support is also available for student research, as detailed in Chapter 4, and, along with experience in internships and service-learning, as well as the many ways the campus recognizes student achievement in these areas, reinforces the importance of learning as a life-long activity.

Beyond this, growing engagement on campus with the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) is helping to ensure that faculty remain engaged with research and theory surrounding the practice of teaching. Combined with research within specific disciplines, SoTL encourages faculty to pursue continued intellectual development throughout their careers.

Mission, vision, values, goals: these are topics very much in the air at UWSP. As mentioned above and detailed in Chapters 1 and 2, the University is currently in the process of re-evaluating its statements of mission and goals, and also the structure of its General Degree Requirements, but this should not suggest any ambivalence in its sense of its direction. UWSP has been and remains a student-centered, learning-focused institution devoted primarily to outstanding undergraduate education. Its current focus on codification of goals and mission reflect both a renewed sense of the importance of that identity and an awareness that the institution must study and learn about itself unflaggingly and grow and adapt to meet the developing needs of its various constituencies.

In assessing these constituencies UWSP is keenly aware that, although it is situated in a very ethnically homogenous region, diverse populations exist and are growing and deserve attention. These populations represent both a challenge and a significant opportunity. Chapter 1 details the UW System's response to this opportunity, *Plan 2008*, which codifies the University's intention to identify and serve the needs of diverse populations. UWSP's efforts to render its operations accessible and transparent to its constituencies is documented in Chapter 1, and the fact that these communities value UWSP's contributions is documented in Chapter 5. By designing programs and services to meet the needs of traditional and newly-developing constituencies, as detailed in Chapter 1, and by retaining a focus on the original mission that forms its foundation, UWSP can ensure that it

continues to serve its constituencies and also remains a viable and vibrant force in the various communities those constituencies define.

UWSP's self-study reveals significant challenges, but even more significant successes, and clearly demonstrates that the University is a learning-focused institution that prepares its students to be engaged, thoughtful, tolerant members of society as well as productive contributors to their chosen professions. We are organized to discharge our mission. We therefore request re-accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission for 2008-2018.

