Chapter Seven
Summary of Findings and Request for Re-Accreditation

UW-W has fulfilled the five goals it set for the self-study process it began nearly two years ago. Five criterion teams gathered evidence for nearly a year, enabling the University to:

- evaluate the extent to which the University's recently identified "Core Values" and recently revised "Select Mission" permeate its policies, procedures, decision-making, and operational activities;
- develop a detailed profile of the evolution and growth of the institution since its 1996 self-study completed for the North Central Association;
- identify current and pending challenges that face the University and, whenever possible, initiate organizational mechanisms to address these challenges;
- affirm the presence of, and further identify, "areas of excellence" within the University; and
- gather information and evidence necessary to evaluate the institution's ability to meet the Higher Learning Commission's five Criteria of Accreditation.

This chapter will summarize and synthesize material in the preceding pages relevant to these five goals. It will overview emergent strengths, discuss challenges that face the institution, and culminate in a request for full re-accreditation.

Summary of Findings

Overview

Conclusions drawn from the five criterion chapters, presented in Fig. 7.1, suggest that UW-W has evolved in important ways. Congruent with the Higher Learning Commission's four cross-cutting themes, the University has taken actions and adopted procedures that confirm that it is forward-looking, focused on improvement, future-oriented, and distinctive. It has affirmed the centrality of learning in its mission documents, in its provision of an integrated curriculum built upon a general education core, and in its expansion of applied and experiential learning opportunities for students and professional development support for faculty, staff, and administrators. Students, faculty, and staff have close connections with regional constituencies

in ways that position the University to fulfill its Select Mission most effectively. Further, the institution has distinguished itself in its efforts to enroll and support a diverse student body and to foster greater appreciation of diversity and inclusion issues within the region.

UW-W as a Future-Oriented Organization

- Revision of the Select Mission and the development of Core Values and Organizational Objectives facilitate institutional planning. (1)
- Institutional decisions are mission-driven. (1)
- Complex and fluid environmental conditions have led to shorter, more responsive strategic planning cycles. (2)
- State-mandated budget reductions and internal budgeting practices hinder the perception of an integrated campus planning process. (2)
- Strategic decisions relative to technology have positioned UW-W to reach, instruct, and support current and future students more effectively. (3)
- Effective planning has ensured that facilities to support student learning are continuously updated and improved. (3)
- The University's General Education (GE) program signals the institution's commitment to reflect the society in which graduates will be expected to live—diverse, global, and techno-centric. (4)
- The institution, consistent with its Select Mission, effectively serves as a regional cultural and economic center. (5)

UW-W as a Learning-Focused Organization

- Mission documents underscore the centrality of learning. (1)
- Continued reductions in operating budgets threaten instructional quality and student learning. (2)
- Academic assessment initiatives continue to expand and mature, but will require continued attention and resources. (3)
- The institution values and supports effective instruction. (3)
- Planning decisions reflect the institution's commitment to the professional development of faculty and staff, a commitment that may be difficult to sustain in periods of declining resources. (4)
- Faculty and students are actively involved in the creation, discovery, and sharing of new knowledge, creating new learning opportunities for students. (4)
- Curricula are oriented toward developing universally-relevant skills, and are designed to progressively develop student skills in acquiring, discovering, and applying knowledge. (4)
- The institution would enhance student learning by moving more fully from a "culture of service" toward a "culture of engagement." (5)

UW-W as a Connected Organization

- Mission documents are a result of an open and collaborative process with internal and external stakeholders. (1)
- Strategic decisions relevant to the implementation of technology have improved access to critical information and data. (2)
- Collaborations between non-instructional and academic programs have expanded and improved learning opportunities for students. (3)
- General Education assessment efforts would benefit from improved collaboration among internal constituencies. (3)
- Connections with external constituencies ensure that curricula are current and focused on developing relevant knowledge and skills. (4)
- A strong culture of undergraduate research fosters close connections between students and faculty. (4)
- Consistent with its Core Value "Commitment to Serve," the institution has developed a culture of service to the region. (5)

UW-W as a Distinctive Organization

- The institution is fulfilling its stated commitments to creating and supporting a diverse student body, but faces new challenges in doing so in the years ahead. (1)
- Internal quality assurance processes lead academic and non-instructional programs to be reflective, accountable, and focused on improvement. (2)
- The institution's provision of support services underscores its appreciation of the needs of diverse learners. (3)
- Research protocol processes ensure that research is conducted in ethically and socially responsible ways by faculty, staff, and students. (4)
- Outreach programming is responsive, based on what it learns from those it serves. (5)
- The institution uses its resources and expertise to serve diverse populations in the region and promote awareness about diversity. (5)

Figure 7.1: *Summary of Conclusions from Five Criterion Chapters*
Note: Chapters in which conclusions appear are in parentheses.

As UW-W looks beyond the self-study process, particularly in terms of these four cross-cutting themes, it can identify sets of strengths it can use to address a series of emergent challenges.

UW-Whitewater as a Future-Oriented Organization

Strength: UW-W is mission-driven in its planning, policies, procedures, and organizational actions.

The processes of identifying Core Values and University Objectives and of revising the Select Mission have been open and collaborative. This has made UW-W's purposes and priorities more transparent and widely understood.

The evidence presented in the preceding chapters affirms UW-W's commitment to using its Select Mission as a guide for decision-making, planning, and performance evaluation. The Select Mission keyed the development of principles that have guided difficult decisions in cutting campus-wide budgets. Integrated planning efforts at the department/unit, college/division, and institutional levels all focus on identifying initiatives that fulfill the Select Mission. UW-W's internal review processes require academic and non-instructional programs to specify how their actions and performance contribute to fulfilling the Select Mission.

As UW-W moves from using University Goals as a primary planning document to developing a more traditional Strategic Plan, mission documents will continue to provide direction.

Strength: UW-W has embraced and implemented technology in ways that improve its operation, enhance student access, and position it for future success.

The University's operating and instructional environments have been transformed through progressive and continuous strategic planning efforts of iCIT, a Department of Education Title III grant, and a campus budget commitment of $8 million over several years.

The University's conversion from a mainframe-based computer system (Legacy) to PeopleSoft for administrative, personnel, and academic record-storage and maintenance has resulted in faster and more efficient access to information campus-wide. Students can access their academic records, register for classes, retrieve grades, and pay bills online. Faculty can check course enrollments, access course rosters, and submit grades electronically, and administrative offices have access to up-to-date information on personnel and budgets at the click of a mouse. Efforts to expand wireless networks campus-wide are emblematic of a continued commitment to improved access. An expanded capacity for collecting, storing, and sharing data and information has enhanced the University's ability to engage in performance evaluation and, in turn, improved its ability to engage in effective planning. Over the past 10 years, the University Library has been transformed from a building housing printed information to a 24-hour information center that delivers to both resident and remote patrons.

Large numbers of faculty and staff have become highly technologically proficient, and use technology according to research-based principles to teach courses online or as part of a web-enhanced environment. The highly successful and widely recognized Online MBA provides a model for the delivery of graduate-level and select baccalaureate programs available to growing numbers of non-traditional learners.

Challenge: Developing student appreciation of diversity- and globalization-related issues will require continued attention.

UW-W has devoted significant resources and implemented a number of processes in efforts to prepare students for an increasingly diverse and global society. Curricula in the General Education sequence and within majors focus student attention on these issues. Non-instructional programs, including the Multicultural Education Center and Residence Life, work collaboratively with academic programs, and regularly provide workshops and bring in guest speakers and lecturers designed to raise awareness about diversity and international issues. The University has created the Diversity Committee to "promote diversity in curricular content and process" and "provide leadership in fostering a range of diversity-related experiences across campus." The A&R process requires programs to identify initiatives designed to foster student understanding of diversity and global perspectives.

Broadening international, intercultural, and diversity awareness in a relatively homogeneous student body, drawn largely from southeastern Wisconsin, will continue to carry with it several challenges. In 2003, a campus-wide ad hoc committee examined and made recommendations based upon UW-W's NSSE data. It concluded that "While in some areas we are similar to peer institutions, the growth of our students in understanding of diversity and the involvement of our students with others from diverse backgrounds may be an area of concern." And while the University has made progress towards its goal of increasing the percentage of students traveling abroad, resource limitations and external travel regulations hinder these efforts. Developing more sophisticated measures of student attitudes and awareness about diversity and globalization will aid these efforts.

Challenge: UW-W must become more entrepreneurial in its thinking and programming.

Over the past 10 years, the University has responded to declining state support in a variety of ways. It has eliminated services, merged administrative units, and developed collaborative partnerships to share costs. It has enhanced its fund-raising efforts and significantly improved its performance in securing extramural funding. More energy needs to be devoted to identifying and developing other potential sources of operating revenue.

Specifically, there is a need to develop and offer programming, like the Online MBA, that generates revenue in ways that are both self-supporting and assist in funding other critical campus-wide initiatives. Such efforts will be difficult for faculty and staff not accustomed to thinking in this way. Further, such efforts will directed at a market filled with competitors, many not constrained by cumbersome and bureaucratic UW System and campus policies and procedures that make it difficult to take advantage of new opportunities quickly .

Strength: UW-W has expanded its array of learning opportunities for students in ways that have strengthened its capacity to serve as a regional comprehensive university.

For many years, the University has been recognized for the quality of its academic programs offered through the College of Business & Economics and the College of Education. The former continues to house programs such as accounting and management computer systems that garner national awards; the latter has been recognized for innovatively providing students first-hand experience in urban, multicultural school settings, and for producing more public educators than any other comprehensive university in the state. Both have continued to put a premium on creating applied, experiential learning opportunities for students, through internships, student teaching, and applied projects.

Over the past 10 years, the UW-W has expanded the array, quality, and intensity of educational experiences available to students, particularly outside of education and business. Students are more actively involved in all phases of theatre production, scripting, directing, and acting in performances that earn regional awards. Art students now share their work in juried exhibits both on-campus and off. Students are involved in all phases of production of live broadcasts of UW-W athletic events delivered, in cooperative agreement with Charter Communication, to more than 100,000 homes across southeastern Wisconsin. Students in graphic arts and the new digital multimedia major and minor apply design or communication principles as they complete projects for on- and off-campus clients. Students in the natural sciences, in particular, are actively collaborating with faculty conducting basic and applied research and co-authoring peer-reviewed papers.

In brief, the University has expanded its array, improved the quality, and enhanced the intensity of applied and experiential learning experiences, making them available to larger numbers of students.

Challenge: UW-W must find new ways to support faculty in fulfilling evolving roles and completing additional responsibilities.

One of the emergent themes from the self-study process, echoed in the post-secondary education literature, is that the responsibilities of faculty have changed over the past 10 years. At UW-W, the following factors have affected faculty expectations: increased scholarly and creative activities; a wider range of the academic preparation and ability levels of students; larger classes; students' expectation of 24-hour contact; the need to stay current with evolving instructional technologies; and greater involvement in assessment initiatives. Expectations have increased while the numbers of support staff have decreased. The trend of greater expectations, coupled with declining state support, presents a key challenge for the institution in the years ahead.

Faculty development programming provided by the campus has provided support for faculty in managing their increasingly complex, time-consuming, and multi-faceted demands. However, consideration must be given to other factors influencing workloads, including: teaching loads for faculty and instructional academic staff;

measures of faculty productivity; expectations in scholarship and creative activities; and new methods for teaching larger numbers of students, including online instruction.

Strength: UW-W has strong, wide-ranging, mutually beneficial connections with constituents in the region.

The self-study process has clearly substantiated the breadth and depth of connections the University has with external constituencies throughout the region. The University's traditional outreach units, including Continuing Education, Business Outreach Services, and the Irvin L. Young Auditorium, provide programming and services that reach more than 100,000 individuals annually. Based directly on feedback and information gathered from the constituents they serve, these programs and services ensure that the institution fulfills that portion of its Select Mission that commits to serving "as a regional cultural and economic resource center through its service initiatives," and providing "continuing education and outreach programs as integrated institutional activities."

These programming and service efforts enhance the region economically and culturally. They also add important intangible benefits through connections that are fluid and often informal. Students annually volunteer tens of thousands of hours in support of area schools and human service organizations that both extend student experiences and expand the capacity of these schools and organizations. Academic programs have established external advisory boards that provide strategic direction and assess curricula, and ensure that the institution is providing a workforce with the necessary skills and knowledge base. Faculty initiate successful partnerships with schools, businesses, and service organizations that lead to applied experiences, student teaching opportunities, practica, and internships. Experience suggests that these opportunities also give these school districts, businesses, and organizations a first look at future employees.

Challenge: UW-W must continue to help faculty connect and collaborate in meaningful and profitable ways.

Much of the richness that comes from being a part of a comprehensive university relates to its being large enough to attract faculty with diverse scholarly interests and perspectives, but small enough to allow them to connect regularly. Over the past 10 years, interdisciplinary collaborations at UW-W have resulted in the creation of new courses, new degree programs, and new research partnerships that have led to extramural proposals, conference papers, and publications.

The self-study process suggests that a number of factors are making these connections more difficult to establish and sustain. Faculty schedules indicate that many are choosing to teach their classes on two or three days each week. Although this frees up large blocks of time for research and/or service activities, it can isolate individuals and reduce collaborative activity. Furthermore, with the increase in online offerings, more faculty are teaching at a distance.

Existing programs (e.g., the First Year Program) and services (e.g., the Collaborative Research Network) must continue to be supported and new programs will need to be developed in order to assist faculty in building and sustaining collaborative relationships while fulfilling expectations in teaching, research, and service in an increasingly complex institutional environment.

UW-Whitewater as a Distinctive Organization

Strength and Challenge: UW-W demonstrates a strong commitment to matriculating and graduating a diverse student body, but faces a number of challenges in sustaining these efforts in the years ahead.

UW-W's *Plan 2008* outlines the institution's strategies for increasing the matriculation, retention, and graduation rates of multicultural students. Past efforts have been partially successful; UW-W has enrolled more multicultural students than any other comprehensive university in the UW System, although graduation rates continue to lag behind those of the University as a whole. A wide range of programs, including those in Academic Support Services, facilitate the transition of multicultural students into college and provide supportive services for them. These programs and services range from assisting academically challenged students (e.g., Tutorial Services) to meeting the needs of students who wish to pursue post-baccalaureate education (e.g., the King-Chavez Scholars Program and McNair Scholars Program).

Institutional efforts to sustain these initiatives are already being challenged. Significant increases in tuition, decreases in the availability of financial aid, and reductions in funding for academic support programs for multicultural students have resulted in the matriculation of fewer students in the lowest quintile of family income. Decreasing levels of support from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) have impacted services to students with disabilities. Challenges in these areas are expected to grow as stagnant budgets are stretched to try to meet increasing demands.

Strength: UW-W is responsive to problems and oriented toward continuous improvement.

Over the past 10 years, UW-W has repeatedly demonstrated its ability to identify problems and a capacity to plan, allocate resources, and implement solutions. The creation of the Advising Council, the Academic Advising and Career Exploration Center, the New Student Seminar, the Early Warning and Peer Mentor Programs, and the Master Advisor Program were all initiated in response to student concerns about the quality of advising and the University's commitment to improve freshman-to-sophomore year retention. The LEARN Center was established to provide leadership in academic assessment and faculty development. The Peer Coaching Program was designed to offer tenure-track faculty formative assessment from faculty not involved in their tenure and promotion decisions. Finally, the Teaching Scholars Program began as a way to promote cross-disciplinary discussions about teaching among faculty in a context conducive to the completion of a scholarship of teaching and learning project.

The University's Audit &Review and Office Planning & Review processes underscore a commitment to continuous improvement. Academic and non-

instructional programs are required to identify program goals and, in the case of the former, learning outcomes. With increased access to data and information, programs are evaluating and assessing their performance against these goals and outcomes, and reflecting upon steps for programmatic improvement. These efforts are further reviewed by campus committees and follow-up actions are recommended. Programs are held accountable for following up on recommended actions.

Conclusion

A review of the list of strengths and challenges highlights the University's ability to plan for and to respond to changing conditions. Changes in the University's operating environment, social and economic trends, funding sources, and technology have all led to changes in mission documents, planning efforts, methods of instructional delivery, and faculty expectations, roles, and responsibilities. In the past ten years, the University has faced unprecedented challenges, as documented throughout this self-study. The responsiveness with which UW-W has adapted to change based on evidence being collected and its response to unplanned changes in the past provides strong evidence that UW-W is well-positioned to meet future challenges in continuing to move the institution forward.

Request for Re-Accreditation

UW-W has shared strong patterns of evidence to affirm that it meets all accreditation criteria of the NCA's Higher Learning Commission. The introductory chapter summarizes actions taken in response to the single concern and a series of recommendations emergent from the last accreditation visit. Evidence presented in the five criterion chapters affirms the University's orientation toward the future, commitment to being learning-centered, tendency for creating strong connections internally and externally, and effort to remain distinctive and important in the region. The self-study process also reveals challenges that will require the University remain nimble, innovative, and responsive as it continues to succeed in an increasingly complex, dynamic and demanding operating environment.

Chapter Six presents evidence to support UW-W's change request for programs offered through distance education. The chapter validates that the institution has a noteworthy history of success in offering online programs and coursework; a well-trained faculty; a supportive infrastructure for online education; and a genuine need for its online offerings by a growing number of non-traditional learners.

Accordingly, UW-W respectfully requests that its Statement of Affiliation Status be changed to read, "No prior Commission approval required to offer online degree programs," and that the institution be granted continuing accreditation for the maximum 10-year period.