

## INTRODUCTION

In preparing this self study, the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse (UW-L) community welcomed the opportunity to review and evaluate all aspects of university life. The self study process served as an avenue for the campus to assess its development and growth over the past ten years while prompting the campus community to identify areas in need of improvement. It is our intent that the following report reflects both aspects.

### **Historical Overview**

**The Early Years.** In 1909, UW-L was founded as the State Normal School, La Crosse, and was authorized to offer two-year programs preparing students for the teaching profession. In subsequent years, the curricula expanded to include three- and four-year programs, and in 1926, the institution was authorized to award baccalaureate degrees in teaching. In 1927, the name of the institution was changed to State Teachers College, La Crosse.

In 1951, after the governing board authorized the nine Wisconsin State Teachers Colleges to establish baccalaureate degree programs in the liberal arts, this institution was renamed Wisconsin State College, La Crosse. A division of letters and sciences was then formed to complement teacher education, and in 1956, began offering programs in selected disciplines leading to the Bachelor of Science and the Bachelor of Arts degrees in selected disciplines. Numerous additional programs in the liberal arts and professional fields have since been added.

In 1956, the college was authorized to establish graduate programs leading to the Master of Science in Teaching (M.S.T.) and the Master of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) degrees and also created a graduate program in physical education. In 1960, the college added M.S.T. and M.A.T. degree programs in language-literature, science-mathematics, history-social science, and elementary education.

In 1964, the college was designated a university in the Wisconsin State University System and was renamed Wisconsin State University-La Crosse. As part of the new designation, the Colleges of Education, Health-Recreation-Physical Education, and Letters and Sciences were formed. Beginning in 1967 and continuing through the subsequent years, several Master of Science and Master of Science in Education degree programs were authorized and developed. In 1971, the School of Business Administration was created.

**The University of Wisconsin System.** In 1972, the University of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin State University Systems were merged into the present University of Wisconsin System (UW System), under the direction of the Board of Regents. With the merger, the institution underwent its current name change and became the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse (UW-L).

The University of Wisconsin System includes 2 Ph.D. granting institutions, UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee; 11 comprehensive universities, including UW-L; and 13 two-year institutions known as the UW Centers. The UW System is governed by a Board of Regents consisting of 17 members. Two are *ex-officio* members: the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the president or designee of the State Board of Vocational, Technical, and Adult Education. The remaining members are appointed by the Wisconsin Governor, subject to approval by the Wisconsin Senate. Fourteen have seven-year staggered terms; one is a student member, appointed to a two-year term. During the 2003-04 academic year, the Board of Regents developed a strategic plan as a guide for its oversight of the UW-System. (See the Resource Room for the Board of Regents website and strategic plan.)

The President of the UW System is responsible for administering the system under Board of Regent policies. The President directs UW System Administration, which is located in

Madison. UW System Administration is responsible for assisting the Board of Regents in establishing system policies, reviewing the administration of such policies, and planning the programmatic, financial, and physical development of the system.

**Program Changes.** In 1974, the Master of Education-Professional Development and the Master of Business Administration degree programs were created. At about the same time, the existing M.S.T. and M.A.T. degree programs were eliminated. Beginning in the 1990s, several new graduate programs were developed including a Masters of Science in Physical Therapy (1995), Software Engineering (2000), School Psychology (2000, this is the Education Specialist Degree Ed.S.), Physician Assistant Studies (2004), and Occupational Therapy (2005). In 2006, the campus will become one of two campus members of the UW System Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPTP) Consortium and will begin offering the DPT degree. In 1995, the Master of Science in Educational Media was phased out.

During the 1990s, several new undergraduate degrees were also initiated including majors in Radiation Therapy (1997), German Studies (1998), International Business (1999), Information Systems (1999), Athletic Training (2001), and Biochemistry (2002). Certificates represent another segment of academic programming projected to grow, with new ones in Medical Dosimetry, Geographic Information Science, and Middle School Mathematics. These new degrees and certificates have professional applications, reflect the national trends in higher education, and meet national and regional workforce needs.

## **Student Profiles**

**ACT Scores and Class Rankings.** Paralleling the changes in academic programming, students entering UW-L in the 1990s were distinguished by higher than the national and state average ACT scores. Since 1994 the average ACT score for incoming

freshmen has been second in the UW System (UW-Madison is first). Steadily rising, the average ACT score for fall 2004 was 25.4 and has been accompanied by a steady improvement in class rankings. In 1990, the average UW-L freshmen came from the top 30% of their classes, and by 2000, the percentage rose to the top 21%. By 2004, 79% of UW-L's entering freshmen were from the top 25% of their classes. (Figure)

### New Freshmen Average High School Rank and ACT Scores

		Average High School Rank	Average ACT Composite	Average ACT English	Average ACT Math
2000 FALL	Mean	79.5%	24.0	23.2	24.1
	Valid N	1571	1581	1581	1581
2001 FALL	Mean	79.4%	24.2	23.5	24.1
	Valid N	1526	1569	1569	1569
2002 FALL	Mean	80.5%	24.4	23.6	24.5
	Valid N	1502	1541	1541	1541
2003 FALL	Mean	82.8%	24.8	24.0	24.9
	Valid N	1445	1482	1482	1482
2004 FALL	Mean	83.8%	24.9	24.2	25.0
	Valid N	1457	1527	1527	1527
2005 FALL	Mean	82.5%	24.7	24.1	24.7
	Valid N	1608	1717	1717	1717

Source: Official Day of Record Enrollment as reported in the Common Data Set, submitted annually to the Princeton Review and posted at [http://www.uwlax.edu/provost/universitydata/cds\\_2004.htm](http://www.uwlax.edu/provost/universitydata/cds_2004.htm)

Note: Valid N is the number of students who have a valid ACT score/HS rank. Not all our students submit ACT scores and some high schools don't rank their students, so not all students in each class can be included in these calculations.

Accompanying rising ACT scores and class rankings was an increase in the number of applicants. For example, 4,580 applications were received in 1996. Of those, 3,707 were admitted, 744 were denied, and 1,733 were enrolled. Moreover, the number of applicants has continued to rise despite diminishing enrollment capacity. (Figure)

### **Application, Admission, and Enrollment Data: First-Time, First-Year Freshman**

	Fall 2000	Fall 2001	Fall 2002	Fall 2003	Fall 2004
Applicants	5242	5028	5385	6376	6226
Acceptances	3396	3457	3457	3357	3766
Full-Time Enrollees	1605	1568	1533	1487	1546
Part-Time Enrollees	40	18	19	22	8

Source: Official Day of Record Enrollment as reported in the Common Data Set, submitted annually to the Princeton Review and posted at [http://www.uwlax.edu/provost/universitydata/cds\\_2004.htm](http://www.uwlax.edu/provost/universitydata/cds_2004.htm)

**Graduation and Retention Rates.** UW-L's six-year graduation rates complement the statistics of incoming freshmen. Beginning with the incoming class in 1992, UW-L's six-year graduation rate increased from 46.1% in 1997 to 58.4% in 2002. (Figure ) Moreover, in 2003, the university goal was to increase its graduation rate to 65.0% within the next three years. Because of the increase in six-year graduation rates, UW-L was one of twelve campuses nationwide invited to participate in a Graduation Rate Outcome Study, directed by the American Association of Schools and Colleges (AASCU). The study concluded that "campus culture and university leadership help improve student success." (See Exhibit in the Appendices.)

### Comparison Chart of Graduation Rates

Graduation Rates Year by Year	6-Year Rate 1997	6-Year Rate 1998	6-Year Rate 1999	6-Year Rate 2000	6-Year Rate 2001	6-Year Rate 2002	6-Year Rate 2003	Grad Rate
UW-La Crosse	46.10%	50.20%	48.80%	52.10%	52.50%	58.40%	59.50%	59.50%
UW-Eau Claire	55.30%	53.10%	51.80%	50.10%	54.50%	54%	55.90%	55.90%
UW-Stevens Point	54.80%	54.70%	52.80%	53.10%	53.50%	55.90%	55.50%	55.50%
UW-River Falls	42.90%	46.90%	48.70%	47.30%	47.80%	52.70%	54.40%	54.40%
UW-Whitewater	50.30%	49.70%	47.30%	48.50%	52.10%	54.20%	52.30%	52.30%
UW-Platteville	53%	53.60%	53.10%	49.90%	50.30%	54%	49.50%	49.50%
UW-Oshkosh	45%	45.90%	46.30%	47.50%	45.40%	44.20%	45.70%	45.70%
UW-Stout	42.70%	45.40%	49.30%	40.60%	39.30%	48.50%	45.50%	45.50%
UW-Superior	26.20%	34.90%	34.10%	33.80%	32.60%	32.80%	33.40%	33.40%
UW System Masters I Universities Average	46.26%	48.27%	48.02%	46.99%	47.56%	50.52%	50.19%	50.19%

Source: Data from The Education Trust College Results Online (<http://www.collegeresults.org>): Graduation Rate: Total, Public/Private Non Profit Status=Public, Carnegie Classification=Masters I

Freshmen to sophomore retention rates have also continued to improve significantly. In 2004, UW-L had an 85.8% retention rate, which was the second highest in the UW System with UW-Madison ranking first. (Figure )

PLACE RETENTION CHART HERE

**Admission Policies.** Throughout the 1990s, a new profile of UW-L emerged as admission became more competitive, and the university could not accept all of its applicants. In response to the large number of applicants, UW-L developed an enrollment policy within the parameters of EM-21, which was the UW System’s Enrollment Management Plan for all UW System campuses. The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse EM-21 plan included a slight reduction in student enrollment while maintaining state funding levels. This plan had increased UW-L’s financial support per student. Budget constraints, however, prompted the institution to increase enrollments; in fall 2004, for example, 8,513 students were enrolled (7,846

undergraduates and 667 graduate students.) Although the majority (82%) were from Wisconsin, 36 states and 41 countries were also represented.

**Student Diversity.** Another contrast from the 1996 student demographics is an increase in student diversity. In 1995, 4% of the student population were racially and ethnically diverse. By 2005, the percentage increased to 6%. The number of international students is also growing with 160 international students from 41n countries enrolled during the 2004-05 academic year. Although the graduate student population has remained stable at 7% of the total enrollment since 1995 its demographics represent a more diverse population.

### **National Recognition**

UW-L has received several high national rankings illustrating the university's quality academic programming and subsequent high student demand. In fall 2005, *U.S. News & World Report* ranked UW-L second in the Midwest among public universities offering bachelor's and master's degrees. The 2005 ranking was an improvement from 2004 when *U.S. News & World Reports* ranked UW-L third among the top public universities in the Midwest. In the 2005 *U.S. News & World Reports* "America's Best Colleges" issue, UW-L was the highest ranked of UW System's 11 state four-year comprehensive campuses. Other national recognitions include *Kiplingers 100* where the university was ranked 19<sup>th</sup> among public colleges in 2004. Also, in 2004, two of UW-L's graduate programs received national attention in *U.S. News and World Report* with the community health program ranking 6<sup>th</sup> and the physical therapy program ranking 23<sup>rd</sup> among all sizes of colleges and universities.

### **Highlights Since 1995**

Poised to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, UW-L is a different institution than it was ten years ago. The university is redefining its mission and place in the UW System as it

builds upon a foundation established in the early 1990s that stressed academic excellence, quality teaching, and student support services. Although the highlights identified in the following pages are not definitive, they reflect the direction pursued by the university over the last decade. This direction is not only a student-centered focus--exemplified through undergraduate research, student life, a globalized campus, and an influx of new faculty with subsequent effects in programming--but also a reconceptualization of how the institution can meet growing needs, resulting in an array of external partnerships.

**Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity.** Refining its mission as a student-centered university has underscored UW-L's initiatives since the 1990s. While the exact reasons for the impressive retention rates and six-year graduation rates are not known, several recent developments have contributed to greater student satisfaction. One prominent initiative began in 1996 when the Provost directed the Grants and Contracts Office to convene an ad hoc committee of faculty to develop an Undergraduate Research Initiative and accompanying grant competition. The first competition was held in spring 1997; 32 grants were awarded for a total of \$19,000.

The second phase of the Undergraduate Research Initiative was introduced in spring 1998 and became known as the Annual Celebration of Undergraduate Research & Creativity. This event featured grant awardees of the previous year and other students who reported on their research efforts (36 posters and 7 oral presentations).

In fall 1998, the third phase of the Initiative added a *Journal of Undergraduate Research* to recognize student research. Beginning with Volume VI (2003), the journal moved to publication in CD-ROM electronic format. (See the Resource Room for a complete listing.)

With the growth of the on-campus program, UW-L also became involved in additional campus undergraduate research activities. In 2000, UW-L established and hosted what has become an annual University of Wisconsin Symposium on Undergraduate Research & Creative Activity. The symposium brings together undergraduate researchers and many of their mentors from all campuses of the UW System to present posters or oral papers. The site rotates every two years among interested UW System campuses.

In 2000, the first delegation of UW-L student researchers attended and presented their research at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR). This annual event represents another aspect of the budgeted activities undertaken by the campus-wide Undergraduate Research Program (formerly the Undergraduate Research Initiative); UW-L students have presented at subsequent NCUR events hosted by institutions across the nation. (UW-L will host the conference in 2009.) The UW-L Undergraduate Research Program covers the expenses of all student researchers who have had their papers accepted by the NCUR review committee. Another extra-campus event involving UW-L undergraduate researchers is the “Posters in the Rotunda,” that began in 2004 and is sponsored by the University of Wisconsin System Administration. This annual event provides students an opportunity to display the results of their work in the rotunda of the State Capitol in Madison to the State Legislature, UW System, Board of Regents, and members of the Capitol press. As with NCUR, the UW-L Undergraduate Research Program assumes the expenses of students attending the “Poster in the Rotunda” and the UW System Symposium on Undergraduate Research.

UW-L is also engaged at the national level with undergraduate research as a member institution of the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR), which is an organization that provides peer support to universities and colleges nation-wide as they are either beginning

undergraduate research programs or developing programs to a higher level. UW-L hosted the national CUR Conference in 2004.

UW-L's commitment to undergraduate research is demonstrated through significantly increased financial support—from \$34,000 in 1997 to \$98,000 in 2005. Part of the increase can be attributed to the Office of International Education that began supporting international undergraduate research grants in 2001. Also in fiscal year 2005, the revenue stream from the student-originated Academic Initiative (funded by differential tuition) was initiated, which allocated an additional \$18,000 for domestic grants and \$9,000 for international grants. This increase in funding has enabled the program to expand to two competitions per year—one in fall semester and one in spring. Growth in funding has resulted in more students seeking support; the numbers of applicants almost doubled from 48 in 2004 to 86 in 2005.

In addition to the campus-wide Undergraduate Research Program, the College of Science and Allied Health introduced in fiscal year 1999 a highly competitive summer fellowship program that awards \$3,000 fellowships/stipends. The college also supports academic year competitions for \$800 supply and travel grants.

INSERT 2 CHARTS—1 WITH DATA OF UNIVERSIY SUPPORT; 1 WITH  
DATA OF COLLEGE/SAH SUPPORT

Faculty support for undergraduate research has become widespread with increased participation from faculty in the humanities furthering UW-L's leadership in the UW System and beyond in this promising student-centered initiative.

**Emphasis on Student Life.** The Office of Residence Life recognizes the high academic expectations for UW-L students and is aware that student success can only occur by focusing on their total collegiate experience. Accordingly, the Office of Residence Life enlists several

practices to promote student retention, especially during the freshmen year when nearly 95% of this class lives in the residence halls. These practices include small residence halls where the ratio of trained resident assistants to students is 1:28 compared to a national average of 1:60. As a result, students in the residence halls not only form close connections with each other but also receive more individual attention that can alert residence staff to any potential problems.

At UW-L, the process of introducing students to residence life begins during the application process and continues through enrollment. Students are welcomed to campus life through early room and roommate assignments, letters or e-mail from the RAs during the summer, and planned activities during move-in weekend. These early efforts are targeted to promote the new student's identity and connection to the university. Once the school year is underway, another connection occurs through the *Faculty in Residence* program that links faculty with residence hall cubes.

Academic year programming is multi-faceted and includes numerous opportunities for student involvement once the student arrives on campus. Because research in this area reveals that involvement in extracurricular activities enhances a student's undergraduate experience, the Office of Residence Life offers activities through the residence halls, including a leadership program. Other programs of particular benefit to the first-year student include a social norming campaign to dispel some of the stereotypical behaviors associated with students such as alcohol usage, partying, and unsafe sexual behavior. Recent alcohol-related tragedies with UW-L students and other students in the area have elevated the importance of this program as a critical part of the freshmen experience. Using a holistic approach to improve student life, programs are in place to address issues of standing up for oneself, assertiveness training, and confidence building. Not overlooking the academic needs, Residence Life has implemented advising

programs for new students, formally recognizes students on the Dean's list, follows up with students who are receiving failing grades, and collaborates with the Office of Records and Registration to provide lists of students in each hall who are taking the same courses.

Another practice that the Office of Residence Life employs to further ensure student success, particularly during the first year, is the various residence hall options that include housing for international students, co-ed housing, theme halls such as one selected for the freshmen-year experience, a hall of 208 students who desire to live in a substance free environment, and a hall designated for students with disabilities.

Noted earlier, the emphasis on student life, especially the freshmen-year experience, may partially explain UW-L's success with first-year retention. The national retention rates for students from first to second year ranges from 71.2% to 76.9% for four-year, non-doctoral public universities. At UW-L, the retention rate is at 85.8% making it the only campus in the UW System, with the exception of Madison, retaining more than 80% of its freshmen for a second year. (Refer to retention chart earlier in the chapter.)

**Globalization of the Campus.** The student-centered approach is also evident in the area of international education, one of the most active units in the last ten years. Since 2000, UW-L has added 19 new international partnerships allowing for student study-abroad experiences around the globe. Students have been taking advantage of these opportunities with 398 students studying abroad during the 2004-05 academic year--a 427% increase from the 1995-1996 academic year. The range of study-abroad programs further distinguishes UW-L as a mid-sized comprehensive university. In addition to the more traditional programs at European sites, UW-L has entered into partnerships with Assiut (Egypt) University, University of Ghana, Wuhan (China) University, and Dubna (Russia) International University, to name a few. The

commitment to produce global citizens has taken on a new meaning at UW-L with these immersion experiences in cultures outside First World countries.

### **UW-L International Exchange Programs**

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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Argentina*</li> <li>• Australia*</li> <li>• La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia</li> <li>• Austria*</li> <li>• Webster University, Vienna, Austria</li> <li>• Bulgaria*</li> <li>• Brazil*</li> <li>• Canada*</li> <li>• Chile*</li> <li>• China (Hong Kong)*</li> <li>• Guangxi Normal University, Guilin, China</li> <li>• City University of Hong Kong</li> <li>• Guilin, China</li> <li>• Costa Rica*</li> <li>• Tropical Ecology in Costa Rica</li> <li>• Czech Republic*</li> <li>• Denmark*</li> <li>• DIS, Denmark</li> <li>• Copenhagen Business School, Denmark</li> <li>• American University-Cairo, Egypt</li> <li>• Fiji*</li> <li>• Finland*</li> <li>• France*</li> <li>• University of Caen, France</li> <li>• Germany*</li> <li>• Goethe University, Germany</li> <li>• University of Oldenburg, Germany</li> <li>• Hessen-Wisconsin Exchange, Germany</li> <li>• Tandem Language Institute-Frankfurt, Germany</li> <li>• Iceland*</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland</li> <li>• Tel Aviv University, Israel</li> <li>• Italy*</li> <li>• UW-Platteville Rome, Italy</li> <li>• Japan*</li> <li>• UW-Platteville Nagasaki, Japan</li> <li>• Hirogaku Summer Intensive Program, Japan</li> <li>• Korea*</li> <li>• Latvia*</li> <li>• Malta*</li> <li>• Mexico*</li> <li>• University of the Americas, Puebla, Mexico</li> <li>• University of Veracruz, Xalapa, Mexico</li> <li>• Maastricht Center for Transatlantic Studies, Netherlands</li> <li>• New Zealand*</li> <li>• Nicaragua*</li> <li>• Dubna International University, Russia</li> <li>• South Africa*</li> <li>• Sweden*</li> <li>• Spain*</li> <li>• Universitas Castellae, Valladolid, Spain</li> <li>• UW-Platteville, Seville, Spain</li> <li>• Thailand*</li> <li>• United Kingdom*</li> <li>• London Metropolitan University, United Kingdom</li> <li>• Wisconsin-in-Scotland, United Kingdom</li> <li>• UW-Platteville London, United Kingdom</li> </ul> |
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\*Exchange Program through [International Student Exchange Program](#)

Source: UW-L Office of International Education

Further evidence of the increased role of international education is the International Task Force created by the Provost in summer 2004. Charged with the responsibility of “exploring ways in which the university can play a larger role in the global arena,” the committee recommended several initiatives including:

- Creating a shared institutional identity that embraces internationalization as part of UW-L’s core identity.
- Fostering and instilling an expectation (rather than a requirement) that all UW-L students, faculty, and staff will be engaged in international experiences.

- Developing the infrastructure, support systems, and assessment measures needed to advance the international mission of the university.
- Expanding partnerships and avenues of communication that will enhance the international mission of the university.

By fall 2005, some of the recommendations of the task force were already in place including the formation of a select committee to continue the work of the task force, a more organized website ([www.uwlax.edu/provost/pvchome/international.htm](http://www.uwlax.edu/provost/pvchome/international.htm)), and the inception of the 7 Rivers Region Fulbright Association.

As the International Task Force report noted, internationalizing a campus extends beyond the students; i.e., faculty and staff must also be part of the dialogue. In an effort to offer international experiences to UW-L faculty and staff, the International Development Fund was created in fall 1999. This fund, which is supported by the deans and their units, funds international travel for faculty to conduct research, present at international conferences, visit international internship sites, or participate in other recognized professional activities. (See Resource Room for examples of International Development Fund supported travel and the chart below that identifies International Development Award Funding.)

#### INSERT CHART WITH IDF FUNDING DATA

Another area of growth has been the number of international scholars hosted by UW-L—11 in 1997-98 compared to 35 in 2004-05. Visiting scholars are part of a growing movement toward collaborative research, faculty exchanges, and grant opportunities. Paralleling this expansion is the growth of international students with 160 international students during 2004-2005. (Figure) This number is impressive considering the new procedures international students must follow to study in the U.S. as a result of the events of September 11, 2001. (See Resource Room for examples of supported research for Visiting Scholars.)

### International Students Summary 1995-1996 to 2005-2006

Year	Number of Students	Number of Countries
Fall 1995	165	45
Fall 1996	165	41
Fall 1997	148	33
Fall 1998	140	33
Fall 1999	154	44
Fall 2000	148	43
Fall 2001	152	42
Fall 2002	122	39
Fall 2003	140	45
Fall 2004	153	41
Fall 2005	166	42

Source: UW-L Office of International Education

Internationalizing a campus in today's global society implies more than study abroad opportunities or an infusion of international scholars and students. Innovative universities are applying their intellectual capital to facilitate the transition many post-Cold War countries are facing. At UW-L, the College of Business Administration has worked with Georgetown University for 14 years in the USAID supported East Central European Scholarship Program (ECESP). In touting its accomplishments, Wisconsin's U.S. Representative Ron Kind told members of Congress that the ECESP "has conducted technical training for democratic institution building, health care administration, and financial sector management, among other fields. The program's efforts have resulted in strengthened skills and understanding for over 1,200 administrators, managers, and government leaders. ECESP alumni include members of national parliaments and the European Council, bank examiners of central banks, hospital administrators as well as administrators of non-governmental and non-profit organizations." Of those 1,200 administrators, 300 have visited the UW-L campus and received training in various

aspects of banking and finance. Their presence added a new dimension to the diversity of the campus. Building upon the numerous benefits derived from the ECESP, UW-L is planning similar initiatives as the campus reconfigures itself as an international university.

**New Faculty/ Programming Changes.** The last significant highlight since 1996 to be presented in this section has been the influx of new faculty, as a result of a large number of retirements. This infusion has influenced new programmatic developments and enhanced student preparedness for a variety of careers or entrance to some of the nation's top graduate schools. While there are many success stories throughout the university, three departments are discussed here as examples of exceptional programming and subsequent student accomplishments.

**(1) Physics.** One of the most notable success stories at UW-L is that of the Physics Department. As recently as the late 1980s, the program had only five majors and a graduation rate of one per year. Because of the low enrollment numbers, the UW System had recommended phasing out the program. But with a combination of revised academic programs, the offering of dual degrees, mainly with engineering programs (e.g., with UW-Madison), excellence and innovation in teaching, support of undergraduate research, informed assessment of student learning, and outreach activities, the department is experiencing a rebirth and is a model for other physics programs throughout the nation.

The Physics Department has received state and national recognition including the UW System Regents Teaching Excellence Award in 2004 (awarded to only department system-wide per year.) On a national level, the department was selected as one of the most successful undergraduate programs and is being showcased by the National Task Force on Undergraduate Physics. Currently, the department has the largest undergraduate physics program in Wisconsin

with 115 majors (18% women and 2% minorities) and 24 graduates during the 2002-2003 academic year. The department offers students an engaged, cohesive undergraduate experience including several career tracks and a faculty who are active in research and successful in securing external funding for both teaching and research. Adding to the department's energy are the interactions with the community including an annual Distinguished Lecture Series in Physics, a program in which the department hosts a Nobel Laureate for a two-day visit (during which the Laureate gives a public lecture) and the Physics Laser and Light Shows, an outreach program for school children. The Distinguished Lecture Series is supported by a community member through the UW-L Foundation, the College of Science and Allied Health, and the Physics Department. For a complete listing of the Nobel Laureates who have participated in this Distinguished Lecture Series, refer to [www.uwlax.edu/physics/dls.htm](http://www.uwlax.edu/physics/dls.htm)

**(2) Theatre Arts.** Another department experiencing growth and recognition is Theatre Arts which was selected in 2004 to the Kennedy Center/American College Theatre Festival for its production of *Metamorphoses*. Formed as a separate department in 1998 with 18 majors, the department has tripled the number of majors to 54 in 2004. The success of its students and its community impact have distinguished the department both locally and nationally. In the past six years, 19 Theatre Arts graduates have received full graduate scholarships at premier universities including Temple, Ohio State, Florida State, and the UCLA Film School; these scholarships have surpassed half a million dollars. Part of its success is due to a revamped curriculum as faculty broadened student choices with new major emphases in Music Theatre and Theatre Management. The department has tackled difficult productions such as the *Laramie Project* to the more traditional *Amadeus*. The number of season ticket holders for the three annual productions has risen from 90 seven years ago to 737 in the 2004-05 season—another indication

of accomplishment. With this level of community support and engagement, the Department of Theatre Arts enhances UW-L's reputation and contributions to the community. (See

[www.uwlax.edu/theatre/](http://www.uwlax.edu/theatre/) and the Resource Room for a complete file on the department.)

**(3) Accountancy.** The third department selected to represent academic excellence at UW-L is Accountancy, which has averaged more than 40 graduates a year over the past three years. The department has built a national reputation for graduate performance on the CPA exam, which is administered by the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA). In the past ten years, the pass rate performance for UW-L accountancy graduates taking the exam ranks in the top ten nationally in nine of those years. Credit for the high pass rates is due, in part, to an active internship program. Accountancy has increased the number of internships from 40 in 2001-02 to 55 in 2003-04. The internships and high pass rates also help to ensure higher employment rates; e.g., in 2001-02 the placement rate for graduates was 100%. In 2003-04, 97.4% of the graduates obtained employment at an average salary of \$38,421 per year.

Faculty in the Accountancy Department reflect the student-centered focus exemplified at UW-L. In addition to the internships, students have the opportunity to work with low-income residents in preparing their tax returns. In 2004, 32 accountancy majors assisted in the program—an asset to the university and community. For more regarding this department, refer to [www.uwlax.edu/ba/acc/](http://www.uwlax.edu/ba/acc/).

Responding to student needs while offering a challenging, intellectual environment has become the hallmark of a UW-L education. As the institution reconceptualizes its role and adds new opportunities to the graduate and undergraduate experience such as undergraduate research and international study abroad, students graduate with a better understanding of the world. They leave the university better able to analyze, synthesize, and communicate clearly. As a student-

centered university, UW-L focuses on preparing global citizens who are equipped to excel in the workplace—far exceeding the expectations of a comprehensive university. (For additional data regarding student satisfaction at UW-L, go to the Resource Room for results of NSSE surveys and the 2004-05 Student Survey.)

**External Partnerships.** A growing number of external partnerships indirectly but greatly enhance the educational experience at UW-L. The following examples illustrate how these collaborations raise the stature of the institution, bring in resources, enlarge the academic community, and build networks throughout the region, nation, and globe.

**(1) School District/School of Education.** (to be added)

**(2) River Studies Center/Government Agencies.** (to be added)

### **Responses to the 1996 Concerns**

**Concern 1.** *A standing committee of the Faculty Senate currently has responsibility for oversight of the General Education program. This committee lacks the resources and authority necessary to improve quality assurance, course availability, and advising. If the program is to provide the foundation of liberal learning for students, campus-wide commitment must be reaffirmed and stable leadership and administrative be assured.*

In 2000, the General Education Committee (GEC) recommended and the Faculty Senate approved the recommendation to create a position entitled Director of General Education. The first director was appointed in spring 2001. Shortly thereafter, GEC recommended and the Faculty Senate approved a change in the by-laws that allowed the director to be a member of and to chair the GEC committee. Further, GEC members are allowed to serve up to five years. These changes have provided more consistent oversight of the program. The director reports to the Provost and Faculty Senate and works closely with deans and the registrar.

In the 1996 report, the NCA team stated it could not judge the effectiveness of the General Education Program. An assessment plan was in place but actual implementation of the plan had been delayed. The 2000 GEC report to Faculty Senate that recommended a director of the program also highlighted concerns about challenges associated with the assessment of student learning. Although establishing a director was intended to ameliorate some of these difficulties, the director, in consultation with the committee, argued that assessing student learning was difficult because of the lack of clearly defined learning outcomes. Furthermore, many of the GEC members struggled to understand the role of General Education in the curriculum vis-à-vis the student's major.

The GEC focused on two major activities over the next two years. First, it committed to developing a set of programmatic and measurable learning outcomes. Working with a consultant from Alverno College, the GEC completed a working draft in 2002. The Faculty Senate was asked to approve the outcomes as a working draft, but deferred until the impact of learning outcomes on program structure could be articulated. Instead Faculty Senate gave tacit approval for the GEC to continue its work using the draft to engage in assessment activities. Thus, the GEC used the outcomes to design several assessment measures that have now been piloted and refined during the past three semesters (spring 2004 through spring 2005.) The results were analyzed in summer 2005. The outcomes were also used to complete course reviews during 2004-2005 for all courses in the General Education program. Results of the course reviews and other feedback on the learning outcomes are now being used to revise and simplify the set of learning outcomes. (The Faculty Senate formally approved the learning outcomes on September 29, 2005.)

Another challenge in developing a cohesive assessment plan is the lack of a campus culture that fully embraces a structure to support assessment activities. For example, the GEC relies upon volunteer classrooms or volunteer students to engage in assessment activities related to general education. However, the GEC has an active assessment team and is investigating other mechanisms for effective assessment, including embedded assessments and e-portfolios. Both would require significant faculty development opportunities.

Although hampered by budgetary constraints, faculty development funds have supported sending a team to the AAC&U General Education and Assessment conference for the last three years. Teams have been comprised of the director, members of the GEC, or other general education faculty. In addition, the director has attended the Association of General and Liberal Studies conferences and is currently serving as President of the Council for Administration of General and Liberal Studies. The GEC has also sponsored several faculty development activities on campus focused on learning outcomes, course reviews using learning outcomes, and an examination of the role of General Education in the baccalaureate degree. The GEC is beginning to collaborate with the Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning to coordinate other faculty development activities. Although challenging, all these activities of the GEC complement the efforts of the university as a whole to develop a culture that embraces assessment rather than complying with it. Refer to the responses to Concern Two (below) and to Criterion Three for a more detailed discussion of UW-L's progress and shortcomings with assessment. (See the Resource Room for materials related to General Education.)

**Concern 2.** *A well-developed but complex assessment plan exists but implementation across campus is inconsistent.*

Assessment activities have increased substantially over the last ten years with reviews of all departments in 1998, 2001, and 2003. Equally important, however, have been the initiatives originating in the Provost Office to take assessment to the next level, i.e., with assessment results informing teaching and curriculum. In 2002, the Provost convened an Assessment Working Group comprised of associate deans, Director of General Education, and the Director of Institutional Research. The group committed to meeting once a month to discuss ways to strengthen assessment practices throughout the institution. The expectation was that this group would form a hub that would generate discussion throughout the academic programs.

Exceeding these expectations, the Assistant to the Provost who is charged with oversight of the university assessment, collaborated with the Assessment Working Group to develop a rubric or assessment tool to evaluate assessment practices in academic programs. The office of each academic dean evaluated individual department reports and communicated the results to the departments. (Results of the rubric can be found in the Resource Room.)

Reflecting a long-standing pattern at UW-L, the results are uneven in that some departments have developed and integrated assessment into their teaching practices while a few remain resistant and view assessment as an activity outside the scope of teaching. But within the self-study under Criterion Three, there are recommendations to make assessment meaningful. These include revising the academic program review process with assessment playing a more prominent role in the review and linking the practice of assessment to the annual review of faculty, which affects the pay plan.

Complementing assessment at the department level, UW-L has invested in two other instruments to better gauge student performance and the overall undergraduate experience. The first measure is the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which UW-L has participated in since the survey began in 2000. With five years of data as a solid baseline, UW-L intends to use the NSSE periodically to monitor changes in student experiences. Results of the survey are used in a number of ways such as providing data for the UW System accountability report and NCA self study report; moreover, the First Year Experience Work Group used the results to inform its discussions about the overall composition of the first year experience at UW-L. (Because UW-L oversampled its student population, customized college and departmental reports are also possible.) Other follow-up studies stimulated by NSSE results are the creation of Freshmen Focus Groups, a Study of Faculty-Student Interaction, Peer Tutoring Group, participation in the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement, First Year Students' Study Skills, and Longitudinal Analysis of NSSE. (See the Resource Room for NSSE results, department assessment reports, and the Associate Deans' evaluation of assessment reports.)

PLACE NSSE CHART(S) HERE

The second instrument used to evaluate student performance is the ACT Critical Thinking Test. As part of university-wide assessment, UW-L administered the ACT Critical Thinking Test to freshmen and seniors during 2003-2004.

**Concern 3.** *There is a perception on the part of faculty and academic staff that communication and decision-making processes have been disrupted and that there is a lack of leadership in the area of academic affairs.*

Senior academic leadership has changed substantially since the 1996 NCA visit, with a new Chancellor in 2001 who has 16 years of experience at the institution (as Dean, Provost, and

Chancellor) and a new Provost in 2002. Two Deans have over five years of experience at UW-L, one Dean began in 2004, and one deanship was eliminated as part of budget reductions.

Departments within that college have been relocated to two of the three remaining colleges.

With these administrative changes, communication among the constituencies has also changed. The Chancellor's staff (Chancellor, Chancellor's Executive Assistant, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance, Assistant to the Chancellor for Affirmative Action and Diversity, and Assistant Chancellor for Advancement) meets weekly to discuss UW System and campus-focused topics. The Provost meets with the Academic Deans and Dean of Students both as a group and individually every two weeks. The Provost also meets monthly as a group and individually with members of the Provost Council that is comprised of the academic dean of students, other unit leaders, and those who report directly to her. The Chancellor and Provost meet with the governance groups regularly, and the Provost attends the Faculty Senate Executive Committee meeting on a regular basis.

The addition of a faculty internship position in the Office of the Provost/Vice Chancellor beginning in 1999 further strengthens the connection between the faculty and administration. The internship is open to all tenured faculty (at the ranks of associate and full professor) for a period up to three years. The Office of the Provost/Vice Chancellor also produces a monthly electronic newsletter, the *Provost's Digest*, to keep the campus apprised of university academic events and issues.

**Concern 4.** *Through a strategic planning process culminating in 1993, the University completed a comprehensive set of value statements, goals, objectives, and strategies. The resulting plan, however, which has not been updated, is missing the time lines and*

*implementation and assessment strategies necessary for full and continuous strategic planning.*

Since 1996, the university developed another strategic plan, *Building Our Academic Community of Learning and Inquiry*. The initial planning process that involved all campus constituencies and the La Crosse community began in January 2002 with an activity known as the Future Search Conference which included 120 individuals. However, the university was struck by severe budget reductions for the 2003-05 and 2005-07 biennium which delayed full development of the new strategic plan. Still, the 2004 strategic plan is used as a guide for planning, and the Joint Planning and Budget Committee provided a status report of the plan in August 2005. The Chancellor charged this same committee to further review the plan for the 2005-06 academic year.

In part, a product of decentralization of the budget, the strength of UW-L's planning process often occurs at the unit/program level. For example, the attached strategic plan for the College of Science and Allied Health is a well thought-out definitive plan. For additional discussion of strategic planning, refer to Criteria One and Two where recommendations include revisiting the mission statement and strategic plan. (See the Resource Room for the 2002 strategic plan and college/units strategic plans.)

**Concern Five.** *If recent practices continue, a substantial core of tenured and tenure-track faculty may not be maintained in the future to preserve and enhance the quality of educational programs. A special concern is replacement of tenure-track positions with instructional academic staff, as proposed by the Board of Regents.*

According to university data, the number of tenure-track faculty has been fairly stable over the past eight years with shifts occurring as a result of changes in college structures. But the

number of Instructional Academic Staff (IAS) has increased, reflecting a national trend in that new faculty jobs in higher education “went disproportionately to adjuncts.” (*Chronicle of Education*, June 3, 2005) For example, in fall 2003, IAS taught 28% of the courses at UW-L compared to 21% in 1994. Recognizing the major contributions and working conditions of IAS, recent attention has focused on the needs and concerns of IAS. Consequently, in October 2004, the Faculty Senate Executive Committee established the IAS Task Force to investigate and make recommendations about instructional academic staff concerns. The IAS Task Force submitted a list of recommendations addressing IAS concerns regarding their contracts and governance representation. These findings were based on the results of a survey of instructional and non-instructional academic staff that was completed during the 2004-05 academic year. Recommendations included offering multi-year contracts whenever possible, establishing a mentorship program, and creating a Faculty Senate committee to continue to monitor and address IAS concerns. The committee was established and began work in the fall 2005. (See the Resource Room for Faculty Senate Minutes for March 10, 2005 detailing committee recommendations.)

#### PLACE TWO CHARTS—TENURE TRACK FACULTY/IAS

***Concern 6.*** *There are regulations implementing shared governance, as well as vehicles for implementation, but the operational definition is not clearly understood across the campus, nor is the process working as effectively as it could.*

Progress has been made in several areas of shared governance. First, during the 2004-05 academic year, a Faculty Senate Task Force was charged with examining the status of instructional academic staff. (See the discussion in Concern Seven.)

The Joint Minority Affairs Committee has also been very active in another area of shared governance. (To be added.)

The Joint Planning and Budget Committee meets regularly and is comprised of faculty, academic staff, college Deans, Dean of Students, and a student representative. The Provost/Vice-Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor of Administration and Finance also attend the meetings; it is this committee that was charged with the strategic planning process and review of the plan. This committee is discussed in detail under Criterion Two.

The Joint Information Technology Services Committee (comprised of representatives from Faculty Senate, Academic Staff Council, and Student Association) discusses and acts upon issues resulting from the Chancellor's annual charge. Committee members solicit input from the constituents they represent and then communicate this information to the committee. Issues related to information technology will be examined further under Criterion Two.

The Joint Physical Facilities Committee is a university-wide committee with membership derived from the faculty, academic staff, and students. Individual members of the committee are appointed by their respective governance groups, and the Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance serves as an administrative consultant to the group. The committee reports directly to the Chancellor and annually receives its charge from the Chancellor. Responsibilities may include receiving proposals and recommending names for physical facilities, advising the Campus Planner and the Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance on specific facility issues and campus opinions, and providing feedback to the Campus Planner on the development of biennial project requests.

**Concern Seven.** *In the environmental and safety area, some problems identified early in the effort to assess environmental and safety conditions have not yet been corrected.*

*Significant safety problems, such as the existence of a chlorine tank and the absence of eye-wash stations in laboratory and studio facilities, must be corrected expeditiously, so that the University ensures safety and conforms to OSHA regulations.*

The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse is committed to providing and maintaining a safe and healthful working and learning environment for employees, students, guests, and residents of the community. UW-L has taken numerous actions to comply with the vast array of applicable federal, state, and local codes and regulations pertaining to the environment, health, and safety.

At the time this NCA recommendation was identified/issued, no OSHA compliance violations existed. However, UW-L was proactively and voluntarily enhancing safety associated with use of chlorine gas and upgrading eyewash/drench showers. Shortly after the identification of this issue, UW-L had removed gaseous chlorine as a disinfectant for campus swimming pools. An alternative process with less hazardous materials is now used to disinfect swimming pool water. In addition, all emergency showers and/or eyewash equipment have been installed in all high hazard operations. The equipment existing at the time of the NCA recommendation provided adequate coverage and compliance with OSHA regulations. Based on faculty and staff concerns, funding was provided for installation of additional emergency eyewash equipment in many moderate to low hazard areas. Upgrades to the swimming pool and eyewash/drench showers both occurred during 1996-97.

**Concern Eight.** *Anxiety and concern on the part of faculty and academic staff over both the extent of budgetary reduction and the allocation process have resulted in low morale and could threaten productivity.*

Unfortunately, UW-L has experienced three major budget reductions since the 1996 site visit. These reductions have occurred as a result of the State of Wisconsin reducing the overall

budget for the UW System that subsequently affects UW-L. This trend (reduced state support for higher education) that the UW System and UW-L are experiencing is similar to what other university systems throughout the nation are experiencing. To offset this funding support, UW-L is in the midst of identifying other ways to support programs and services. Examples of potential funding sources include a planned comprehensive campaign, additional grant support, and increased revenue generated as a result of efforts to increase the number of international and non-resident students.

Despite these budget reductions, many UW-L programs have received and continue to receive national recognition. The consensus on campus, however, is that the university cannot sustain its academic quality if further budget reductions occur. Criterion Two describes resource planning and allocation and budget reduction and reallocation processes that the university has followed in each of the past three biennia and its efforts to address these challenges while remaining focused on academic program and service quality, the campus community, and its students.

### **The Self Study Process**

UW-L welcomed the opportunity to be one of the first institutions to seek reaccreditation under the new criteria. Early in the process, self-study committee members realized the new criteria allows the campus to evaluate existing processes rather than to merely describe what has been accomplished over the last ten years. The self-study has presented the campus with the opportunity to reflect upon and analyze the direction of higher education in the State of Wisconsin, the region, and the community. As a result, the self-study serves as a valuable, comprehensive resource for further discussion and analysis of UW-L's current status and future direction.

In spring 2004, the Provost used the campus newsletter to announce the position of Self-Study Coordinator. The position was limited to tenured faculty members with the coordinator being charged to lead the self-study. Upon selection, the coordinator assembled a steering committee to address the five criteria. The steering committee, which began meeting in May 2004, represents a cross-section of the campus population with faculty from each of the colleges, associate deans, and academic staff from student advising, counseling and testing, affirmative action and international education.

Three members chaired Criterion One, and two members chaired each of the remaining criterion. After receiving their assigned criterion, the chairs formed their own subcommittees to address each of the core components. With the formation of the subcommittees, representation across campus broadened to 42 participants to include classified staff and additional academic staff from advancement, career services, educational technology, the business development center, multicultural student services, student centers, and continuing education and extension. Additional participants were included as consultants such as the Institutional Researcher, CIO, Associate Registrar, and Director of the Center of Teaching and Learning, to name a few.

Each of the subcommittees (with the exception of Criterion 2) used a matrix adapted from the criterion, core components, and evidence provided by the Higher Learning Commission. While the subcommittees were gathering evidence for their respective criterion, the coordinator worked with staff assigned specifically to design a self-study website and to scan materials for an electronic resource room. From the beginning, the Self-Study Committee decided to provide NCA evaluators with the choice of either electronic or hard copies of the supporting documents. In creating the website, the coordinator and web designer relied upon models from other universities undergoing the self-study process as well as consultation with one of the reference

librarians. The resource room that was created for the self-study will be maintained after the NCA visit as a central storehouse of significant UW-L documents.

Throughout the 2004-05 academic year, steering committee members and their subcommittees met, reviewed evidence, and completed a matrix for the coordinator to use when compiling the report. As they addressed the criteria, the committees considered UW-L's strengths and areas in need of improvement. The coordinator attempted to maintain their recommendations in the final report.

In an effort to engage more of the campus community, the coordinator began a series of forums in spring 2005. Each forum centered on a question that emerged from one of the steering committee's concerns when responding to the core components. The dates and topics are listed below.

March 24, 2005	<i>Is it time for UW-L to revisit its mission statement?</i>
March 30, 2005	<i>Are we budgeting our resources to meet our mission?</i>
April 12, 2005	<i>Where do all those assessment reports go?</i>
April 28, 2005	<i>How can UW-L use scholarship and outreach to stimulate organizational and educational improvement?</i>
May 5, 2005	<i>What are UW-L's strengths and areas in need of improvement?</i>

A campus-wide survey was used to address criterion five rather than a forum.

At the April 28 forum, an NCA evaluator, President Margaret Lee of Oakton College, visited UW-L and spoke to steering and subcommittee members. President Lee had recently evaluated another campus that was undergoing its self-study and advised UW-L committee

members on how to improve the self-study process. The visit with President Lee was timely and helpful for those involved in the self-study process.

The campus coordinator also informed the campus about the status of the self- study through two updates to the Faculty Senate in spring 2005. The first update was general with one of the steering committee members also participating; the second update presented the findings of the one of the subcommittees and its recommendations regarding assessment. Other forms of communication used to update the campus included a mass e-mail from the Provost , the campus newsletter, and mass e-mail from the coordinator.

In May 2005, the coordinator began writing the first draft of the self-study. Throughout the summer, chapters were drafted and reviewed by an editorial team with experience in accreditation and a long association with UW-L. Upon completion, each chapter was posted on the self-study website, and a mass e-mail was used to notify faculty and staff of its availability. The first draft is to be completed in October 2005. Upon review by the campus community, the final draft will be completed during January and early February, 2006.

A self-study retreat was held in September 2005 with 38 campus leaders in attendance. The retreat generated vigorous discussion as participants heard reports from each of the steering committee members regarding their respective criterion. In September 2005, three student forums were held to engage the students; the Dean of Students will also schedule a forum for the self-study coordinator to meet with the Student Senate.

Promotional materials advertising the self study have been circulated at prominent events such as the Chancellor's Fall Remarks, Residence Life Orientation, Faculty Senate meetings, and various forums. Promotional materials include a bookmark and a highlighter with the NCA site

visit dates on both. A visit from the NCA staff liaison is scheduled for October 20. The liaison will meet with various campus constituencies and provide input regarding the self-study process.