

External review report---Western Carolina University
Administrative Program review for International Programs and Services
March 14-16, 2010

1. Introduction

- The review team of Keith Corzine, Chris Cooper and Terry Rodenberg met for a get acquainted dinner on Sunday night, March 14, 2010. Information was shared on the procedures to be used for the on-campus evaluation to be held March 15-16.
- On Monday, March 15th, the review team met with the staff of the Planning & Effectiveness Office for an overview of the process, and throughout the day additional meetings were held with the International Student Services and IEP staff, with selected faculty, with international students, and with individuals involved in the administration of study abroad and faculty-led travel courses.
- On Tuesday, March 16, additional meetings were held in the morning with Lois Mwaniki, with the members of the Allied Staff, another with the Council of Deans, and an exit meeting with Mwaniki, Lofquist, Wargo, Carter and the review team.

2. Analysis of the Program

- The primary unit functions of the International Programs and Services office are consistent with those found at other American institutions of similar size and mission. These include study abroad, faculty-led abroad, international student services, immigration services, and the Intensive English Program (IEP). In addition, the unit contributes toward the admissions process of undergraduate international students and especially for study abroad exchange students. There is only marginal involvement with the admissions process for international graduate students. The office space provided for the center is attractive and adequate for their needs although their location away from the center of the campus is not an optimal situation. The IPS office (specifically Lois Mwaniki) also assists with immigration documents for students and faculty, and while this is frequently done in international offices for institutions the size of WCU it is unusual that the Director assumes these responsibilities.
- The unit's programming activities and/or services represents the primary function of the IPS office. Student-oriented programs such as study abroad, international student support, and international activities for the campus, community and region are organized here. In addition, the administrative responsibilities for establishing new institutional relationships, for monitoring global health issues, for planning faculty-led programs, and international recruiting are major roles of the IPS. A relatively new Intensive English program is also part of the unit's responsibilities. In our discussions with various groups across campus there emerged a general theme that the office does provides strong support for the campus and that they are always willing to help in any way that they can. Students remarked that they had received assistance from the office through their orientation program and during their stay on campus. There were some concerns expressed that suggested that IPS personnel were sometimes hard to find in the office—due in part perhaps to the perception of the amount of travel done by office professionals.

- The planning and assessment strategies of the IPS offer a number of different approaches and measures based upon the large number of functions performed by the unit. These include the number of study abroad advising sessions completed as well as the number of students who actually go abroad. Comparisons with other institutions are available in terms of study abroad participation as well. Additional information has been compiled concerning various activities organized by the IPS such as public school requests for speakers, the approximate attendance at events such as the International Festival, the attendance at the Study Abroad Fair, the number of international delegations hosted on campus, the number of H-1B and PERM petitions addressed each year, and the number of visits to various pages of the website. The review team asked for and received additional information on the admissions process, including the number of applications, acceptance rates, and eventual enrollment of international students. There remains the question of whether or not this information is being used to make improvements in the unit's performance. For example, there are significant differences between the number of students interviewed for studying abroad and those that actually go abroad. Has any attempt been made to determine why some student go and others do not? For the admissions process it would be appropriate to seek information from potential students who were accepted to WCU and then who never enrolled. An assessment is done by study abroad students of their pre-departure orientation with the specific purpose of improving the services provided.

3. Analysis of Staff

- The qualifications of the IPS unit personnel are appropriate for their responsibilities. The general area of international programs has historically attracted individuals from a number of academic disciplines as there have not been specific academic programs designed to prepare people for the field. However, this is now changing and as positions open up in the future it would be appropriate to seek out individuals with this training.
- The resources and support available for the unit has changed dramatically over the past five years. The increase from three full-time employees to seven full and one half-time has allowed the unit to expand its international agenda considerably. There has been a corresponding increase in the overall operational budget although this recently was reduced due to the current budgetary situation of the University. However, as budgets and personnel increase so do the expectations of a return on this investment, and this was mentioned several times on campus concerning overall study abroad participation as well as the number of international students on-campus. International student numbers remain relatively low despite this investment and improvement in this area remains an IPS and campus priority---as it should be. One consistent theme heard throughout the review was the need for a full-time Assistant Director to replace the current part-time Assistant Director position. It may be possible to gain the full-time position by the reassignment of tasks, consolidation and/or elimination of one or more positions given the relatively low number of students currently being served.
- In terms of professional activity and service the staff of the IPS has done some things well with improvement needed in other areas. They do maintain affiliations with appropriate international organizations both within and outside North Carolina, and some have been able to participate in professional workshops on a regular basis. This is particularly important given the ever-changing legal and administrative aspects of international education. However, for some of the IPS staff there is a noticeable lack of actually making professional presentations or leading workshops within the international field. This should be identified as part of their role expectations and financial support made available to allow IPS personnel to make these professional contributions. In terms of University service, the IPS staff has a well-earned reputation for assisting when ever their help is needed by any group across the campus.

4. Analysis of Operational Facilities and Budget

- The IPS unit does have adequate facilities to fulfill its mission. The location on the edge of campus is not as desirable as being centrally-located, but certainly manageable. However, from an international student's viewpoint, there may be a lack of a place that they can call "home", meaning a place where international students and others may gather on an informal basis. This in turn may have a negative impact on the recruitment and retention of future international students, as an institution's current international population is generally seen as an institution's best recruiters.
- Pertaining to budget, the information provided was both challenging and confusing for the review team to properly ascertain the budgets' actual impact on the unit. The review team was provided prior years' budgets and had to request a current budget. It remains unclear what revenues are produced and what expenses incurred—and especially as the costs and revenues sometimes vary dramatically from one budgetary year to the next. An explanation of these changes (such as the funding details for the faculty-led summer groups) would be beneficial. The understanding of the budget was particularly troubling since there had been concerns voiced to the review team regarding the perception of excessive staff travel which could not be verified or discounted. In addition, concerning both budget and productivity, the information provided made it difficult to discern the actual number of international and domestic (study abroad) students served in response to staff increases.

5. Summary of unit strengths and areas for improvement

- The general impression of the IPS is that the unit is doing very well in meeting many of the goals of their institutional mission but that there is room for improvement in others.
- The overall strengths of the unit include an excellent working relationship with the various constituencies across the WCU campus, a professional attitude toward their responsibilities with a strong sense of commitment to their students and faculty, and perhaps most of all a sincere interest in improving and expanding their office operations.
- The unit could make improvements in several areas, with a major one being the establishment of a broader institutional approach concerning the strategic planning for the IPS. (It is our understanding that a strategic plan for the internationalization of the campus is already in progress). This should specifically address, among many things, a more coordinated institutional approach concerning international admissions as well as in the development of a specific recruiting plan that goes beyond what has previously been developed. According to data provided the review team by the Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness, the total number of international students newly enrolled for the 2009-2010 academic year is 63, minus Jamaican students whose involvement with IPS seems limited. An expanded initiative toward international recruiting should also include the potential role that can be played by the WCU alumni office in such things as the development of international alumni associations, the use of such organizations to assist with recruiting, the tracking of international graduates, and long-term plans designed to support international fundraising. The IPS unit also needs to continue its efforts to expand the awareness about its role in internationalizing the campus. While many people do understand what the center does, there are some individuals who remain uninformed about the activities of the IPS as well as the potential benefits that a strong international program can bring to a campus. A campus-wide newsletter to interested faculty and staff about international activities would help address this concern. Another strategic approach toward expanding study abroad participation and faculty involvement would include a systematically outlined plan designed to meet the needs of individual academic departments. This might include the establishment of such things as discipline-specific bi-

lateral exchange programs with faculty at the center of the student, curricular and exchange process. This would also strengthen the relationship between the IPS and the faculty and departments.

6. **Summary of recommendations.** In addition to the comments above, the following recommendations are made by the review team:
 1. The strategic plan being developed to assist in the internationalization of the campus should provide the campus with a realistic approach and not a 'pie in the sky' approach that is found in so many similar documents. Reasonable and measureable recommendations are more likely to be achieved than those based on unrealistic long-term projections, no matter how positive these may be.
 2. Efforts should be increased to bring international activities and options into the forefront of the campus. This can be done in a variety of ways and could include such things as study abroad students writing in the university newspaper, recognition of studying abroad at graduation ceremonies, the presence of international flags at graduation, a newsletter highlighting international campus activities, human interest stories on students abroad in the alumni materials, the establishment of an outstanding international alumni award, etc.
 3. As institutions attempt to expand their international efforts, an involved faculty consistently plays a key part in successful internationalization activities. As part of encouraging faculty involvement WCU departments and colleges should consider the addition of an international component as part of their promotion and tenure process.
 4. Implement a process where each summer/fall the IPS provides an informational workshop for department chairs and/or graduate advisors concerning their roles in decision-making for study abroad transfer credit as well in the admissions process for prospective graduate international students.
 5. The overall admissions process for international students—and especially the graduate students—appears to be unnecessarily arduous. A quick turnaround time for international applicants is critical in bringing them to a campus, yet on one part of the admissions website it states that this process could take at least four months! It was a little unclear but it appeared to be that prospective international graduate students would apply, their papers sent to a department for approval, and then they were notified of the need for financial support documentation. If this is the case the process takes too long.
 6. The requirement to have prospective international student's credentials evaluated by WES or another outside evaluating agency may actually direct potential WCU student applications to institutions that do not have such a requirement. Many institutions do their own evaluation of credentials, or you may consider the possibility of paying the evaluation fee (approximately \$160) back to any student who actually enrolls at WCU.
 7. While there is no absolute organizational structure for where international admissions takes place on a campus, there are significant marketing and recruiting advantages if undergraduate and graduate admissions for international students takes place in one office. You may want to consider this.
 8. Many institutions in the U.S. are going beyond the use of the TOEFL to evaluate a prospective student's English skills. For example, many are now accepting the IELTS test that is used in many parts of the world, and to exclude this probably means you are losing prospective applications and students.
 9. A periodic review should take place on the mailing service used to send out admission documents to prospective international students. Prices can be negotiated with different companies plus some now can allow a student to track their own materials once you have mailed them their documents. (Fed EX, DHL, U.S. Postal service)

10. It would appear reasonable that the graduate office and undergraduate admissions reach agreement on the use of an institutional TOEFL for admittance purposes.
11. As WCU considers new strategies for recruiting international students, one approach would be to determine which academic programs on campus would serve as 'signature' programs for international students. Logical ones would include entrepreneurship, engineering technology, and anything that could use the geographical advantages of western North Carolina such as outdoors education. These are marketable overseas and would attract students. Such programs could also be used to develop special summer programs designed to bring international students to the campus.
12. With the financial difficulties facing in-coming international students as well as out-going study abroad students, the development of scholarship opportunities for them is critical. This could become a focus in working with international and study abroad alumni of WCU.
13. As part of the effort to increase the number of student going abroad, plus bring outstanding students to campus in the first place, the marketing arm of the university should use international opportunities as one of their major means of reaching parents and students. This can be reflected on the institutional website, in recruiting view books, etc.
14. A program could be established to bring surrounding high school students who have an interest in international events to the campus whenever a guest speaker appears that offers an international topic.
15. In seeking additional students with an international interest, it may be possible to target high school students currently enrolled in internationally-themed high schools or those students completing international baccalaureate programs.
16. Specific recruiting efforts could be made to international students currently attending community colleges in the surrounding area. If there is enough student interest it would be positive to hold an 'international day' for them on campus. (Including campus tours, meeting with academic advisers, immigration etc.)
17. Many diverse areas of the campus could be brought together in promoting international education through the establishment of such programs as the University of Kansas' Global Awareness program. This program allows a student to establish a portfolio of international activity through coursework, campus and area activities, study abroad etc., and this is recognized at graduation and is included on a student's transcript.
18. Several institutions across the country are implementing special professional development programs to assist employees in learning more about the cross-cultural issues often found in working with international students. (see Old Dominion University)
19. As curriculum drives students to study abroad, a specific study abroad requirement in some of WCU's degree programs could make a significant impact on student participation. For example, many international studies degrees require study abroad as part of the degree requirements. (there are options available for students who cannot go abroad) Many international minors, not unlike the one at WCU, allow for a study abroad experience to count as a significant part of the degree. The University of Minnesota's College of Arts and Sciences has their own minor in study abroad!
20. The IPS unit already has some ties to counseling services on campus, but these need to be strengthened. Currently there is a nation-wide movement —centered at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University for obvious reasons----that has entire campuses learning more about the signs of students in distress and what to do about it.
21. There appears to be some occasional problems between the academic credit awarded by some departments and the actual academic effort required for short-term faculty-led courses. While some institutions have a faculty committee that addresses these issues, this

- is an unnecessary bureaucratic step if the chairs and deans take their role seriously in assuring the academic legitimacy of the course.
22. There appeared to be some confusion about allowing some faculty-led courses to literally be a travel course with few if any academic requirements. Such courses may have value for students, but these do promote the unwanted image that all short-term study abroad courses are non-academic, plus it raises the question of faculty salaries if no credit is being granted. Calling them travel courses also establishes an unwanted image for the academic courses.
 23. Concerns were expressed by some faculty that the IPS was steering students into summer programs due in part to the “awards” given them by the third party providers operating the programs. This in turn meant that some students who might have gone on a WCU trip were instead directed elsewhere. While the review committee has no evidence of this and do not want to falsely accuse any one of something that is not true, this was stated in one of our meetings. It would appear reasonable to clear this up.
 24. Other faculty raised the question about some international programs being operated outside the auspices of the IPS. The Jamaica program was cited as an example, with the question being whether or not the IPS should have more involvement in the program.
 25. Like many institutions, there is no formal process in place for establishing joint degree programs with institutions outside the United States. When new opportunities appear it is literally a reinvent the wheel process, and this may be something that needs to be addressed as part of the developing strategic plan. In the future shared degree programs with partners abroad will be commonplace.
 26. Efforts need to be made to bring back to life the Phi Beta Delta international organization. This could be a key organization in helping promote international activity on the campus.
 27. Apparently there remain departments who are understood to discourage study abroad for its students. If these departments are willing to discuss their concerns it may be that strategies could be developed to make it easier for their students to go abroad.
 28. There are apparently some degree programs on campus that discourage the acceptance of international graduate students. If this is true, it would be reasonable to find out why this is and if any measures could be taken to alleviate the situation.
 29. It may be worthwhile to create a study abroad video using WCU students as an advertising piece for the freshmen transitional course. (especially useful if the IPS people cannot make it to some classes or as a supplement to what they are already doing)
 30. While there may be some international students involved in various on-campus clubs, a strong international student organization can take the lead in bringing international events to a campus. This should be a key goal of the IPS.
 31. As the short-term faculty led programs grow, so will the problems. Implement a yearly assessment of the procedures used to operate these programs and involve experienced faculty in this process.
 32. An inexpensive and effective way of connecting with the sponsors or parents of graduating international students is to provide them with a certificate of appreciation in helping you provide an education for the student. Make it look a bit like a diploma---these often end up on someone’s office wall or the living room of a home-- and can serve as “advertising” for WCU.
 33. If the IPS office does not make yearly reports to the Board of Trustees this should be formalized if at all possible. Keep the activities of the office on their radar screen!
 34. As larger numbers of students go abroad, the role of the judicial office on campus becomes more significant. Many institutions now require that students undergo a judicial clearance

- before they participate in any overseas experience. While this is reasonable, it leads to additional questions such as who has the responsibility in making the final decision concerning student participation and what are the criteria used in making that determination? Is an alcohol issue during a student's freshman year enough to prohibit participation in a study abroad experience in his junior year? What about two violations? A discussion along these lines would make sense.
35. We believe that the staffing resources are adequate to achieve the mission of the IPS office. The staff has been increased dramatically over the past few years and although the IPS is certainly not overstaffed, there is limited evidence that the increased staffing levels have resulted in a corresponding increase in productivity. The one place where this is not true, however, is on faculty-led trips. It appears that since Claudia Bryant took over as assistant director the number of faculty- led programs has increased at an exponential rate, and her involvement plus the rest of the staff should be complimented on this. Although we recognize the financial limitations of the University and the IPS office, we encourage our administration to look for creative ways to continue Dr. Bryant's work in the office.
36. One of the goals of the IPS office is to elevate the rank of the staff positions to equate them to similar positions on other campuses in North Carolina. While in many ways this may be reasonable, given some of the perceptions that we heard on campus concerning the amount of resources already dedicated to IPS this might be damaging in the long run.