

SECTION IV

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Undergraduate Programs

4.1 General Requirements of the Educational Program

The CNU Mission Statement clearly states that the primary purpose of this institution is the education of its students. This is carried out by a faculty committed to teaching, research, and community service. CNU views the liberal arts as the foundation for quality instruction in the humanities, social and natural sciences, and business and the professional disciplines while providing its diverse student body with a comprehensive, globally-oriented education. Informed by the ancient and enduring academic values of the search for truth and the transmission of knowledge, as well as a concern with the students' overall well-being, CNU reaches out to a wide mix of students. These include commuter students of all ages and backgrounds and, since the fall of 1994, traditional-aged students living in the residence hall. CNU thus plays a special role in bringing the traditions and practices of the academic life within reach of a varied group of students who could not be served as well by a school whose profile is that of the traditional residential college (Mission Statement; 1994-95 University Catalog, 6). Based upon the evaluation of the institution done for this Self-Study, it is evident that a competent faculty, adequate library/learning resources, appropriate computer resources, instructional materials and equipment, and physical facilities are provided to meet this purpose. By means of evaluation of student progress, of the teaching of individual courses, of the overall performance of each faculty member, and of departments and their programs, all on a regular basis, student achievement and the quality of programs are monitored and refined or enhanced as needed.

Of the 50 percent of undergraduates who responded to the Undergraduate Student Survey,

80 percent agreed that the stated purpose of CNU accurately reflects the mission of the University (UgSv, Question 7; the responses “strongly agree” and “agree” have been combined to produce this and most of the following percentages). Seventy percent agreed that the efforts of CNU to achieve this purpose are conscientious (UgSv, Question 8). Nearly the same percentage of students (70 percent) agreed that undergraduate curricular requirements are consistent with the mission of CNU (UgSv, Question 21).

4.2.1 Undergraduate Admission

The general admission policies of CNU are determined by the Board of Visitors upon recommendation of the president as specified in the University Handbook. The size and character of the student body are aspects of the admission policies that are determined by the Board, as evident in the “Freshman Admission Requirements” and “Transfer (Classified) Admission Requirements” sections of the University Catalog. The implementation of specific admission policies is the responsibility of the Admissions Committee, which is composed of seven members of the instructional faculty and the director of admissions. This committee reports to the Faculty Senate and instructional faculty as a whole (Handbook). It is the responsibility of the Office of Admissions to administer the admission policies of the University. These responsibilities are published annually in the University Catalog.

Because the educational purpose of CNU is to develop “intellectual, ethical, spiritual, and physical attributes” and to prepare graduates “to pursue lives with meaning and purpose and to become responsible and contributing members of society” (Mission Statement; University Catalog), the institution’s admission policies are structured to identify students with strong academic preparation while allowing for students with some deficiencies. This is clear from the admission requirements presented in the University Catalog. There are both qualitative and quantitative requirements outlined here: students are expected to have been graduated from an accredited secondary school or its equivalent and to have completed four units of English, three

units in the social sciences, three units in mathematics (Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry), three units in science, and either three units in one foreign language or two years each of two foreign languages; to have earned a “C” average; to rank in the upper half of their graduating class; and to have acceptable SAT scores (400 verbal and 400 math, to be raised to 480 verbal and 430 math beginning Fall 1995) (1994-95 Catalog, 26-31). Students not meeting all of these requirements may be admitted with limitations. When the math SAT score is deficient, a proficiency test is given in math for placement of students in either a remedial course taught by Thomas Nelson Community College or a college-level course. Student with a deficient English SAT score are placed in special sections of ENGL 101(College Writing I), which are taught to enhance these students’ writing skills and which supply academic counseling. Students with very low SAT scores can be admitted if an admissions officer judges them to have the potential to succeed academically. Such students will be restricted to a fixed curriculum in their first semester consisting of COLL 101: The College Experience, ENGL 101: College Writing I, ENGL 180: Analytical and Speed Reading, and PHIL 101: Critical Thinking I. Continuance is based upon successful completion of these courses. Special provisions are also made for early admission without secondary school graduation.

The Undergraduate Admissions Committee recommends to the instructional faculty policies for undergraduate admissions. Utilizing information from recent admissions decisions and in consultation with the Office of Admissions, regular evaluation of admission policies is part of this committee’s purpose (University Handbook, IV.8). This is important given the discretion allowed to admission officers in their evaluation of applications as specified in the admission policies (Catalog, 26-27). For the fall of 1994 the following statistics profile the student admitted and the application of the admission policies by the Office of Admissions:

Entering freshman who

- a. had SAT verbal>400 30%
- had SAT math>400

	had high school GPA>2.0	
	ranked in top half of graduating class	
b.	had high school GPA>2.0	70%
	ranked in top half of graduating class	
c.	had high school GPA>2.0	90%
d.	ranked in top half of graduating class	74%
e.	had SAT verbal>400	50%
f.	had SAT math>400	67%

While stated policies are followed, given the mission of the University and the importance of having students prepared as they begin their college programs, regular evaluation of admission policies is essential to ensure that students continue to have adequate preparation.

Overall, there seems to be a consensus that the undergraduate admissions process at CNU works well and that recruiting activities and materials accurately and truthfully portray the institution. In a survey of alumni, 87 percent agreed that CNU admission policies were clearly stated; only 6 percent disagreed. Seventy-six percent agreed that CNU admission policies are appropriate to its mission; 8 percent disagreed. Eighty-seven percent of the faculty surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed that CNU admission policies are clearly stated, published, and available; 5 percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Seventy-nine percent of the faculty responding either agreed or strongly agreed that admission policies are appropriate to the mission of CNU, while 21 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed (AlSv, Question 29; FcSv, Questions 30, 31).

Students are normally expected to have graduated from an accredited secondary school, but individuals from institutions with non-college-preparatory curricula and individuals with a GED can be admitted if they meet all other criteria for admission. Such individuals will be evaluated using all available information on secondary school work and GED scores to determine

if they have achieved a grade of “C” or better in academic subjects. Such an approach relies on information based on national standards that permit admission of students with experiences appropriate for consideration.

The documentation necessary and the application deadlines for regular freshman admission are clearly stated in the University Catalog (pp. 22-27) and each issue of Registration News, as are documentation and deadlines for early admission (pp. 27-28) and transfer students (pp 28-30).

Transfer student policy is defined and published in the Catalog (pp. 28-31). Transfer applicants must submit a secondary school transcript or a GED certificate and college transcripts in addition to the application for admission. Official transcripts from all colleges previously attended must be submitted. Students must be in good academic standing at the last college or university attended and must present a cumulative GPA of 2.00 (“C”). College-Level Examination Program (CLEP), Advance Placement (AP), and departmental challenge examinations, as well as acceptance of credit from other institutions, are used to award advanced standing. Degree seeking transfer students must be eligible to return to their most recently attended institution in order to be admitted to CNU. In a survey of alumni, 84 percent of those to whom the question applied indicated that they found accurate information about CNU requirements prior to transferring (AIsv, Question 36).

The awarding of credits based on advanced placement or other examinations or from non-collegiate or professional institutions follows national standards as issued by programs such as the College Entrance Examination Board, CLEP, and the American Council on Education. A table listing qualifying scores to earn CNU credit for Advanced Placement is printed in the University Catalog (p.32). A brochure regarding CLEP is distributed through the Office of Career and Counseling Services (University Catalog, p. 18). This brochure lists the general and subject CLEP examinations for which CNU credit may be given, the corresponding courses and

the amount of credit granted, the required CLEP scores, and other matters of CLEP policy. As stated in the University Catalog, transfer credits are awarded for courses “similar in aims and purposes to those of Christopher Newport University” and in a manner that “approximates the curricular structure for the appropriate baccalaureate degree at CNU” (pp. 29-30). As stated earlier, admission policies are products of the Undergraduate Admissions Committee that have been approved by the administration and are administered by the Office of Admissions. The assessment and awarding of transfer credits are carried out by the Office of Admissions in accordance with these policies and, when necessary, in consultation with the appropriate departments.

Credit is not awarded directly for experiential learning. However, if such learning can be validated by way of a standardized assessment tool, e.g., CLEP, or a departmental challenge examination, appropriate academic credit will be awarded.

Transfer students are informed of the amount of transferable credit through a written evaluation form. This form specifies the total amount of credit transferred as well as the specific CNU courses for which credit is allowed. The form is signed by the evaluating officer of the Admissions Office. This form usually takes about a month to process from the time the Admissions Office receives all pertinent documentation. In a survey of alumni, 90 percent indicated that transcript evaluation and transfer of credits were handled fairly, and 88 percent agreed that transcript evaluation and transfer of credits were handled efficiently. The corresponding figures for faculty are 81 percent efficiently and 96 percent fairly (AISv, Questions 38, 39; FcSv, Questions 26, 37).

The University Catalog contains the guidelines for acceptance of credits for transfer students (p. 29). When not from a degree-granting institution accredited by a postsecondary regional accrediting body, credits are evaluated using the standards of the World Education Service, the American Council of Education, and other collegiate evaluating services. Where

such standards are not appropriate, the Office of Admissions uses internally generated guidelines based upon the curriculum and requirements of CNU degrees. In all cases, the Admissions Office makes the final evaluation of transfer credits. For students converting from a non-degree program to a degree program, the requirements for regular degree admission are used. No transfer of “block” credit is allowed.

Once admitted, a student is expected to make reasonable academic progress. Minimum standards for continuance are stated in the University Catalog (pp. 42-44) and are on a sliding scale based upon the number of credit hours attempted. These standards range from a 1.50 for students with 15-29 credit hours to a 2.00 for students with 90 or more credit hours. Students with grade point averages below these values are eligible for probation or suspension depending on their actual GPA. Dismissal is automatic for students receiving a third academic suspension.

Readmission of suspended or dismissed students is handled by the Academic Status Committee following the procedures given in the University Catalog.

4.2.2 Undergraduate completion Requirements

As detailed in the 1995-96 University Catalog, Christopher Newport currently offers 7 different undergraduate degrees, which are the Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), Bachelor of Science (B.S.), Bachelor of Science in Accounting (B.S.A.), Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (B.S.B.A.), Bachelor of Music (B.M.), Bachelor of Science in Governmental Administration (B.S.G.A.), Bachelor of Science in Nursing (B.S.N.), and Bachelor of Science in Information Science (B.S.I.S.). There are 24 majors and 46 concentrations within these degrees--a total of 75 degree programs available at CNU.

In addition to stating the general education requirements for degree completion, the Catalog provides a specific list of the courses and the sequence of these courses that must be taken in order to satisfy the criteria for each major and concentration. Each major and

concentration requires an adequate number of upper level courses with appropriate prerequisites, the precise number varying according to discipline. The courses numbered 100 through 299 contain elementary or introductory level material. Upper level courses numbered 300 through 499 assume either previous course work or special competence in the field. According to a recent survey of undergraduate students, most students (82 percent) think the requirements for degree completion are clearly stated in the University Catalog (UgSv, Question 18).

All students must satisfy the general education requirements, which, beginning in the 1995-96 academic year, consist of two semesters in freshman writing, one course in mathematics, either speech or critical thinking, two semesters in world history, two semesters in natural science with one semester of laboratory, two semesters of humanities, two semesters of social sciences, two semesters of a foreign language, and either health or an activities course. This results in a general education requirement of at least 37 semester hours as the foreign language requirement can be satisfied without course work, by satisfactory scores on a CNU placement test, the appropriate CLEP test, or the appropriate AP test. To complete the freshman writing requirement students receive a “C-” or better in these courses. Though there is no specific component of the general education requirement that addresses computer skills, these skills are incorporated either directly, as in accounting or mathematics (with at least one computer science course being part of the required curriculum), or indirectly (as in the incorporation of computers in courses required in a major, e.g., PSYC 300 and SOCL 391-392). All students must successfully complete at least one course in mathematics chosen from a set of courses that develop fundamental math skills. Oral communication competence is assured for some students in large part by the addition of a speech course within the general education requirements, especially for students seeking professional degrees. For many students, speech is not just a part of general education but part of the major, as in seminar courses and requirements of upper-level courses in the major. The undergraduate student survey referred to above indicates that the majority of students believe CNU develops and requires proficiency in writing (84 percent), oral communication (78 percent), and mathematics (84 percent). Overwhelmingly, CNU alumni believe that they were graduated with competent reading (99 percent), writing (97

percent), oral communication (96 percent), and mathematical skills (95 percent), and they are better citizens as a result of their CNU education (86 percent) (UgSv, Questions 28-30; AlSv, Questions 17, 19-22).

Though the majority of alumni and current students felt they are served well by the curriculum, it is possible for individuals to graduate without any instruction in or assessment of computer skills and oral communication skills.

RECOMMENDATION: Provisions must be made to ensure that all students achieve basic competence in oral communication and the use of computers.

A Major is defined as a student's chosen field of study. The major may fall within a single department of instruction or may overlap several departments. In the latter case, the major is described as interdisciplinary. Major requirements must consist of a minimum of 30 and a maximum of 42 credit hours. A concentration is a subdivision of the student's major and must consist of a minimum of 12 credit hours focused within the major. There may be one or more emphases within a concentration. It is evident from the requirements for CNU majors and concentrations that an adequate number of hours in courses above the elementary level is required. This is done by way of specific 300, and 400-level courses being required in the curriculum of the major, (e.g., the B.A. in English,) or by way of a specific number of credits at the 300-400 level chosen by the student from all or a subset of such courses in the major, (e.g., the B.S. in Biology).

For degree completion, at least 25 percent of semester credit hours must be earned through instruction by the institution awarding the degree. Christopher Newport requires that 30 hours of the last 36 credit hours, including the last 12 credit hours within the major field, be taken at Christopher Newport University.

4.2.3 Undergraduate Curriculum

The curricular offerings are directly related and appropriate to the purposes and goals of the University. Through teaching, research (professional development), and service, the University faculty dedicate themselves to “the discovery, interpretation, dissemination and application of knowledge” to the benefit of the local community, the Commonwealth, the nation, and the world (Mission Statement). In order to support this mission of the University, major requirements and electives build on the liberal arts orientation of the general education courses. This solid grounding in verbal and quantitative skills, combined with required course work in the liberal arts, enables CNU undergraduate students “to pursue studies in the humanities, in the natural and social sciences, and in business and the professional disciplines” (Mission Statement). All members of the Board of Visitors believe that the University’s educational programs are designed to achieve the purpose of the University (BvSv, Question 5). The faculty survey indicates that 65.5 percent of the faculty agree that the curricular requirements for graduation are consistent with the institutional mission; 23.6 percent disagree (FcSv, Question 38).

Courses range from the 100, or, introductory level, which require no prior knowledge of the subject or previous course work, to the 400 level, which are highly specialized and are usually taken by majors in that discipline. This range allows students of varied backgrounds and levels of preparation to pursue degrees in particular majors while taking courses outside of these majors. Each course may be offered every semester to every fourth semester depending on the role the course plays in the curriculum, both general education and major the demand for the course and the resources available to support the course (personnel, space, and materials, such as equipment and supplies in the sciences).

The University Handbook clearly defines the roles of individual faculty, departments, dean, the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UCC), the Faculty Senate, the administration, and the Board of Visitors in the process of curriculum formation, review, and revision. Through a clearly defined process, the University establishes, reviews, and evaluates the curriculum on a

regular basis. Central to this process are the instructional faculty and Undergraduate Curriculum committee (University Handbook, V.1). The committee consists of eight faculty members, one student representative, the dean for academic support services, the director of student records, and the provost. The committee reviews the curriculum and writes reports to the Faculty Senate or the provost to recommend changes in the curriculum, priorities for the development of the curriculum, and all matters concerning the adoption and determination of undergraduate degree programs (University Handbook IV.7-8). The administration and the Board of Visitors are also responsible for development of academic programs. Proposed changes in curriculum are usually initiated at the department level, though they may be initiated at any level, and then forwarded to different levels for review: dean, Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, Faculty Senate, and provost. The provost reviews the proposed changes and makes recommendations to the president for a decision. In the event of an affirmative decision by the president, the changes are incorporated into the next six-year curricular plan, which is submitted to the Board of Visitors (University Handbook, V.2-V.3). Although the Board of Visitors has the authority to approve any new curricular plan, the University can finally proceed only after necessary review and approval by the commonwealth.

During the spring of 1994, the UCC requested that the provost appoint an *ad hoc* task force to review and revise the general education curriculum. This task force reported its recommendations to the UCC at the beginning of the 1994-95 academic year. Following its deliberations, the UCC sent its recommendations to the Faculty Senate in November of 1994. The Faculty Senate made its recommendations to the provost and president during March 1995. The president accepted some of the recommendations of the Faculty Senate but not all of them. This caused considerable discussion and debate concerning the actual role each constituent part of the University should play in the curriculum, especially regarding the general education curriculum. On April 10, 1995, the University faculty met and overwhelmingly passed the following resolution:

Notwithstanding the statutory authority of the President and the Board of Visitors, the Faculty views with alarm the President's overriding the will of the Faculty in a curricular matter of central importance to the University, which is a violation of academic tradition and of the spirit of collegiality which ought to exist in a university. Such actions are contrary to the expectations of major accrediting and professional organizations.

RECOMMENDATION: Curricular changes recommended by the faculty should be accepted by the president, except under extreme, unusual, and extraordinary circumstances.

Recent extensive discussion and debate among the faculty regarding general education has raised questions concerning the linkage among goals, curriculum, and assessment. The goals of general education are needed as a broad guide to the curriculum but should be specific enough to be assessable. A lack of linkage appears most problematic with regard to the goal of developing "a global perspective of the world's history, cultures, and societies." As presently constructed, the new general education curriculum allows students to complete requirements without addressing this goal except for a sequence of world history. Similarly, students could complete general education requirements without addressing the goal of developing "an understanding of the human condition and the significance of the individual." Without clear linkage between goals and curriculum assessment is more difficult.

RECOMMENDATION: The general education curriculum should be tightly linked to its goals in such a way that allows for meaningful assessment.

The University has always maintained a focus on quality classroom instruction provided by an experienced faculty. With a student-to-faculty ratio of 19-to-1 (with a goal of 18-to-1 in the Restructuring Plan), teachers frequently work individually with students. Special programs

include an adequate amount of advanced course work in each subject field. In each curricular area at least one full-time faculty member with appropriate credentials has a primary teaching assignment. The 1994-95 University Catalog lists all full-time faculty in each department (pp. 69-262) and the directory in the Catalog (pp. 277-88) lists the academic degrees of those faculty. The University requires official transcripts of all persons applying for academic positions and keeps those and the curricula vitae of all currently employed faculty on file in the Office of the Provost. In accordance with the University's curricular and departments' programs, qualified adjunct instructors also make their contributions to undergraduate teaching.

The Board of Visitors exercises ultimate local authority for the number and types of degrees offered, the number and nature of departments through which the curriculum is administered, and the extent to which the University offers graduate work and off-campus programs. The State Council for Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV) has regulatory authority. The Board delegates this authority to the president, who in turn delegates various responsibilities to the faculty and its Undergraduate Curriculum committee (University Handbook, III.1).

Although the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee is charged with recommending changes in the undergraduate program (University Handbook, V.1), administrative officers also initiate new programs. The president may appoint a special committee to work with the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee for the establishment of new programs. The faculty and the Board of Visitors are consulted about the development of programs when deemed appropriate by the chief administrative officers.

While the established process for curriculum change has ensured that there be a rationale for developing new courses and programs, institutional needs and resources have not always been taken into account prior to such changes. Especially in this period of restructuring and fiscal restraint, there should be careful assessment of the needs of the institutional and of the adequacy

of resources prior to curriculum revision.

RECOMMENDATION: New academic programs should be undertaken only after an assessment of needs and a review of financial resources by the president of the University in consultation with the provost, the deans, and the executive vice president.

Undergraduate academic policies, procedures, and standards are evaluated by the Undergraduate Academic Program Review Committee (PRC) on an ongoing basis. The PRC is made up of six faculty members and the director of the assessment and evaluation. Every six years, the departments complete their self-studies and submit their reports to the PRC. The PRC meets almost every week during the academic year. It assesses each department's ability to handle student curricular needs, to ensure quality of programs, and to support the University's mission and goals. The PRC's reviews also provide a thorough evaluation and assessment of departmental courses. The PRC's detailed review reports are submitted to the provost. The provost reviews these reports and forwards them with his comments and recommendations (Action Agendas) to each department and related dean for improvement of teaching effectiveness, scholarship, and service. The departments respond to areas identified as needing improvement and report changes made to address these needs to their respective deans. The deans report the changes to the provost and to the director of assessment, who prepares a biennial report to the State Council of Higher Education. These reports are made available to the Budget Advisory Committee for University Planning (BACUP) and the Executive Planning Council (EPC) for use in planning and evaluation. The University's program review process has received praise for SCHEV for its comprehensiveness and effectiveness. Also, the careful assessment of available financial resources and physical facilities avoids the unwarranted proliferation of course offerings and degree programs. As part of the University's Restructuring Plan, an even more focused look at duplication of courses will be undertaken by the UCC during the 1995-96 academic year.

There is a perception among the faculty that graduate programs are draining resources

from undergraduate programs (FcSv, Question 148). This is an opinion that is easy to embrace when one finds graduate courses being taught with five or fewer students while undergraduate courses are canceled with 5-12 students. Also, the granting of three hours of release time per year to graduate faculty often has the effect of eliminating undergraduate courses for lack of a qualified instructor.

RECOMMENDATION: A study should be made to examine the impact of the graduate programs on the undergraduate programs.

The University's curricula have been designed in such a way that the students planning to lay academic groundwork here as a basis for more specialized work at other institutions can normally transfer their credits. In addition, as part of the Virginia system of higher education, the University is in full compliance with the "Virginia State Policy on Transfer." which requires public colleges and universities within Virginia to accept transfer credit for courses taken at other Virginia universities or community colleges. The University's Office of Admissions carefully reviews all application materials to weigh grades, test scores, and professional or military experience and informs transfer applicants and their advisors of its decision.

CNU has no programmatic partnerships with secondary schools. Secondary school students who take CNU courses do so in the same manner as regular CNU students and receive the same course and credit as these students.

4.2.4 Undergraduate Instruction

CNU's attention to the values expressed in its Mission Statement is reflected in its general requirements for graduation, which require a foundation of basic courses distributed across the spectrum of academic disciplines, with a particularly strong emphasis upon liberal studies (32-34 semester hours) (Catalog, 48-49). The methods used by the instructional staff to pass on these values are diverse, including lectures, discussions, labs, field trips, tutorials, senior

research projects, internships, and programs for study abroad. Innovative teaching methods instituted at CNU in recent years include the Writing Center and CNU ONLINE, a computer-based method of offering courses that is leading CNU rapidly into the virtual, interactive classroom. The recently inaugurated London Seminar provides an opportunity for faculty from different fields to make use of London as a physical resource in a summer course in their discipline. Examples of areas in which creative teaching at CNU has received outside funding, include critical thinking, technology in the classroom, and the development of an integrated social sciences course. These varied modes of instruction provide ample learning opportunity for CNU students. Of the 23 percent of alumni who responded to a survey, 70 percent agree that CNU's instructional techniques and policies are in accord with CNU purposes (AISv, Question 11).

CNU's primary means of evaluating instruction is the Instruction Evaluation Survey (IES). Each semester faculty are required to administer the IES to those class sections designated by the provost. Tenured faculty, with approval of the appropriate dean and upon application to the provost, may apply for a waiver of summer and fall term courses (University Handbook, May 1994, VII 30). The result is that nontenured faculty are evaluated in all courses taught while tenured faculty may elect to have only their spring semester courses evaluated.

In response to item 16 on the IES, "Course Was Valuable", lower-level courses over the past four years yielded an average of 3.84 out of a maximum of 5.00. (A summary of IES responses is available from the Office of the Provost.) In response to the same question, upper-level courses over the same period yielded an average of 4.37. The overall average for all courses taught over the past four years is 4.11. The overall average suggests that students highly value their instruction at CNU. However, students are more challenged by upper-level teaching at CNU. This is likely due to the fact that many of these upper-level courses are in the major field of the students. Also, since these courses are more directly related to their career objectives, they may value these courses more than those that seem distant from their

occupational interests. Furthermore, students at this point in their academic careers are more mature and academically experienced and thus generally better able to fairly evaluate the value of a course.

One way that faculty address improvement in their instruction is through a rigorous process of self-evaluation (each step of the evaluative process is detailed in the University Handbook, VI 40-54). Every year all probationary faculty must evaluate and document their performance during the past year. Prior to 1995-96, full professors could petition for a waiver of evaluation for up to eight consecutive years, while other tenured faculty may petition for up to four consecutive years, (University Handbook, VII 42). Beginning in 1995-96, all faculty will be evaluated annually. A major focus of self-evaluation is the area of teaching. In order to help them in evaluating their teaching, faculty members are provided with copies of all IES results and comments from the preceding year. They are also provided with a summary of their IES performance over the three preceding years. Faculty have an opportunity in their Annual Activities Report (Eval-6) to address areas needing improvement as noted by students. The IES results form part of the dossier that is used to make determinations for retention and salary increases. Thus, peer committees, deans, the provost, and the president have an ample opportunity to review the IES's and the individual instructor's responses to them. In addition, in some departments (Biology, for example), the chairman visits classes and evaluates the performance of members of the departments.

Since teaching is of "paramount importance" at CNU, and "poor teaching cannot be redeemed by superiority" in professional development and service (University Handbook, VII 41), this rigorous process of evaluation ensures that only faculty performing their duties in a satisfactory manner are retained, promoted, or given salary increases. Though there is heavy reliance on the IES to evaluate teaching, faculty question the validity of this instrument. Dissatisfaction with the IES shows up in the Faculty Survey. Only 48 percent of the faculty think that the IES "employs clearly defined, objective, and appropriate criteria for faculty

evaluation” (FcSv, Question 119). Even fewer faculty (43 percent) believe that the results of the IES “help improve teaching effectiveness” (FcSv, Question 120). Many faculty suspect that this method of evaluation measures factors other than academic issues (such as the popularity and gender of the instructor and the perceived degree of rigor of the course), and are aware that there are other means available for evaluating teaching. Students are almost as dubious of the value of the IES, since only 56 percent agree that it is “valid way to evaluate instruction” (UgSv, Question 34).

RECOMMENDATION: The University should implement means of evaluating instruction in addition to the IES.

As reflected in students’ responses to Question 3 on IES forms over the last five years, students appear satisfied that they are receiving sufficient information about the goals and requirements of each course, the nature of the source content, and the methods of evaluation that will be used by the instructor. This information is summarized for students on syllabi, which faculty are required to provide for students at the beginning of each course (University Handbook, V 17).

Students agree very strongly that courses are consistent with their catalog descriptions (4.67 out of 5.00). Eighty-three percent of students agree that they understand the goals and requirements of their courses (UgSv, Question 19). Seventy-three percent agree that the course offerings in their major department are described accurately in the CNU catalog (UgSv, Question 22; the question of courses other than those in their major fields is not addressed in the survey). Seventy-eight percent agree that they understand how instructors evaluate their work. Eighty percent agree that “instructors evaluate student performance by a variety of methods (UgSv, Question 32).

Faculty members have the primary responsibility for understanding the requirements,

contents, and evaluative methods of the courses that they and their departments teach. There is extra-departmental oversight, however, insofar as proposals for new courses must be recommended by the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee and approved by the provost (University Handbook, V 3-4). Eighty-eight percent of the faculty think that their students understand the goals and requirements of their courses (FcSv, Question 35). The undergraduate survey showed that 78 percent understood that way instructors evaluate their work, with only 19 percent indicating they did not understand how they were evaluated (UgSv, Question 31). As part of the regular evaluation of departments and their programs, the Program Review Committee (PRC) considers the appropriateness of the methods of instruction to the goals of the courses and the background and preparation of the intended student audience.

As indicated above, experimentation in instructional methodology has occurred across the campus in the past and continues. This experimentation has received support on the state level from the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia, and on the federal level from the National Science Foundation (NSF's) Statewide Systemic Initiative for the Reform of Math & Science Instruction. Evaluation of such experimentation has been a component of each such project, ranging from locally produced assessment surveys and tests to nationally normed assessment examinations. A good example of such experimentation is CNU ONLINE, which is discussed in detail in section 4.5.

The faculty use a variety of techniques to evaluate student performance, including papers, classroom performances, exhibitions, essay exams, multiple-choice exams, group projects (presented both online and in class), classroom reports, computer simulations, computer-generated laboratory experiments, and projects. Faculty also assess student participation in class discussions and projects. Mid-semester grades are required of all first-year and nursing students. Final examinations are required in courses that fulfill a general education requirement. While final exams in other lower-level courses are preferred, they are not required.

The giving of final examinations in upper-level courses is at the discretion of the instructor and departments (University Handbook, V 18). Sixty-three percent of students agree that CNU

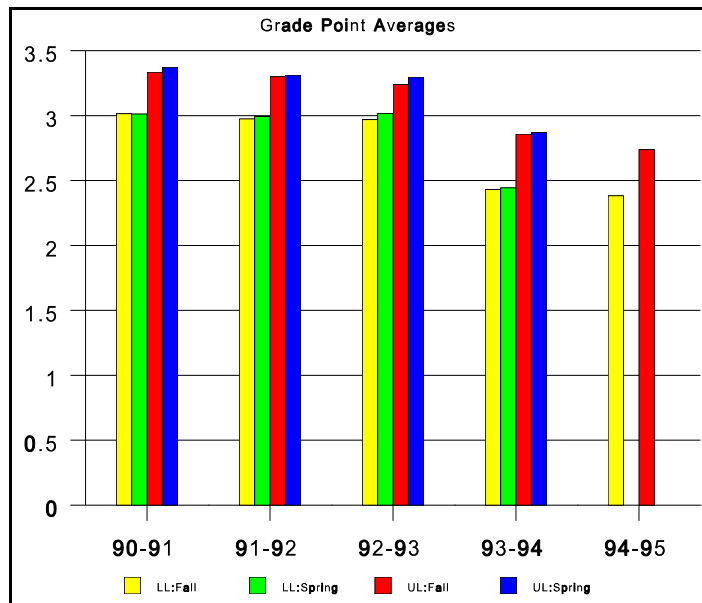
encourages variety in instructional technique, and 90 percent agree instructors evaluate their performance by a variety of methods (UgSv, Questions 23, 32). Sixty-five percent of faculty agree that CNU encourages variety in instructional technique (FcSv, Question 40).

The methods of evaluating student work reveal a concern for the quality and levels of performance. The letter system (A-F) is used for grading course work. This system is translated into the numerical system (4.0-0.0). In order to further discriminate between levels of performance between students, the University instituted in Fall 1993 the use of the plus/minus system (excepting A+). Seniors may take up to two elective courses from outside their major and exclusive of general education requirements on a Pass/Fail basis. No student may take more than three Pass/Fail courses. Students whose GPA is 3.50 or above and have not received an incomplete grade or grade below "C" are placed on the Dean's Academic Honor List for the next semester (Catalog, 39-41). Seventy-six percent of students agree the methods of instruction used at CNU are appropriate to their capabilities (UgSv, Question 33). Grading policies are clearly stated in the University Catalog (39-42). One way in which the University ensures that its grading policies and the grading policies of individual instructors are fair and accurate is through the detailed process whereby a student may challenge a grade (University Handbook, V4-V7). The distribution of grades over the past five years at CNU indicates that the average grade is in the "B" range.

Examination and grading policies are spelled out in the Catalog (pp. 39-40) with "plus/minus" optional with the professor. An examination of grade point averages presented in the following graph shows an increased achievement in the upper level courses. The pattern is consistent. The overall drop in grade point averages beginning in academic year 1993-94 corresponds to the implementation of a plus/minus system with no A+. Overall, grades tend to appear high due to a liberal withdrawal policy. Withdrawals averaged between 5.8 percent and 9.2 percent of total enrollment for the last eight years. Students are allowed to withdraw until the midterm and receive a "W" regardless of their classroom achievement. After that time they

can only get a passing at the from the

To instructional University uses including the Committee integral to all meticulously



“W” if they are time of withdrawal course.

evaluate the program, the various techniques, Program Review (PRC), that are programs. The PRC evaluates every

program in the University. The PRC requires programs to demonstrate an effective relationship between curricular contents and current practices in fields of specialization. The functioning of the PRC in program evaluation has been used as a model by SCHEV.

Chart 4.1.A

When appropriate, outside accrediting standards are followed, e.g., the National League of Nurses and the American Nurses Association for nursing, the National Association of Schools of Music for music, and the American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business for business programs. Also where outside agencies have established minimal standards, appropriate programs are evaluated against these minima, e.g., AICPA standards for sitting for the CPA Examination.

Exit interviews, portfolios, locally produced comprehensive exams, and outside consultants are used to evaluate instructional programs. This information is part of the report submitted to the PRC for program evaluation. Graduates are also surveyed, and many programs track their students throughout their careers, particularly noting certification completion where applicable, e.g., CPA certification for accounting graduates.

CNU has recently begun online instruction, which allows students to take courses from CNU while physically being almost anywhere in the world. While this program is subject to all the usual controls and reviews, the University has developed a special assessment plan for CNU

ONLINE, as discussed in section 4.5. CNU has regularly offered summer courses in abbreviated periods of time--a three-week session in May ("Term 2"), four-and-a-half week sessions in June and July ("Terms 3 and 5"), and a nine-week session in June and July ("Term 4"). These courses require the same number of class hours as full-semester offerings, and as syllabi confirm, cover equivalent material. In the 1995-96 academic year, some courses (example: Spanish 101 and 102) will be taught in subsemesters (half semesters), allowing a full year's courses to be taken in a semester. Designed to increase student scheduling options, these courses require the same number of class hours as full-semester offerings by doubling the length of meetings. The material covered in the subsemester courses is also equivalent, as syllabi demonstrate (and faculty emphasize to enrollees). The University plans a careful comparative analysis of the new courses during and after the 1995-96 year.

As has been stated previously, the overwhelming opinion among students, graduates, faculty, and administration is that CNU is successful in achieving its stated mission of educating students. It does so because of the academic soundness of its programs and the professional activities of its faculty.

Since CNU has no strictly professional, vocational, or technical programs, all learning experiences for which credit is awarded are under the direct control and supervision of this institution.

As part of the program review process, the connection between curricular content and current practices in the field of specialization is evaluated. This is also of concern in the evaluation of curricular matters by the UCC. For programs that are accredited there are very specific criteria dealing with this relationship that must be addressed to remain in good standing. In addition, a number of departments utilize advisory boards, (e.g., the Physics and Computer Science Department), in order to obtain feedback on their programs that is both current and appropriate to the community being served.

Program length, credit hours, and tuition and fees are ultimately under the control of the Commonwealth through SCHEV. Under guidelines provided by SCHEV, total program length and tuition and fees are set by the Board of Visitors. Tuition and fees can change from year to year depending on state authorizations and the actions of the Board of Visitors. Program length is presently set at 120 credit hours for completion of most CNU degree programs. The number of credits for each course depends upon standard values of one credit hour of each hour of lecture per week of the semester and one credit for each 3-4 hours of laboratory per week. All of these practices conform to those around the state and country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Provision must be made to ensure that all students achieve basic competence in oral communication and the use of computers.
2. Curricular changes recommended by the faculty should be accepted by the president, except under extreme, unusual, and extraordinary circumstances.
3. The general education curriculum should be tightly linked to its goals in such a way that allows for meaningful assessment.
4. New academic programs should be undertaken only after an assessment of needs and a review of financial resources by the president of the University in consultation with the provost, the deans, and the executive vice president.
5. A study should be made to examine the impact of the graduate programs on the undergraduate programs.
6. The University should implement means of evaluating instruction in addition to the IES.

SOURCES CITED

1. 1993 Assessment to Report to the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (Vol. 1)
2. Christopher Newport University Catalog 1994-95, 1995-96
3. Christopher Newport University Handbook 1994-95
4. Data from Institutional Research on Class Size, Grade Point Average, Grade Distribution and Admission Percentages
5. Personal Communication with Admission Office, Office of Continuing Education and Special Programs, and members of the Faculty Senate and Undergraduate Curriculum Committee