

External Review of the Registrar's Office at Western Carolina University

Introduction

A review of the Registrar's Office at Western Carolina University (WCU) was done under the direction of the Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness (OIPE). This review included an on-campus visit and set of interviews that were conducted October 22 through October 24, 2011. The review team was chaired by Gilbert C. Bowen, University Registrar at UNC Wilmington, and included William Frady, Manager of Instructional and Student Computing at WCU, and Will Peebles, Professor and Director of the School of Music at WCU.

During days two and three of the visit the review team met with a variety of groups of faculty, staff, and students. We had prepared a series of questions for each interview, but allowed the conversation to evolve based on the participants' comments and perspectives. The full review team was present for all interviews. The interview schedule was as follows:

- Monday, October 24
 - Interim Provost – Beth Tyson Lofquist
 - Senior Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs – Fred Hinson
 - University Registrar – Larry Hammer
 - Registrar Staff
 - Amelia Schlott, Technology Support Analyst
 - Anita Samuel , Assistant Registrar
 - Donna Carpenter, Front Desk and Administrative Assistant
 - Frank Hachadurian, Technology Support Technician
 - Glenda Gainor, Transfer Articulation Specialist [Was she in attendance?]
 - Hilda Wilson, Transcript Clerk
 - Jolene Coggins, Academic Records Specialist
 - Kari Hensley, Transfer Articulation Specialist [Was she in attendance?]
 - Kathy Green, Associate Registrar
 - Laura Mallonee, Graduation Coordinator
 - Linda Woody, Course Records and Registration Specialist
 - Robert Ryder, Technology Support Technician
 - Sharon Painter, Assistant Registrar
 - Sherry Fox, Student Programs Specialist
 - Stacey Atkins, Transfer Catalog Maintenance Specialist
 - Affiliate Offices within Enrollment Management and Undergraduate Studies
 - Trina Orr, Financial Aid
 - David Goss, Advising Center [Who took his place?]
 - Tammy Haskett, Orientation
 - Mike Razdrh, One-Stop
 - Nancy Brendell, Bursar

- Suzanne Baker, Student Support Services
 - Mardy Ashe, Career Services
 - Roxane Stiles, Graduate School
 - Glenda Hensley, First Year Experience
 - Students (nominated by academic departments)
 - Courtney Oliver, Stage and Screen major
 - Amy Motley, School of Teaching and Learning major
 - Affiliate Offices outside of Enrollment Management and Undergraduate Studies
 - Phil Cauley, Recruiting and Transitions
 - Regis Gilman, Educational Outreach
 - Katherine Greysen, Graduate School
 - Shawna Young, Student Affairs
 - John Schweikart, International Programs
 - Jamaal Mayo, Athletics
 - Jessica Shirley, Nursing
 - Patsy Miller, Asheville Programs
 - Faculty
 - Erin McNelis, Chair Faculty Senate
 - Bob Houghton, Education
 - Cathy Grist, Birth to Kindergarten
 - Jamie Davis, Modern Foreign Language
 - Mary Teslow, Health Information Systems
 - Bill Perry, CIS
 - Hollye Moss, Management
 - George Ford, Engineering
- Tuesday, October 25
 - Department Heads
 - Brian Gastle, English
 - David McCord, Psychology
 - Dee Nichols, School of Teaching and Learning
 - Shelia Chapman, School of Nursing
 - Steve Brown, Applied Criminology
 - Don Connelly, Communication
 - Bob Mulligan, Accounting, Finance, Information Systems, and Economics
 - Cynthia Atterholt, Chemistry and Physics
 - Thomas Salzman, Stage and Screen
 - Karen Lunnen, Physical Therapy
 - Deans and Associate Deans
 - John West, College of Fine and Performing Arts
 - Dan Grube, College of Education and Allied Professions
 - Niall Michelson, College of Arts and Sciences
 - Marie Huff, College of Health and Human Sciences

- Debbie Burke, College of Business
- James Zhang, Kimmel School of Construction Management and Technology
- Steve Carlisle, Honors College
- Departmental Administrative Assistants
 - Mary Rompf, Dean's Office, Education
 - Carolyn Wiggins, Dean's Office, Arts and Sciences
 - Denise Royer, Human Services
 - Regina Aton, Teaching and Learning
 - Lisa Brooks, Engineering
 - Martha Tolley, Social Work
 - Melody Huddleston, Stage and Screen
 - Melissa Allen, Modern Foreign Language
 - Vicki Fisher, Sales and Marketing
 - Danielle Haney, Anthropology

The review team also had several working meetings by itself and conducted an exit meeting with the Interim Provost, the Senior Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, the University Registrar, the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Planning and Effectiveness, and the Assessment Coordinator for this review.

Analysis of The Registrar's Office

The Registrar's Office maintains timely and accurate records of academic progress and ensures the privacy and security of student records. The Registrar's Office serves as the data custodian for student academic records and the functional owner of the Banner student information system (SIS). In these two roles it provides data and support for university-wide institutional goals and initiatives, as well as those within the academic divisions. The Registrar's recent self-study describes how the office supports UNC Tomorrow and the University's Quality Enhancement Plan. The office manages SIS to insure the integrity, availability, and confidentiality of academic records. The office also publishes the university catalog and interprets and enforces academic policies and curriculum. In addition, the Registrar's Office owns a diverse set of institutional business processes: registration, grading, certifications, articulation of transfer credits, conferral of degrees, and release of transcripts.

The Registrar's Office supports the mission of the institution and its academic programs by providing leadership and service in the area of student records. Its primary roles are to 1) manage and maintain a stable and efficient student information system, 2) enable the varied business practices related to student records and registration, and 3) enforce the academic policies of the institution.

In most ways, the WCU's Registrar's Office is a typical registrar's office in terms of size, scope of responsibilities, and challenges. As in nearly all universities the WCU Registrar's office manages registration, collects grades, issues transcripts, certifies enrollment, posts degrees, and provides data for internal and external reporting. The WCU Registrar's Office also performs several functions that are not universally the responsibility of other registrar's offices. These functions include class

scheduling, classroom assignment, transfer credit articulation, in-state residency decisions, and university catalog preparation.

We compared the staffing levels of the registrar's offices across the 16 UNC institutions. At the 8 UNC institutions with enrollment between 5000 and 15,000 we found an average of 1.6 full-time positions per 1000 students enrolled. WCU, with 9600 students is right at this average staffing level. Of course, this was a study of positions and assumed that the positions were filled. The WCU Registrar's Office currently has one vacant position. This position is being held as vacant because of budget pressures.

Most WCU students will participate in and take advantage of the Registrar's Office's services without ever visiting the office or communicating directly with the office's staff. Routine services are performed through "MyCat," the self-service portal of the SIS. Using that portal, students can register for classes, perform adds and drops, and check grades. The OneStop center handles most of the walk-in traffic that would otherwise be directed to the Registrar's Office, Financial Aid, or the Bursar.

As the data custodian for student records, the Registrar must approve all access to student information systems by staff and faculty. The cooperation between Information Technology and the Registrar seems to be completely adequate in this area. Terminations and other separations from university employment trigger an automatic closing of account access. When a user changes positions within the university, the change to the new security profile is initiated by the new supervisor. This change would pass through the Registrar for his review and he would direct Information Technology to make the appropriate changes. In addition to these checks an annual review of all student system users is performed by the Registrar.

As it was described to us, the Registrar is also the functional lead on all Banner Student projects. He personally reviews all Banner Student release notes for new versions and patches. This active participation has allowed WCU (along with Winston-Salem State University) to be the only UNC campus to be up-to-date with the latest stable Banner Student release. WCU has an annual upgrade scheduled each fall to allow this to continue. The Registrar understands that his role is that of a business process owner and that the business process is more important than the system that supports the process. Specifically, Banner is a business tool rather than a driver.

The Registrar sees supporting the interactions of student and faculty as central to the office's mission. The goal is to offer faculty the services and information they need to conduct their research and instruction as efficiently as possible. The Registrar's Office provides automated services to make administrative functions (grading, attendance reporting, and overrides) more efficient. The Registrar has also made extensive use of Workflow, a Banner feature which generates automated emails to faculty, advisors, and staff in response to some change in a student's record.

Indeed, most of the interactions of the Registrar's Office staff are with faculty, academic department administrative assistants, and staff in administrative offices. The work with the academic departments is particularly important to the office role in supporting the university's mission of creating opportunities for engaged learning, international experiences, research and creative

activities, and cultural activities. The review team heard many examples of how the Registrar's Office strengthens these opportunities by providing creative scheduling solutions, making registration flexible (e.g., block registration for learning communities), supporting international study, facilitating internships, and communicating effectively. The Registrar and his staff were repeatedly described as problem-solvers. Anecdotes that support this characterization included: applying tuition surcharge charges before financial aid refunds are issued; providing extra support during vacancies in Educational Outreach; and encouraging responses to the Student Assessment of Instruction by providing early release of grades only after the assessment for a course is completed. The Registrar's Office also facilitates the interactions between students and faculty by streamlining such processes as major declarations, substitution and waiver requests, and transfer credit articulation. By providing excellent, transparent service in these areas, the faculty-student conversation is not encumbered by unnecessary procedures or "red tape."

It is appropriate to note here that the email communications from the Registrar are welcomed by most faculty and department staff, but considered an intrusion by a few. We heard some complaints along two lines. One is that the emails are just too numerous. As a result, some important emails might be ignored and considered "just another email from the Registrar." The other type of complaint was that administrative work is not the responsibility of the faculty and that the Registrar does not have the authority to ask the faculty to do such work. The endeavor that triggered this comment was the 5th, 8th, and 13th week grade reporting requests that came from the Registrar. One department head reported that faculty were not consulted on this process ahead of time. (It must be mentioned that other department heads said they were part of a meeting and consultation process ahead of time.) Finally, it was clear that some faculty and department heads were not sure where certain initiatives, such as interim grade reporting, came from or who was the sponsor of the idea.

The position of registrar is not part of the faculty governance structure, nor should it be. However, the position does have an important role to play in many academic policy matters and decisions. The WCU Registrar is available and able to act in those roles. For example, the Registrar sits on the Academic Calendar Committee, providing important advice and information. The office also provides representation to the Academic Appeals Committee, which hears appeals to academic policy enforcement. The awarding of WCU credit for work done elsewhere is governed by academic policy, but made possible by technical support and information provided by the Registrar's Office. The Registrar could play a larger role in course curriculum and degree program development, as discussed below.

The Registrar's Office does regular self-assessment of its processes and systems. The office can get a lot of information from monitoring levels of activity. Statistics on classroom utilization, registration activities, and compliance with attendance and grade reporting reveal the extent to which services are used and the success of these services. Also turnaround times are tracked for such services as official transcript production, transfer credit evaluation, degree posting, diploma mailing, and end-of-term processing and reports.

Finally, considerable feedback is solicited, received, and reviewed during interactions with offices and programs across campus. The Registrar and his staff make it a point to visit other offices and

participate in committees and task forces. Examples of this participation include, but are not limited to, the Registrar's Advisory Board, the OneStop Coordination group, Banner User Groups, the Academic Calendar Committee, The Start of School Committee, The Commencement Committee, the Data Standards group, the Retention and Enrollment Steering Team, the Academic Appeals Committee, the Administrative Technology Advisory Council, the Department Head Council, the Associate Deans Council, the Committee for Improving Transfer Process, the Advising Center Advisory Committee, the University Space Committee, and the Academic Space Committee.

Constructive criticism on issues is taken seriously and acted upon. Some recent example issues include the timeliness of degree conferral and the turnaround time for transfer articulation. The feedback indicated that the timeliness to degree conferral was not acceptable. In response, the Registrar re-engineered the business process and improved turn-around time from 4-6 weeks to 48 hours. In response to a finding that the turnaround time for articulation of courses taken elsewhere was not acceptable, the Registrar re-engineered the business process, increased transparency, and improved turn-around time. As a result all matriculating students now receive transfer evaluations prior to advisement and registration.

An important and trusted source of feedback and evaluation is the Registrar's Advisory Board. Its membership includes representatives from most of the offices with which the Registrar's Office has frequent contact. The board meets several times each semester as convened by the Registrar to discuss issues that have arisen within the Registrar's office or from any of its affiliates within the university. Each of the following offices provides representation for the Registrar's Advisory Board: Admissions, Advising Center, Financial Aid, Student Accounts, each of the deans' offices, representative academic departments, Graduate School, Office of Institutional Planning and Effectiveness, Information Technology, and Educational Outreach.

Analysis of Staff

The Registrar's Office is fortunate to have several longtime university employees. The staff's length of service to the institution and its length of service within the profession are key strengths of the unit. The Registrar's recent Self-Study document includes the resumes of the office staff. It is clear that each member of the staff has the credentials and experience required for the position they hold. The review team interviewed the staff; all but one person was present. They spoke highly of their director and also of each other. Most of the staff was also eager and proud to describe their individual jobs.

The office has a staff meeting once each week. The meetings are short, but the staff seemed to appreciate this opportunity to discuss the latest changes and current issues. The area supervisors receive weekly status reports from their staff. A few did express the desire to have a full- or half-day retreat to engage in in-depth planning and team-building.

We did not hear about any specific cross-training or job sharing program within the Registrar's Office. However, some of this has happen by necessity, brought on by the recent staff vacancy. For example,

the responsibility to sit at the front desk is now shared by most staff on a rotating schedule. Two of the staff mentioned that this new responsibility has gotten them familiar with areas of the office and certain services that were new to them. These staff appreciated this opportunity. An up-coming retirement of a key staff member will put additional pressure on the office to train and cross-train.

We heard some concern from the Registrar staff, as well as from staff outside the office, that the current vacancy is an issue. The responsibility for publishing the catalog is a fairly new one for the office and the elimination of that very position makes the new task particularly challenging. If additional staffing were made available, the Registrar would supplement the busy technical area of the office.

The Registrar staff described several opportunities they have to interact with other offices and programs across campus. The Registrar and the other managers in the office are well-aware of the value in being engaged in efforts and activities with affiliate offices. This engagement ranges from technical support, such as Resource25 issues and reporting needs, to ambitious projects, such as Early Alert and student retention.

Analysis of Operational Facilities and Budget

The Registrar's Office's current budget is based on an operational office model that was in place four or five years ago. At that time, processes were typically paper-based and most communications were still done through the U.S. Postal Service. Although the office has not seen a budget increase in over six years, it has never been short of operational funds. Instead, the office has introduced self-service offerings for students and faculty and on-line forms to replace the old (and expensive) paper forms. The office also now uses email almost exclusively to communicate with faculty, staff, and students. The shift has saved a great deal by reducing paper, envelope, and postage costs. In four of the last five years, the unit has returned excess money to enrollment management for use in other areas.

The facilities available to the staff of the Registrar's Office appear to be adequate for the office to fulfill their mission and responsibilities. The review team toured the office and found the space to be inviting, comfortable, neat, and well-lit. The staff seemed to have fairly up-to-date computers. They also had double monitors, which has become the standard for data-intensive offices that work with on-line systems and documents. A recent renovation of the office's physical space involved moving some doorways and workspace stations. The result is a layout that is more open, has better traffic flow, and allows more work areas without crowding.

Summary of Strengths and Areas for Improvement

The review team certainly got the overall impression that the Registrar's Office was well-organized internally and well-regarded across campus. A consistent theme through our interviews with faculty and affiliate offices was that the Registrar and his staff accept challenges with grace and have a genuine interest in solving problems and doing well at everything they do. Also mentioned several

times was an obvious evolution of the Registrar's Office in the last five or six years toward excellent customer service. One faculty member mentioned that office used to be a scary place that they dreaded dealing with. Another remembers a feeling of not being at all welcome when they visited or called the office. Many interviewees stressed how much this has changed for the better in the last five years. Even though many of the same staff have been in the office for ten or more years, the improved atmosphere and attitude projected to faculty and staff has been dramatic. Most interviewees credit the Registrar with this improvement, as the leader of the office for the past six years.

In response to a self-study question about how services could be enhanced, the Registrar did offer a few ideas. For example, the addition of a document imaging system would move the office further toward the goal of becoming a paperless operation able to share information across offices efficiently. It was stated that this would especially be beneficial for documents being transferred from Admissions to the Registrar's Office. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act allows students access to view their own educational record. The Registrar pointed out that if the documents in the education record were stored as digital images, the student could conceivably be given access to view those images through self-service. Further automation would also improve such processes as changes of major, NCAA eligibility checking, entry and evaluation of coursework done elsewhere, transcript ordering, and class seat prediction. The discussions the review team had with faculty and staff confirmed support for each of these. We also heard some other suggestions, most of which would involve purchase of additional or expanded systems. These items include enhanced enrollment and retention management tools (e.g., SunGard's Business Relationship Manager), more integration among the offices (specifically, Admissions, Registrar, and Advising), and the upgrade to current versions of critical software (e.g., Microsoft Reporting Services, SharePoint, and Resource25).

The areas for potential improvement range from relatively simple items directly under control of the Registrar to complex items requiring additional funds or cooperation among several offices. A summary of those items follows.

Most interviewees appreciated and valued the emails that this Registrar sends out. Some of these are generated by Banner Workflow and others are email blasts from the Registrar. A vocal minority, however, voiced concern that faculty get too many emails from the Registrar. The temptation is there to skip over these emails "for later reading" and thus stand the chance of missing something important. We also heard questions about what authority the Registrar has to require any administrative action by faculty. Many directives come by email from the Registrar directly to faculty, but it was not clear to faculty whether these imperatives should come from the Registrar or from the Provost or other administrative officers.

The utilization of classroom facilities was reported as being much better than it once was. Apparently this was not even measured systematically before WCU used Resource25. However, Resource25 was blamed for some dissatisfaction with room scheduling. Some faculty perceive themselves as being tied to a system that forces them to teach in undesirable rooms. It was not apparent to the reviewers that the faculty or the schedule builders fully understand the need for better facility usage. It was not

clear how well the classroom scheduling process leverages the Resource25 features of attributes, partitions, and prescheduling.

The students we interviewed had very few complaints about the Registrar's Office's services. The most significant for them was the system problem they encountered at the beginning of a registration period. Apparently when a registration window opens at midnight, the volume of students hitting the system all at once has overloaded the network or the database and caused connection problems.

A few other issues seemed less pervasive or were mentioned by only one interviewee. These included a problem with students not using their Catamount email accounts, questions about the accuracy of the "Not Enrolled" reports (some students had graduated or had been out a long time), a report of missing AP credit (not clear whether the disconnect was between the CollegeBoard and WCU or between Admissions and Registrar), and confusion about the major codes (curriculum strings) required for the change of major requests by email. We heard some questions about the waiver and substitution request and approval process, such as who should sign the form and when deans' office should be notified. Finally we heard one report of a problem with a catalog year when a student declares or changes a minor.

Without a doubt most of the interview time was spent listening to stories about the Registrar's Office's areas of strength and kudos for its staff. We have already highlighted the transformation of the office over the last five or so years into a customer-friendly operation. Staff never seems to be under pressure or stressed. They are always responsive and available. We also mentioned the many and varied ways that the office staff become involved in programs and projects across campus. The departmental section builders especially appreciate the scheduling workshops offered each term by the Registrar's Office. The academic departments like the departmental mailboxes that the Registrar set up for them. The Registrar is engaged with faculty and is visible, and this attitude is picked up and practiced by his staff.

We picked up on a high level of job satisfaction among the staff of the Registrar's Office. The office is a comfortable setting with good technology and tools for the staff to do their jobs. They seem to appreciate how their own tasks fit into the big picture of the university's mission. In short, they take pride in their work.

The technical team within the Registrar's Office received praise for their work with reporting. Their can-do attitude was mentioned, as was their ability to deliver on complex requests. Many departments rely heavily on reports out of the Registrar's Office. The Registrar website also received high marks for content and ease of navigation. More than one person mentioned the use of the language "credit earned elsewhere" instead of "transfer credits" as a great name for the useful course equivalency tool.

Summary of Recommendations

The Registrar's Office is well positioned to provide institutional leadership in several areas. The office can move from good to great or from great to exemplary in few ways. Some of the recommendations below would require the commitment of institutional resources beyond current levels. Please note that the numerical listing does not imply priority but is provided only for ease of reading and discussion.

- 1) Fix the "disconnect" among offices that deal with enrollment management and retention. – The topic of the University's reporting structure came up in many of the review team's conversations with faculty and staff. All parties we met agreed that the Registrar's Office should report to the Provost area. Most of the discussion regarded how the Registrar interacts with offices such as Admissions, Advising, and Financial Aid. Such offices have close working relationships with the Registrar's Office, but report to different vice chancellors. We heard reasons on both sides of whether or not these affiliate offices should report to the Provost. The overall impression is that the present reporting structure makes most sense. Nevertheless, the reports of interrupted information flow and lack of coordination among these offices indicate that common goals and inter-office communications could use some attention. Improving retention and graduation rates was mentioned as an example of a goal that needs to be coordinated throughout the timeline of prospect to applicant to admit to student.
- 2) Implement an electronic document imaging system. – This is obviously not a Registrar-only endeavor, although as custodian of the education records, the Registrar would be a primary player in the project. A document imaging system would allow the Registrar to meet the stated goal of accepting and sending PDF format transcripts. Imaging tied with workflow would address some of the problems described as a "disconnect" among the offices of Admissions, Registrar, and Advising, as these offices would be able to share incoming transcripts and other documents in real time. It is beyond the scope of this review to recommend an imaging strategy or vendor. However, there is a clear record of several similar universities that have seen beneficial returns on their imaging system investment.
- 3) Involve the Registrar in the curriculum approval process. – The Registrar's Office is now at the receiving end of any curriculum decisions or updates. We agree with the suggestions we heard that the Registrar should be involved earlier in the decision-making process. The Registrar has access to a store of enrollment and degree clearance information and is responsible for publishing the Catalog. The value added by Registrar involvement is not with the conceptualization of the course curriculum or degree programs, but with their implementation. The Registrar will have a sense of what related issues need to be considered and what the history is with a particular issue. He could provide comparison information about the credits required for particular degree programs. He could give feedback on which programs (existing or proposed) could likely be completed in four years. The Registrar also has some ideas on how the curriculum review process and forms could be simplified. The recommended involvement could be in the form of an *ex-officio* seat on the curriculum committee(s) or as a regular consultation point in the curriculum review and approval

process. The important point is that the Registrar should be readily available as a resource to the curriculum decision makers.

- 4) Fix the midnight registration bottleneck. – Students reported not being able to access the registration system during the time when the midnight window opens for registration. The review team is not sure what the cause of this problem is. It might be a database or a network issue; it might be a chronic or an intermittent problem. The Registrar should get additional feedback from students and share this feedback with Information Technology Services toward a goal of diagnosing and fixing the problem. In addition to whatever fixes are indicated and possible on the technical side, the Registrar should adjust the registration appointment assignment process to better regulate how many students are first accessing registration at any one time.
- 5) Provide tools to do seat and course demand prediction. – This is a recommendation that appeared in the Registrar’s Office’s self-study. Based on some of the ideas we heard in the interviews, we would agree that some development in this area would make sense. The degree audit is a useful tool for the students, advisors, and staff. It is a view of the courses one student has passed and what courses are still needed. If this information could be aggregated for particular programs or particular courses, better prediction of future course demand becomes possible. Analysis tools and professional services are available on the market to help with this work. The university should give serious consideration to making a commitment in this area. Better course demand prediction would lead to better use of faculty and classroom resources.
- 6) Implement additional Banner Student modules directly effecting student success, retention, and graduation rates. – SunGard (the Banner company) offers a product named Business Relationship Manager that would tie in well to the existing SIS. The reviewers are not familiar with this particular piece of software, so we cannot advocate for the SunGard product over any other. However, we do recommend that the university pay attention to this need. We expect performance-based budgeting to become the standard for UNC. We foresee pressure to improve retention as a means toward more efficient admission-to-degree progress. Better tools to assess our success are important.
- 7) Automate the entry of credits taken elsewhere. – This has been a Registrar priority for years and was also mentioned as a priority by non-registrar staff. The most labor-intensive part of the credit evaluation and posting process is the manual data entry of the courses appearing on incoming transcripts. This step is often the bottleneck and challenge to evaluating and posting all credit taken elsewhere before advising and registration takes place. This is not a problem unique to the WCU campus. In fact, the WCU Registrar has been uniquely active in initiating and encouraging this effort to be a joint project with UNC General Administration and the UNC campuses.
- 8) Plan a Registrar’s Office staff retreat. – As already mentioned, the office staff expressed their desire to have a retreat. This might be a full- or half-day event to include some team building

games or exercises, some training, and some brainstorming. The staff feels and the review team agrees that getting out of the office to a fresh location would be stimulating and worthwhile. This should be an annual event to enable the Registrar's team to re-charge and refresh each year.

- 9) Address the complaints about Resource25. – We heard several complaints from faculty and academic department offices that Resource25 was not producing a schedule that was acceptable to faculty. Some of the complaints were about a classroom assignment too far away from the instructor's office. Other complaints were that the assigned classroom did not have the required features or manipulatives. Conducting a fresh inventory of classroom facilities and classroom scheduling needs might be a good idea. The goal would be to better leverage Resource25 features such as partitions, facilities, and prescheduling to better meet the departments' needs. It would be good to also consider how transparent you want the algorithms within Resource25 to be. For example, what degree of involvement should departments have in setting preferences for attributes and partitions?
- 10) Strengthen Continuous Improvement. – The Registrar received kudos for always looking for ways to improve services and processes. Nevertheless, we did hear isolated complaints about relatively trivial issues related to Banner and information systems in general. It was not clear to the review team whether these issues had even reached the Registrar's Office or Information Technology Services, so this should not be considered as a lack of responsiveness by either department. However, it might be an indication of a need for a regular assessment to find and address even small problems. Examples of the issues in this regard are: the way incomplete grades show in the degree audit and the inappropriate change in catalog year following a change in minor.
- 11) Make staff responsibilities and direct contact information available. – Some time ago, the Registrar sent departments and affiliate offices a staff list with individual responsibilities and direct contact information. Some of that information is now out-of-date. We recommend that the registrar posts this staff information on their website. If that is not possible, updated staff information should go out to departments on a regular basis.
- 12) Reintroduce the 5th, 8th, and 13th week grading. – Most of the folks we discussed this early grading with agreed that it was a good idea. The complaints that we did hear were about the about the directive to do the additional work. This type of effort needs to be introduced in a way that faculty see the value the extra task and also in a way the makes it clear what authority is asking for that work. The support from the Provost and deans should be more apparent.
- 13) Enhance the self-service system. – The review team heard a few suggestions on ways to improve the self-service experience for faculty, advisors, and students. These enhancements would be projects for Information Technology, but would certainly need support and specifications from the Registrar's Office. An example of a feature that would help advisors is a dashboard that would aggregate information that is already in the SIS for a particular

student and present it on a summary page. Such a dashboard would highlight any academic or financial issues that need attention by the student and thus facilitate the advising session. An enhancement that would help students is to personalize the class search. Personalized class search results would highlight which courses would satisfy the various requirements that still must be completed by the student doing the search. We could also envision some “suggestive marketing,” such as “students who chose that course also chose” One of the instructors we interviewed suggested that presenting the class photos as a grid (several photos at a time) would be more efficient than the present link to see one photo at a time. Each of these examples would represent a significant amount of development work and testing by Information Technology and the Registrar’s Office. Nevertheless, they were suggested and seem like good ideas. It is also worthwhile to note that the ideas were not proposed as pie-in-the-sky wishes, but as serious suggestions that the interviewees thought Information Technology and the Registrar’s Office could partner to accomplish.

- 14) Restore the Catalog Specialist position. – If the additional responsibility of catalog development is to be housed in the Registrar’s Office, the position dedicated to this important function should be restored as soon as possible. In the meantime, and perhaps as a matter of course, it would be wise to continue efforts toward ensuring that all functions of the Registrar’s Office are sufficiently cross-trained as to ensure smooth operations in the event of unexpected changes in personnel.

Closing Comments

The review team was most gratified to hear of the high esteem in which the Registrar’s Office is held across the campus, which made our review a pleasant and agreeable task. It is obvious that the Registrar and his staff are doing a superior job in not only their day to day operations, but in the support of the university mission, departmental offices, faculty, and most importantly the students at WCU. Some recommendations are offered to improve certain processes, but overall, the staff and the systems that support their work are functioning superbly.

The team appreciates the thoughtful efforts that went into the preparation of the Registrar’s Self-Study, the highly efficient scheduling of the visit itself, the candid discussions with all participants, and the support of the administration for the assessment process. We appreciate the trust placed in us, and we offer this report in hopes of assisting the Registrar’s Office to build upon its already strong reputation in the service of the Western Carolina University community.

Submitted November 11, 2011

The review team: Gilbert C. Bowen (chair), William Frady, and Will Peebles