



# **Institutional Self-Study**

## **September 2006**

**Prepared for The Commission on  
Institutions of Higher Education**

**NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF  
SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES, INC.**

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## Institutional Characteristics

**Date:** September 2006

1. Corporate name of institution:  
**Board for State Academic Awards/Charter Oak State College**
2. Address (city, state, zip code): **55 Paul J. Manafort Drive, New Britain, CT 06053-2150**  
Phone: **(860) 832-3800** URL of institutional webpage: [www.charteroak.edu](http://www.charteroak.edu)
3. Date institution was chartered or authorized: **June, 1973**
4. Date institution enrolled first students in degree programs: **September, 1974**
5. Date institution awarded first degrees:  
**Associate in Arts: December, 1974; Bachelor of Arts: March, 1977**
6. Type of control: (check)

<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> State	<input type="checkbox"/> Independent, not-for-profit
<input type="checkbox"/> City	<input type="checkbox"/> Religious Group (Name of Church)
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Proprietary
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
7. By what agency is the institution legally authorized to provide a program of education beyond high school, and what degrees is it authorized to grant?  
**Connecticut State Legislature and Department of Higher Education**  
(Attach a copy of the by-laws, enabling legislation, and/or other appropriate documentation to establish the legal authority of the institution to award degrees in accordance with applicable requirements.)
8. **Level of postsecondary offering** (check all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> Less than one year of work	<input type="checkbox"/> First professional degree
<input type="checkbox"/> At least one but less than two years of work	<input type="checkbox"/> Master's and/or work beyond the first professional degree
<input type="checkbox"/> Diploma or certificate programs of at least two but less than four years	<input type="checkbox"/> Work beyond the master's level but not at the doctoral level (e.g., Specialist in Education)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Associate degree granting program of at least two years	<input type="checkbox"/> A doctor of philosophy or equivalent degree
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Four or five-year baccalaureate degree-granting program	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
9. **Type of undergraduate programs** (check all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/> Occupational training at the crafts/clerical level (certificate or diploma)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Liberal arts and general
<input type="checkbox"/> Occupational training at the technical or semi-professional level (degree)	<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher preparatory
<input type="checkbox"/> Two-year programs designed for full transfer to a baccalaureate degree	<input type="checkbox"/> Professional
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

10. **The calendar system at the institution is:**

Semester       Quarter       Trimester       Other \_\_\_\_\_

11. What constitutes the credit hour load for a full-time equivalent (FTE) student each semester?

- a) Undergraduate    12 credit hours
- b) Graduate            \_\_\_ credit hours
- c) Professional        \_\_\_ credit hours

12. Student population:

a) Degree-seeking students:

Headcount	Undergraduate	Graduate	Total
Full-time student	N/A	N/A	N/A
Part-time student	1,902	N/A	1,902
FTE	634	N/A	634

b) Number of students (headcount) in non-credit, short-term courses: 150

c) Distance Learning enrollment 2005-2006

Credit Courses	3,532
Non-credit Courses	226

13. **List all programs accredited by a nationally recognized, specialized accrediting agency.** List the name of the appropriate agency for each accredited program:

14. **Off-campus Locations.** List all instructional locations other than the main campus. For each site, indicate whether the location offers full-degree programs, 50% or more of one or more degree programs, or courses only. Record the FTE enrollment for the most recent fall semester. Add more rows as needed.

Locations	Full degrees?	50% or more?	Courses only?	FTE Enrollment
A. In-state	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
B. Out-of-state	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
C. International	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

15. **Degrees and certificates offered 50% or more electronically:** For each degree or certificate, indicate the level (certificate, associate's, baccalaureate, master's, professional, doctoral), the 60 percent that may be completed on-line, and the number of matriculated students for the most recent fall semester. Enter more rows as needed.

Name of program	Degree level	% on-line	Students
Associate in Arts		100%	N/A
Associate in Science		100%	N/A
Bachelor of Arts		Various	N/A
Bachelor of Science		various	N/A

16. **Instruction offered through contractual relationships:** For each contractual relationship through which instruction is offered, indicate the name of the contractor, the location of instruction, the

program name and degree level, and the percent of the degree that may be completed through the contractual relationship. Enter more rows as needed.

Name of contractor	Location	Name of program	Degree level	% of degree
Bridgepoint Education	Poway, California	Degree completion	Undergraduate	Up to 50%

17. List by name and title the chief administrative officers of the institution (see page x).
18. Supply a table of organization for the institution. While the organization of any institution will depend on its purpose, size and scope of operation, institutional organization usually includes four areas. Although every institution may not have a major administrative division for these areas, the following outline may be helpful in charting and describing the overall administrative organization:
  - a) Organization of academic affairs, showing a line of responsibility to president for each department, school division, library, admissions office, and other units assigned to this area;
  - b) Organization of student affairs, including health services, student government, intercollegiate activities, and other units assigned to this area;
  - c) Organization of finances and business management, including plant operations and maintenance, non-academic personnel administration, auxiliary enterprises, and other units assigned to this area;
  - d) Organization of institutional advancement, including fund development, public relations, alumni office and other units assigned to this area.

## *History of Charter Oak State College*

- June 1971      Enactment of P.A. 71-537, AN ACT CONCERNING EXTERNAL DEGREES AND COLLEGE CREDIT BY EXAMINATION, establishing the Task Force on External Degrees.
- May 15, 1972    First meeting of Committee on Alternative Approaches for the Delivery of Higher Education.
- June 22, 1973    Enactment of P.A. 73-656. AN ACT CONCERNING A BOARD FOR STATE ACADEMIC AWARDS.
- Nov. 3, 1973    First meeting of the Board for State Academic Awards.
- May 10, 1974    Appointment of Dr. Bernard Shea to the position of Executive Secretary (later Executive Director) of the Board for State Academic Awards following a nationwide search.
- October 1, 1974    Board for State Academic Awards authorized by Connecticut Commission for Higher Education to enroll candidates and to award the degree of Associate in Arts.
- Dec. 27, 1974    First graduation - four candidates awarded Associate in Arts.
- May 6, 1975      Board authorized by Connecticut Commission for Higher Education to award the degree of Associate in Science.
- Oct. 28, 1976    Board for State Academic Awards admitted to candidacy for regional accreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.
- 1976-77          Electronic data base developed for maintenance and processing of academic records; operations of Registrar's office fully computerized.
- March 8, 1977    Initial licensure and accreditation to award the degrees of Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science.
- March 17, 1977    First baccalaureate degrees awarded.
- Sept. 15, 1977    Connecticut Open Learning Assistance Corporation established (Title changed in 1983 to Charter Oak College Foundation, Inc.).
- May 1978          First issue of *BSAA BRIEFS*, the College newsletter, appears (currently called *Connections*).
- June 1980          General Assembly authorizes use of title Charter Oak College.
- October 1981      College attains regional accreditation by New England Association of Schools and Colleges.
- July 1983          Board membership increased from five to seven by addition of a graduate and student.  
Alumni and student associations established.
- 1983-84          Faculty develops and standardizes battery of seven comprehensive examinations in Business subjects.
- October 1986      Continuation of regional accreditation following re-evaluation by New England Association of Schools and Colleges.
- July 1987          Establishment of Bernard D. Shea Endowed Chair for Open Learning honoring first Executive Director.

- October 1987 College moves from Hartford to Farmington.
- October 1989 Honored outgoing Board chairman, Dr. Gerald Lamb, for his many years of distinguished service with the Honorary Doctor of Law Degree.
- December 1989 Dr. Merle Harris appointed as President of the College following completion of nationwide search.
- Spring 1992 Legislation passed to add "State" to the college name.  
College offers its first video-based courses.
- Spring 1996 Board increased from seven to nine members.
- Fall 1996 College calls together colleges to form Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium.
- April 1997 Reaccredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.
- Spring 1998 The College offers its first online course.
- April 1998 Groundbreaking for Charter Oak State College building.
- May 1998 Board approves Doris G. Cassiday Award.
- May 1998 College celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.  
Charter Oak State College Foundation launches first endowment campaign with a goal of raising \$500,000 in private contributions over five years with the State matching one dollar for every two dollars raised.  
College awards first Doctor of Humane Letters, *honoris causa* to Eileen Kraus.
- July 1998 College launches payment plan.
- April 1999 College moves into its new building.
- October 1999 College gets first approval to participate in Federal Student Financial Aid program.  
Official ribbon cutting for new building.
- Fall 1999 College establishes its Women in Transition program and admits its first student to the program.
- May 2000 First graduation Web cast.
- Fall 2000 College begins to use technology for live chats with perspective and enrolled students.
- March 2001 College embarks on its first corporate partnership – Aetna program.
- Spring 2001 General Assembly includes money for grants to needy students in College appropriation.
- Summer 2001 College provides e-commerce option for registering for online courses.  
Agreement with the Army National Guard Institute and the Coast Guard Institute for degree completion program.
- Fall 2001 Addition of accelerated online courses in management, leadership and criminal justice.  
College offers Nursing Refresher Course - first online, non-credit course.  
First student takes Early Childhood Pathways exam.  
Introduction of online tutoring.  
Access to Connecticut Digital Library.
- Summer 2002 Endowment campaign goal achieved (\$500,000 in gifts from donors earning a State match of \$250,000).  
Legislation passed to establish grant program for Charter Oak under the



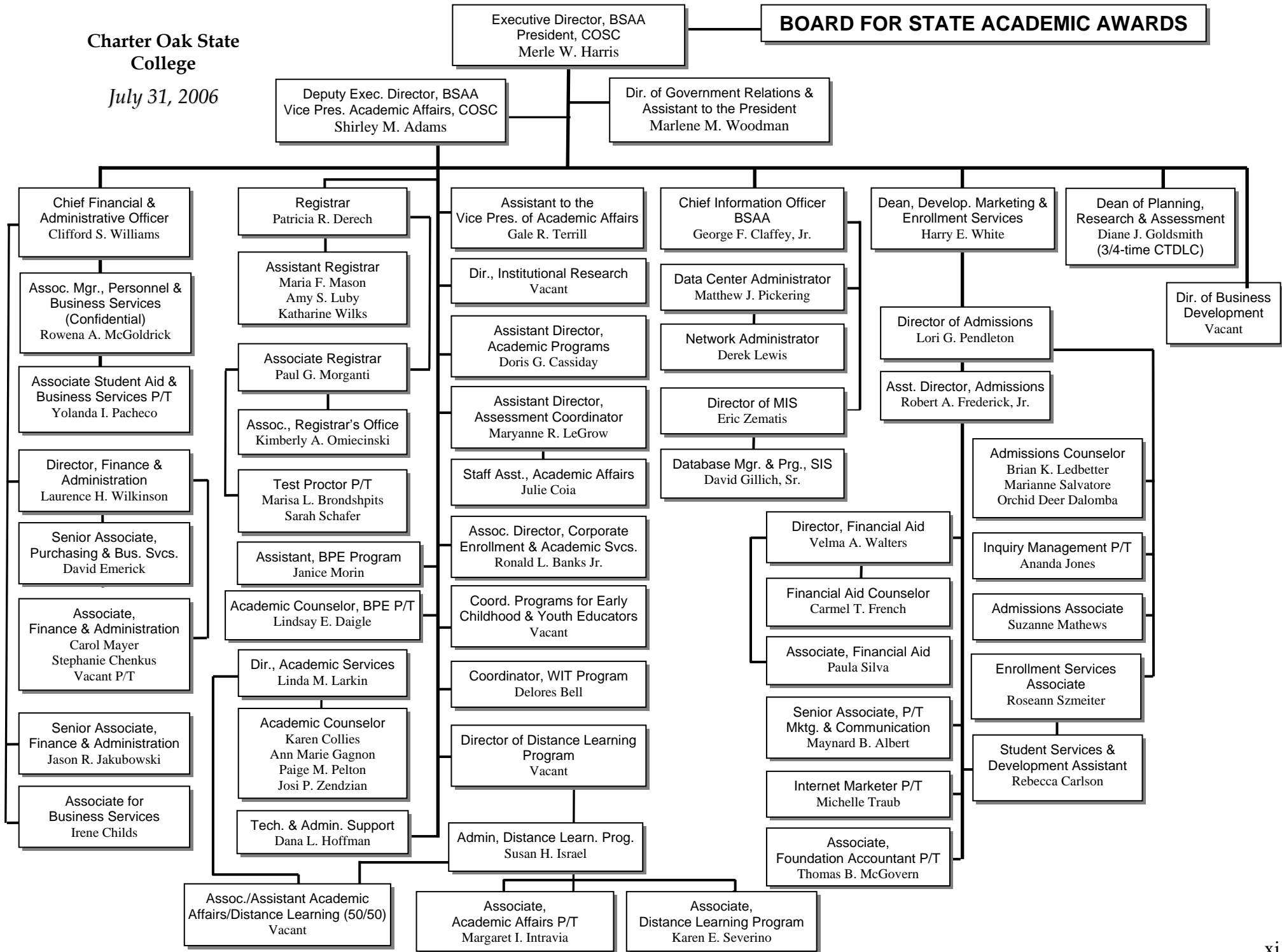
- Connecticut Aid to Public College Students Grant with an appropriation of \$25,000.  
First summer online offerings.
- Fall 2002 Enrollment exceeds 1,500.  
College begins program to award the Connecticut Director's Credential for Early Care and Education.
- Fall 2003 Adoption of new logo and tagline, Degrees without Boundaries.
- 2003-2004 Attained the highest number of online enrollments of all Connecticut Public Institutions.
- Fall 2004 For the first time, provided students online access to their records.  
Students are able to complete a number of concentrations using Charter Oak online courses, including American Studies, Public Safety Administration and Health Care Administration.
- Summer 2004 Awarded TANF Bonus Funds for the College's Women in Transition program for FY2005 and FY2006.
- Winter 2005 Added a writing assessment instrument and a computer assessment instrument with a tutorial.  
Accepted to Alpha Sigma Lambda Society and able to induct students who meet Society's honors criteria.
- Fall 2005 Added a connection to Jones e-global library to increase student access to information resources and library services.

***Chief Institutional Officers***

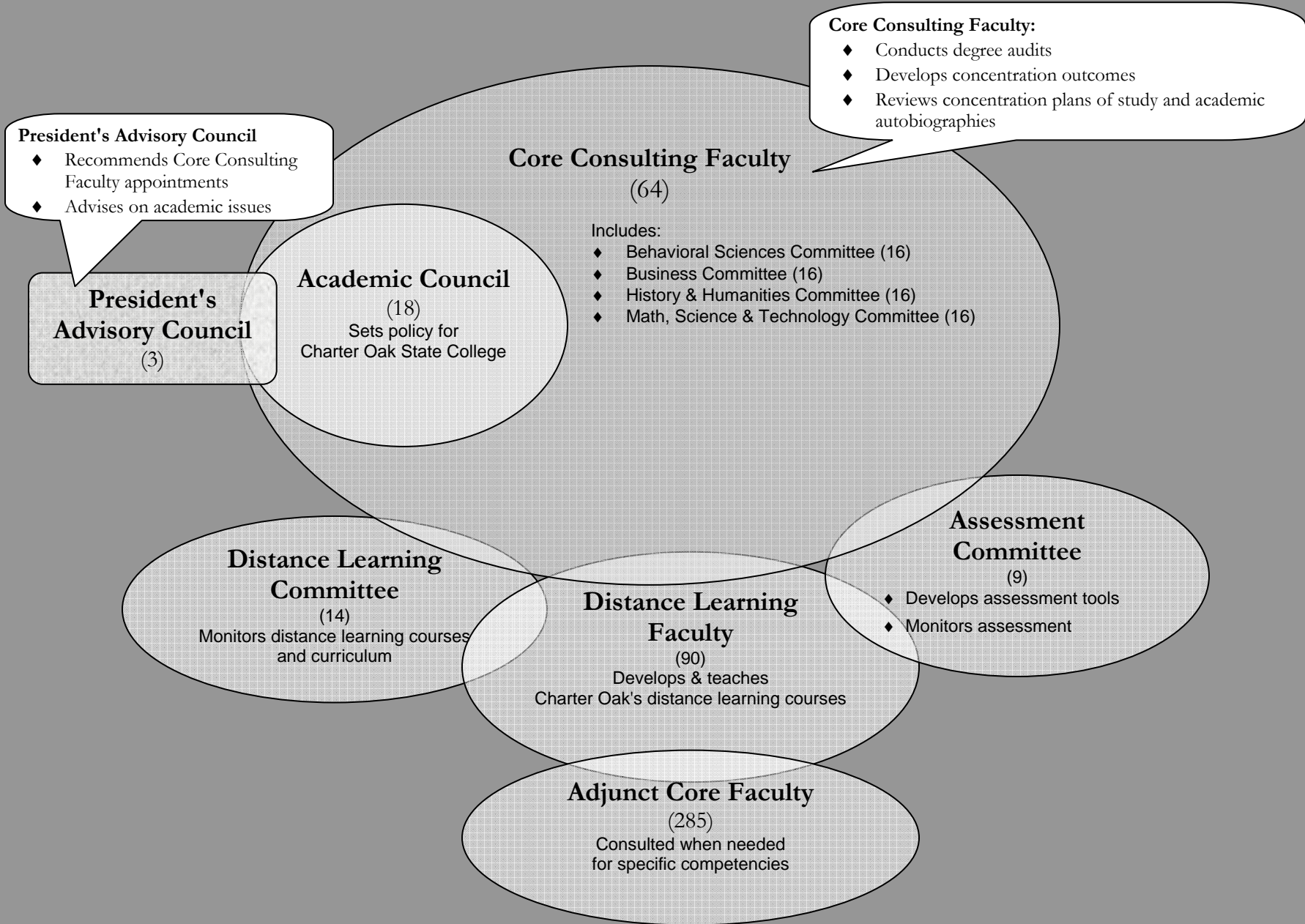
<b>Function Or Office</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Exact Title</b>
Chair Board of Trustees	Chandler Howard	Chair
President/Director	Merle W. Harris	President
Executive Vice President		
Chief Academic Officer	Shirley M. Adams	Vice President for Academic Affairs
Deans of Schools and Colleges (insert rows as needed)		
Chief Financial Officer	Clifford S. Williams	Chief Financial & Administrative Officer
Chief Student Services Officer	Linda M. Larkin	Director of Academic Services
Planning		
Institutional Research	Diane J. Goldsmith	Dean of Planning, Research and Assessment Director of Institutional Research
Development	Harry E. White	Dean, Development, Marketing and Enrollment Services
Library		
Chief Information Officer	George F. Claffey, Jr.	Dean, Chief Information Officer
Continuing Education		
Grants/Research		
Admissions	Lori G. Pendleton	Director of Admissions
Registrar	Patricia R. Derech	Registrar
Financial Aid	Velma A. Walters	Director of Financial Aid
Public Relations		
Alumni Association	Lori G. Pendleton	Alumni Advisor
Other		

**Charter Oak State  
College**

*July 31, 2006*



# CHARTER OAK STATE COLLEGE FACULTY



Student	Staff	Core Consulting Faculty		Distance Learning (Teaching) Faculty	Adjunct Consulting Faculty
		Policy-Making Role	Non-Teaching Evaluation Role		
<b>Applies for admission</b>	Admissions counselors and staff				
Submits transcripts	Registrar evaluates transcripts	Establishes standards for awarding credits for both collegiate and non-collegiate instruction			
<b>Matriculates</b>	Assigned to academic counselor				
Works with academic counselor to decide how to meet Charter Oak graduation requirements		Establishes degree requirements			
Prepares Concentration Plan of Study (CPS)			Evaluates and approves CPS		
Earns credit by:					
Enrolling in Charter Oak courses		Approves and monitors new courses		Teaches Charter Oak courses	
Portfolio assessment	Works with assessment coordinator	Establishes policy for portfolio assessment			Reads and evaluates portfolios
Standardized testing: ACE/PONSI (CLEP, DSST/DANTES)		Approves policy determining level of course and number of credits the exam is worth			
Taking courses at other institutions	Registrar evaluates transcripts	Approves policy determining level of course and number of credits the course is worth			
Contract learning	Distance Learning Dept. helps student find faculty mentor	Establishes policy for contract learning	Approves contract	Faculty mentor guides student through independent study, and assigns a grade	(May be performed by adjunct consulting faculty with requisite expertise)
<b>Readies for graduation</b>					
Submits Academic Autobiography (AA) to show how learning met graduation requirements			Evaluates and approves AA		
Submits graduation application	Academics Dept. conducts graduation audit	Recommends graduates to BSAA			
		Audits 20% of graduating class			



**Fact Sheet**  
**January 2006**

<u>Students</u>		<u>Graduates</u>	
Number of students served in FY2005	2633	Total Degrees Awarded	8,251
Students matriculated in October 2005	1,902	Current Residence	
		In State	62%
Female	60%	Out-of-State	38%
Male	40%	Degrees Awarded 2004-2005	519
Native American	1%	Average Length of Time To Degree	
Asian or Pacific Islander	2%	Associate Degree	2 years
African American	10%	Baccalaureate Degree	2½ years
Hispanic	6%	Recent Graduates Pursuing Advanced Degree	48%
White Non-Hispanic	69%	Recent Graduates Achieving Professional Advancement	45%
Unknown	12%	Recent Graduates	
Average Age	40	Used non-traditional means to earn credits	86%
In-State	44%	Used one examination to earn credits	49%
Out-of-State	56%	Used more than one examination to earn credits	38%
Employed	92%	Broad Areas of Concentration	
Unemployed	8%	Applied Arts	3%
Fields of Employment		Technology/Engineering Studies	1%
Business-Industry	36%	Behavioral Sciences	.5%
Education	18%	Business	7.5%
Health	13%	Computer Science	.5%
Government	10%	Health Studies / Human Services	1.5%
Self-employed	6%	Humanities	3%
Military	3%	Individualized Studies	65%
Social Services / Ministry	3%	Liberal Studies	11%
Child Care	2%	Social Sciences	5%
Average Number of Credits at Matriculation	85		

Note: Percentages in all categories do not total 100% due to rounding.  
Figures represent data collected October 2005

## Preface

Charter Oak State College began its self-study process in Fall 2004. Dr. Shirley M. Adams, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Chair of the Self-Study Steering Committee and Dr. Diane Goldsmith, Director of Institutional Research, attended the NEASC self-study workshop for institutions preparing for a comprehensive evaluation and site visit. In addition, Dr. Adams had participated in a number of meetings as the standards were being revised and Dr. Adams and Dr. Merle Harris, President of Charter Oak also met with Dr. Barbara Brittingham at NEASC to discuss how the new standards would impact Charter Oak. Dr. Harris also attended the session for institutional presidents.

Upon returning from the NEASC Self-Study workshop, Dr. Adams established a steering committee composed of staff, faculty, students, alumni, and Board representatives. Charter Oak launched the self-study process by having Dr. Brittingham meet with the steering committee and the staff of Charter Oak in December 2004.

The eleven NEASC standards were assigned to the following work groups. A senior level member of Charter Oak's administration chaired each group.

### Work Groups

Mission and Purpose  
Public Disclosure  
Organization and Governance  
Integrity

Planning and Evaluation

The Academic Program  
Faculty

Students

Library and Other Information Resources  
Physical and Technological Resources

Financial Resources

### Work Group Chairs

Dr. Merle Harris, President

Dr. Diane Goldsmith  
Director of Institutional Research

Dr. Shirley M. Adams  
Vice President for Academic Affairs

Harry White  
Dean of Development, Marketing, & Enrollment  
Services

George Claffey, Chief Information Officer

Clifford S. Williams  
Chief Financial and Administrative Officer

Charter Oak asked for volunteers from its staff to serve on the work groups. Staff were assigned according to their preference and composition of the committee. All staff were given opportunities to read drafts and to provide comments to the steering committee or work group chairs.

In addition to staff, faculty, students, alumni, and Board members were recruited to participate. Some members could not attend all meetings, but phone and e-mail contact was high. Work group chairs solicited input from non-work group members when they felt they did not have the expertise among the committee members.

The work group chairs developed a process and time line for accomplishing their committee's work. The first step was for each committee to develop bullets for the description section of its

standards. Each committee also conducted an analysis of strengths and weaknesses related to the standards.

The generation of this document was an opportunity for Charter Oak to stop and reflect on what it had accomplished; its strengths, its challenges, and its future. From the beginning of the process, the self-study was to be viewed as an integral part of Charter Oak's initiative to improve its institutional effectiveness; it was not to be viewed simply as a required process. The early emphasis on widespread participation was to ensure a broad perspective, to recognize what Charter Oak does well, to recognize what changes need to be made, and to help ensure "buy in" to any changes that might emerge from the self-study process.

The individual chapters were prepared by the work groups and submitted to the committee of work group chairs. The draft chapters were then forwarded to the steering committee for review and comment. A draft of the document was also posted on the Charter Oak Web site and students and alumni were asked to comment. In addition, a draft was sent to the Charter Oak staff for comment and the Academic Council reviewed the draft at its February 2006 meeting with special attention to the academic program and faculty standards. The Board reviewed a summary document at its January 2006 meeting. A draft was then sent to Dr. Brittingham for comment. The final draft was also posted to the Web site and students were notified and asked to read and comment. Throughout the process there were regular updates at the monthly staff meetings, the bimonthly board meetings and at faculty meetings.

The steering committee found that conducting the self-study was a valuable educational process which resulted in an extensive appraisal of the College: its mission, operation, and strategic goals. The projection section of each standard will provide direction for Charter Oak as it begins its next strategic planning cycle in 2007.

The steering committee should be commended for its hard work and dedication in developing the self-study. In addition, a thank you should go to members of the work groups, Board members, faculty, staff, students, and alumni who took the time to read and comment on drafts (see Appendix B: Self-Study Steering Committee Members).



## Overview

The Board for State Academic Awards (BSAA) was established by the Connecticut State Legislature in 1973 "to develop and coordinate the implementation of new methods of awarding undergraduate degrees and college credits..." The Board's degree program evolved into Charter Oak State College. The College is a constituent unit of the State of Connecticut's higher education system (see Appendix A).

Charter Oak was established as an external degree program that accepted credits earned at other accredited institutions or through non-traditional means such as standardized examinations (CLEP, DSST/DANTES). It has expanded to include a distance learning degree completion program offering online and video-based courses. In order to serve its students at a distance, the College provides all academic support services using technology. Students can also receive the services at the Charter Oak offices.

The College is run by a small dedicated staff. Core Consulting Faculty are recruited from other accredited colleges and universities in Connecticut. They are selected for their subject-matter expertise and their understanding of the adult learner. Distance Learning Teaching Faculty are recruited for their subject and teaching expertise from all over the country. Occasionally, experts in a field of study are recruited to serve as Adjunct Faculty Consultants to perform specialized assessments.

### **Profile of Graduating Students:**

The typical Charter Oak student takes a very winding and often very bumpy road to reach the ultimate destination—graduation. Most have started down this road a number of times and at a number of institutions only to give up or to run into barriers such as marriage, insufficient finances, change of jobs, and poor academic performance. Once at Charter Oak, students earn credits in a variety of ways to reach their goals.

The next few paragraphs introduce you to some of our graduates. They have been selected to demonstrate the variety of students that Charter Oak serves (the age listed is the age at graduation).

Mr. K, age 26, transferred into Charter Oak in 2004 with a Diploma in Civil Engineering earned through the University of Benin in Togo. He needed a U.S. degree to be accepted to graduate school. Charter Oak's requirement is that a student must earn 30 American credits and meet all other graduation requirements. He completed his requirements for a Bachelor of Science with a concentration in Engineering Studies in 2005 by taking standardized examinations and courses. He is now pursuing his Master's in Structural Engineering at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University.

Ms. H, age 40, matriculated at Charter Oak in 2000 and graduated in 2005 with a concentration in Individualized Studies. She came to Charter Oak with a background in recreational therapy, but decided she wanted to move into the area of domestic violence. She combined credits from six different colleges with CLEP, DSST/DANTES and Excelsior College examinations, and portfolio assessment. She is working on a Master's in Counseling at Cambridge College.

Mr. F, age 41, came to Charter Oak in 2004 with more than 50 credits in theatre performance earned during the 1980s. His career goal had changed to business and he was employed in a top level management position at a non-profit organization in Connecticut. He completed his degree

in 2005 by taking courses and standardized examinations. He is currently in the M.B.A. program at the University of Connecticut.

Mr. R, age 39, came to Charter Oak in 2005. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Individualized Studies by combining 44 ACE-approved (American Council on Education) Navy training credits with 15 ACE-evaluated Defense Language Institute credits, traditional courses, and 21 credits from DSST/DANTES and CLEP examinations.

Mr. E, age 47, earned an associate's degree at a community college in 1981. When he came to Charter Oak in 2003, he was employed by a health care insurance company. While a student he served on the committee that developed Charter Oak's Health Care Administration concentration and was the first student to graduate with that concentration (2005). He is finishing his term on the Student Government and is serving on the Charter Oak Self-Study steering committee. He recently accepted a managerial position at another insurance company and plans to enroll in an M.B.A. program.

Mr. D, age 52, is a deputy chief of police. He started at Charter Oak in 2002 and earned his bachelor's degree in 2004 with a concentration in Individualized Studies and then went on to earn his master's degree in Criminal Justice from Tiffin University in 2005. This fall he began his doctorate at the City University of New York's Graduate Center. While a student at Charter Oak, Mr. D conducted research, which was published, with one of his professors. After earning his master's, Mr. D began teaching for Charter Oak.

Ms. S, age 61, is a published author, three-term elected official, and writer for newspapers and technical journals. She matriculated at Charter Oak in 2001 and graduated in 2002. She earned 40 credits through portfolio assessment to complete the degree she started in 1965.

Ms. St, age 38, a single mother of three, entered Charter Oak's Women in Transition (WIT) program in the fall of 2004. WIT is a program for single mothers in low paying jobs, many of whom were once on welfare. Upon entering the program she worked part-time as a Service Care Coordinator at Future, Inc., where she worked with young adults 17-21 who had behavioral and learning disabilities. Ms. St pursued the Individualized Concentration with a focus in Psychology and Special Education and graduated with her Bachelor's in May 2005. In September 2005, she was hired full time as a psychiatric technician at Midstate Medical Center. She is currently enrolled at Goodwin College and is waiting for acceptance into their nursing program. Her ultimate goal is to become a psychiatric nurse.

### **Student Perceptions of Charter Oak**

Data from the Graduate Survey (Spring 2005) which was completed by 92.5 percent of the graduating seniors show that students select Charter Oak because it offers flexibility (98 percent), acceptance of credits (97 percent), opportunity to complete degree quickly (98 percent), a range of concentrations (97 percent); availability of academic counseling/advising (95 percent); open admissions (94 percent); and reasonable cost (93 percent). These characteristics reflect Charter Oak's mission and marketing and the percentages have been consistent over the last five years.

The Graduate Survey data (Spring 2005) also show that students are "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the services and policies of Charter Oak: level of credit awarded for prior college/experience (94 percent), variety of ways to earn credit (96 percent), timeliness of response by academic advisor once enrolled (95 percent), test administration services

(96 percent), timeliness of response of admissions staff (94 percent), requirements to complete concentration (95 percent), and general education requirements (94 percent). Students were less satisfied with timeliness of financial aid staff (78 percent), interaction with the business office (71 percent), mail-order book service (81 percent), availability of library resources (80 percent), and assistance in locating other resources for purchasing study material (72 percent). All of these areas of concern have been addressed, including adding additional online library resources, contracting with a new online book store, revising the financial aid packaging process, and sharing the concerns with the appropriate offices for their action.

### **Major Changes**

Charter Oak is a "learning" institution. Since the last NEASC accreditation visit in 1996, Charter Oak, based on constant appraisal of its students, its understanding of the needs of adult learners, and its familiarity with technology, has changed significantly. The major areas of change are the following:

- As a result of a statutory change in 1996, the Board increased from seven to nine members.
- In Fall 1996, the Board invited colleges across Connecticut to form the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium, which now provides the infrastructure and other support for the Charter Oak distance learning program.
- Charter Oak offered its first online course in the spring of 1998. Charter Oak now has the highest online enrollment of all of the State's public institutions.
- The Charter Oak State College Foundation launched its first endowment campaign in 1998 with the goal of raising \$750,000 in five years. The College has met that goal and now has about \$1 million in assets, making it able to increase its funding of grants to students with financial need, scholarship support, and support for program innovations.
- The College moved into its new building in the spring of 1999, which provided the space needed to expand its program and services.
- In Fall 1999, the College received approval to participate in Federal Financial Aid (Title IV) programs. This afforded students with financial need access to the Charter Oak program.
- In 1999, using the resources from Foundation and corporate grants, the College created its Women in Transition degree completion program to assist single mothers in low paying jobs with college credit but no degree.
- In 2000, technology became an important tool to reach its student body, located throughout the state and across the nation. Technology is used to Web cast graduations and student workshops. Technology also is used for live chats with prospective and matriculated students.
- In 2001, a new student information system was developed for internal use. In 2004, the system was expanded to provide students with Web access to their status reports and other information.
- In 2001, for the first time, the Connecticut General Assembly appropriated student financial aid dollars to the College. A special grant program was legislated in 2002.
- To meet the library needs of its distance learning students, access was provided to Connecticut's digital library (iCONN) in Fall 2001. In 2005, membership in the Jones e-global library enhanced the College's library services.

- To provide additional student services, e-tutoring was introduced in 2001 and writing assessment and computer-literacy assessment instruments were added in 2005.
- Through comprehensive faculty review processes, general education requirements have been modified twice during past ten years to better reflect societal needs and accreditation requirements.
- In 2004, the College introduced a two-step requirement for approval of student concentrations (Concentration Plan of Study) and graduation (the Academic Autobiography). These writing requirements provide the student with better advisement earlier in the Charter Oak program and affords the College a method of assessing student learning prior to graduation.

## **Results of the Self-Study**

### **Major Strengths**

The self-study gave the College an opportunity to analyze its strengths against its mission and its practices. Each of these strengths is discussed in detail in the self-study.

1. A major strength is dedication to the College's mission. The Board, staff, faculty and students agree on the mission and purposes of the institution, periodically reaffirm that understanding and commitment, and are dedicated to accomplishing the mission.
2. The College is actively engaged in strategic planning which is ongoing and involves all facets of the institution. Planning is data-driven.
3. The College has an active Board and a structure which allows the College to make changes that meet the academic demands of a changing society.
4. The College and the Foundation have a positive relationship because of the many fundraising and grant initiatives in which the Foundation engages that result in financial and programmatic support to the College.
5. Students receive personal attention in developing their academic programs. The degree program allows students to choose how and where they earn their credits within a framework of academic requirements.
6. The Charter Oak program provides a good foundation for students to move on to further education and results in positive career changes and job advancement.
7. Charter Oak faculty come from diverse backgrounds and bring their content knowledge, policy perspective, and understanding of the needs of adults to their work at Charter Oak.
8. The College provides access to degree completion for students from diverse backgrounds and, because of the design of the program, allows these students to earn their degrees without repeating prior academic experiences.
9. The College has built a highly qualified team to integrate technology into the delivery and support of its distance learning program. Technology is a backbone of the work of the institution.
10. The College monitors and plans its use of financial resources in an effective manner and, as a result, the College's financial position is solid and stable.
11. The College provides consistent information to the public in print and on its Web site. There is a strong correlation between students' expectations and their experience once they have enrolled.
12. Students, faculty and staff are treated fairly and with integrity.

## **Major Concerns**

The self-study also served to focus the College's attention on areas of concern. Some of these concerns are already being addressed. Others will be addressed as part of the strategic planning process.

1. Although the College understands its mission, the way it describes its mission to prospective students and the public is not always easily understood.
2. Assessment is not easy to conduct since many of the students earn credits elsewhere. Methods to determine if students are meeting expected outcomes in general education and concentrations have been established, but the College needs to look for or develop additional assessment methods that are both valid and sustainable.
3. Although the College is more than 30 years old, it still does not have strong name recognition which is essential for growth, nor does it have the marketing budget to compete head-to-head with other Colleges that are in or are entering the adult market.
4. Students need additional support in understanding how they learn, how to work independently and what is expected for the development of their concentration plans of study and academic autobiographies.
5. The percentage of students matriculating needs to be increased if the College is going to meet its enrollment projections. One area of concern was that the length of the admissions process might be having a negative impact. Therefore the admissions process has been revised, effective July 1, 2006.
6. With the growth of its distance learning program, the College is concerned that its existing faculty structure may need to be changed to provide additional oversight of curriculum and assessment.
7. The College has outgrown its student information system and can no longer function with systems that do not link together. In order to continue to provide state-of-the-art support services to its students; allow for tracking of students from inquiry to graduate status; link business, academic and financial aid requirements; and warehouse data, Charter Oak has decided to purchase a robust system. This will have an impact on its budget and staffing.
8. The College has outgrown its space. If Charter Oak is going to continue to expand, it will need more and better space for staff, large gatherings, individual conferencing, testing, training, and storage. The College will need to raise additional funds from the State, bonding, and tuition and fees.
9. State support continues to decrease causing the College continually to monitor its financial position.

## **Projections**

As part of the self-study process, the College has identified ways of addressing a number of the major concerns. The College will

1. Begin development of a new five-year strategic plan in 2007. It will include a re-examination of its mission statement, with special attention to determine if the expansion of the distance learning program is adequately reflected in its mission (Spring 2007).
2. Develop an approach for increasing the College's share of the adult student market in Connecticut. The approach will be linked to the strategic plan and include increased marketing and outreach activities, new program growth targeted at workforce development opportunities, and other related continuing education initiatives.

3. Continue to expand the distance learning program. The College has hired a Director of Distance Learning to assist with program growth and to examine the impact of program growth on the College (expansion is ongoing; examination of the impact of growth will occur in Spring 2007).
4. Review the evaluation process for Distance Learning Teaching Faculty, enhance the orientation process for all faculty, review the size of committees, and review meeting schedules (Spring 2007).
5. Continue to improve the assessment process for general education and concentration outcomes (Ongoing).
6. Evaluate the new admission process to determine if it reduced the processing time for reviewing and evaluating applicants' files and provided prospective students with adequate information for making the decision to matriculate (Summer 2007).
7. Develop ways of connecting with out-of-state alumni (Fall 2008).
8. Expand services to current students, including online orientation (CPS and AA explanations) and more frequent contacts (Ongoing).
9. Begin implementation of a new Student Information System in Spring 2006 with completion targeted for Summer 2007.
10. Continue its planning for additional space both short- and long-term. The goal is to have a decision and funding in place by Summer 2008.
11. Continue to monitor income and expenses on an ongoing basis with an eye toward growth.
12. Continue to upgrade the Web site and to monitor content to ensure that the public information section is up to date, all material on the site is accurate, and that the site is functioning both as a recruitment and information source (Ongoing).
13. Develop ethics policies for Board members and faculty (Spring 2007).

### **Summary**

The self-study process has reaffirmed the importance of Charter Oak's mission and the College's place in higher education. The College has been able to grow and change while remaining true to its mission of serving the adult student in non-traditional ways in a quality program. The College is well respected as a member of Connecticut's higher education system as evidenced by the role its administrators are asked to play on various state-wide committees and in helping to develop new and innovative programs. Most importantly, the data gathered from its students affirm that students are meeting their educational and professional goals, allowing them to successfully continue their education and advance in their professions.

Charter Oak is well positioned to continue to expand and grow to meet the challenges of the next ten years.

## **STANDARD ONE: Mission and Purposes**

### ***Description***

Charter Oak State College holds a unique place in American higher education as a public free-standing, external degree-granting institution and, as such, has no academic residency requirements and no geographic limits. The College truly provides "degrees without boundaries."

### **The Governing Board**

The Board for State Academic Awards (BSAA), established by statute, serves as the board of trustees for the College and is also the governing body for the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (CTDLC). The Board consists of nine members. The Governor appoints eight members, one of whom must be a graduate of Charter Oak, and designates the chair. The ninth member is a student member elected by the students.

### **The Mission**

The Board for State Academic Awards has a mission statement based on statutory responsibilities to guide its work. The BSAA statement provides the broad mission for Charter Oak State College and the CTDLC. The Board has adopted distinct and separate role and scope statements for each of the two entities it governs, Charter Oak State College and the CTDLC. The College's role and scope statement, labeled Role and Scope in accordance with the direction set by the Connecticut Board of Governors for Higher Education, is derived from the BSAA statutory mission, but includes more specific language regarding how the College achieves its mission (**Evidence: BSAADocuments/BS7**).

The BSAA mission and the Charter Oak role and scope have been revised periodically as the Board has approved the College's strategic plans and plan modifications. The last mission revision was made in 2002 and coincided with the approval of a 2002-2007 Strategic Plan (**Evidence: StrategicPlanning/ST1**).

The changes in 2002 focused primarily on updating language related to the development of the College's distance learning initiatives. In addition, the Board eliminated the existence of the Center for Innovation in Adult Learning (CIAL) as a separate entity. The CIAL was established as the College's educational research, program development and service component. With the addition of staff and the refocusing of programmatic efforts, these responsibilities, including the review of non-collegiate learning and experiential learning; test development; and research projects related to adult learning, were integrated into the regular activities of the College.

The mission and role and scope are shared with students through the College's *Official Catalog* and are included in summary fashion on the College's Web site. Both documents are incorporated into the *Faculty Handbook* and are discussed in orientation sessions for new faculty held every September (**Evidence: Faculty/FC3**).

Charter Oak also has a philosophy statement that is grounded in its mission and guides the College in serving its students. The philosophy statement is the basis for the formulation of the College's academic requirements and provides a framework for how those requirements are met. It is included in the Charter Oak *Official Catalog*, which also can be found on the Web site. The institutional philosophy asserts that college-level learning can be acquired anywhere, any time. Furthermore, college-level learning can be assessed and accredited via appropriate means and is enhanced via collaborative interaction with faculty and peers. In addition, it asserts that advisement is critical to student success.

The major purpose of the College is to provide adults with access to higher education in a way that overcomes barriers of time and geography. The mission stresses the innovative delivery of programs and services while maintaining quality and rigor. Further, the College provides opportunities for students to demonstrate learning and earn credit through a variety of options. These options include transfer of credit from traditional classes and distance learning courses from regionally accredited institutions as well as credit earned through Charter Oak distance learning courses; contract learning; testing; review of non-collegiate-sponsored instruction such as military, business and government-sponsored employee learning programs; special assessment; and portfolio review. Key features of the Charter Oak program are the individualized advisement and student-centered services that students receive throughout the educational process.

### **Degree Programs**

Currently, the College offers four General Studies degrees: Associate in Arts, Associate in Science, Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science. Charter Oak also awards certificates in a number of career areas as recognition of mastery of a specific body of knowledge.

Charter Oak's General Studies degree programs honor the liberal arts tradition and recognize the characteristics of adult learners. They are designed to enable adult students to develop their potential, enhance their abilities to continue their education, and help them achieve personal and professional goals.

The general education distribution requirements, with stated outcomes, provide breadth in the arts and science and the development of critical thinking and communication skills. The College's baccalaureate degrees require a concentration designed to provide depth in one or more areas of study.

During the 1990s, the College, through its distance learning efforts, took on a new role as a course provider in addition to its continuing role as an aggregator and assessor of learning. A broad range of distance learning courses is now provided to assist students in completing their degrees or certificate programs and in acquiring new knowledge needed for the workforce.

### ***Appraisal***

The Mission and Role and Scope for Charter Oak State College are specific about the population to be served and the goals to be achieved. They emphasize the importance of complementing the missions of other Connecticut institutions.

Both statements underscore the need for quality in academic and student services and the need for innovative ways to meet the requirements of adult learners. The Mission and Role and Scope statements not only allow for the flexibility that Charter Oak students need but also give the institution the flexibility necessary to meet the demands of a changing environment and a changing higher education landscape. A good example is in the area of online learning. As it became clear that online learning is an important and excellent way to provide access to higher education for students with work and family responsibilities, physical disabilities, and those who live in remote areas, Charter Oak was able to move ahead quickly in developing its online program.

For many reasons, including faculty resistance, more traditional institutions have been tied to the traditional classroom delivery system. Charter Oak was able to do this and still remain true to its



mission. However, new initiatives put pressure on existing staff, and the College must frequently align staff and workloads to new initiatives.

The fact that the mission does not define a geographic delivery area is viewed as a strength of the institution. The ability to accept students from out of state has helped keep costs more reasonable for in-state students and to enhance services for Connecticut residents. The ability to attract students from diverse backgrounds and different parts of the United States also enriches learning experiences in online courses. Some students have commented in their graduate surveys on the value of this interaction (**Evidence: Graduate Surveys**).

The mission statement is also broad enough to allow the College to address workforce needs. Therefore, the College has played an important role in a number of State workforce initiatives, providing community service even though this is not explicit in its mission. These initiatives include the areas of early-childhood education, nursing (credit and noncredit), public safety and homeland security, computer security, and health care administration.

Most important, the mission continually drives innovation. The Charter Oak Board, faculty and staff must balance access, innovation, and quality. This is a demanding role and requires dedication and sophisticated knowledge about the broader academic community, adult learning, and technology. Literature and reports are shared with the Board, staff, and faculty regarding the field of adult learning, distance learning and the future of higher education. This information is an important background for strategic planning.

Because of the nature of Charter Oak's mission, orientation material and sessions for new Board members, faculty, and staff are very important. The College has to be sure that each component of the institution understands the mission and its role in achieving the mission before working with students or crafting and approving policy for the institution. The need for this understanding prompted the development of comprehensive faculty and student handbooks and orientation sessions for new faculty. The President meets with new Board members prior to their first Board meeting to discuss the mission and how the mission is reflected in the College's programs and services.

As the College community has worked on the self-study, it has reflected on possible differences between what appears in writing and what Charter Oak sees on a daily basis. It is clear that online learning is growing and becoming a more significant part of what the College is about. As a result, distance learning must receive greater prominence in the Mission and Role and Scope statements.

Although the College community understands the mission, it is not clear that the public, at large, has the same level of understanding. At times, this is also true of the students Charter Oak attracts. Only after they have matriculated do they truly understand the mission of the College. Therefore, the Charter Oak Mission Statement needs a companion piece, which is the College's public statement.

Finally, the distinctions between the Board for State Academic Awards and the College need greater clarity. Those who work at the institution understand the distinction but this is not always clear to the public.

Ultimately, the success of carrying out the institutional mission rests with the Board, which assigns this responsibility to the President. The President works with senior staff to ensure broad-based understanding of the components of the mission and that the strategic plan reflects the

mission. A review of the College's plans indicates that the mission is closely linked to the planning process and plans produced by the College community.

### ***Projection***

The College will revisit the Mission and Role and Scope statements as part of its next strategic planning process to take place in 2007. During the revision process the Board will consult with all of the College's constituencies: staff, faculty, students, alumni and the business community. The goal will be to address the question of how the distance learning program fits into the other parts of the College's mission. The process will begin immediately following the NEASC accreditation review in October of 2006 and will be coordinated by the President and the Director of Institutional Research. Following approval of the Board, the Mission and Role and Scope statements will be forwarded to the Connecticut Board of Governors for Higher Education for its review and approval.

As discussed in Standard Ten, the College will also write and have the Board review a public statement of mission, which can be used in public documents and on the College's Web site. The goal will be to have a statement that is more concise and is easier for prospective students and others to understand.

### ***Institutional Effectiveness***

The Mission and Role and Scope statements are regularly reviewed by the Board, staff, faculty, alumni, and students as part of the College's planning process. In the last review in 2002, there were very few changes recommended. The College community generally embraced the statements as they were written. In a survey and workshop conducted in 2005, the BSAA reaffirmed its support for the current mission of the institution (**Evidence: BSAADocuments/BS2, BS3**). There are very few negative comments on graduate surveys about the manner in which the College is fulfilling its mission of providing adults access to higher education. Graduates do, however, request that Charter Oak offer a master's degree. The College will continue to assess survey information from graduates regarding its mission and how well the institution is performing.

## **BOARD FOR STATE ACADEMIC AWARDS**

### **Mission**

The Board for State Academic Awards, established in 1973 by the Connecticut General Assembly, provides diverse and alternative opportunities for adults to earn degrees. The Board accomplishes its mission through Charter Oak State College and the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium. Relying on the judgment of professional educators, the Board validates learning acquired through standardized examinations, independent study, work experience, noncollegiate-sponsored instruction, distance learning and traditional study. The Board seeks to

- (1) offer coherent, college-level curricula and degree programs which incorporate transfer credit, standardized examinations, and other methods of credit and competency validation;
- (2) develop valid and reliable tests and other methods to evaluate and assess experiential and extracollegiate learning as alternatives to classroom study;
- (3) provide and promote educationally sound learning through a variety of means including video- and Web-based technologies;
- (4) inform and guide the public about opportunities for earning credentials by alternative means;
- (5) provide testing and credit registry services, and information regarding such services, to the public;
- (6) extend access to higher education to all adults who demonstrate the ability to perform on the collegiate level and to foster the enrollment and graduation of diverse populations;  
and
- (7) encourage innovation in meeting the needs of adult learners and to serve as an advocate for adult learners in higher education.

In all of its activities, the Board for State Academic Awards rigorously upholds standards of high quality and seeks to inspire adults with the self-enrichment potential of non-traditional higher education.

## **CHARTER OAK STATE COLLEGE**

### **Role and Scope**

The Board for State Academic Awards, established in 1973, grants degrees through Charter Oak State College. As a non-traditional college, Charter Oak is designed to provide adults with an alternate means to earn degrees that are of equivalent quality and rigor to those earned at other accredited institutions of higher learning. The College, therefore, collaborates with and complements the missions of other Connecticut colleges and universities.

Charter Oak State College awards four degrees: the Associate in Arts, the Associate in Science, the Bachelor of Arts, and the Bachelor of Science. These degree programs enable students to meet career and personal goals. The content of the bachelor's degree programs is structured to provide the foundations needed for advanced study since a large number of Charter Oak State College alumni continue their education in graduate school. Enrollment is open to any adult who demonstrates college-level achievement. The College endeavors to recognize the diversity and achievements of its entire community.

Recognizing that learning takes place in many forms, Charter Oak State College provides a flexible approach to higher education. There is no residency requirement, and academic credit may be awarded for course work completed successfully at other accredited institutions, academic instruction sponsored by noncollegiate organizations, military training evaluations, video-based and online courses offered by Charter Oak, testing, portfolio assessment, contract learning, and for learning acquired through many licensure and certification programs.

Charter Oak State College has no campus and offers no classroom instruction, but assists its students through a variety of academic support services including program planning, testing, and evaluation. The College also delivers video-based and online courses, serves as a testing center, and provides credit registry services as well as information regarding other educational opportunities. The College identifies qualified faculty from regionally accredited colleges and universities and other experts to assess academic achievement in areas not measured by standardized tests and to serve as mentors for programs such as video-based and online courses, contract learning, and practica. In recruiting these faculty and experts, the College actively seeks to identify educators who value the impact of broad and diverse experience acquired by students.

Charter Oak State College also assists other Connecticut colleges or universities seeking to provide their students with alternate ways to validate college-level learning, develops partnerships with the corporate and non-profit community to meet the State's workforce needs, and through its Connecticut Credit Assessment Program and special assessments, Charter Oak evaluates and formally recognizes non-collegiate learning regardless of how or where such learning is acquired.

Charter Oak State College conducts institutional research and assessment to monitor and evaluate the progress and success of its students, graduates and programs. The College uses the results of these assessments to evaluate its effectiveness and to make changes that respond to student, institutional and societal needs.

Revised March 1998  
Revised July 2002

## **STANDARD TWO: Planning and Evaluation**

### ***Description***

Planning and evaluation pervade the culture of Charter Oak. Strategic planning is essential to Charter Oak State College's operations and impacts enrollment management, academic programs, student support services, fiscal management, physical and technological infrastructure, and decisions about future endeavors. The College is committed to the practice of formal, data-driven, systematic, organic and continual evaluation. Outside consultants are employed when appropriate. In its planning and evaluation processes, the College places primary emphasis on efforts that promote student achievement and address student needs.

### **Planning**

Every five years the institution as a whole comes together to begin its strategic planning cycle. Strategic planning involves Board members, administration, staff, faculty, students, and alumni. In 2001, the College began the planning cycle for 2002-2007. Planning began with a Board retreat to discuss trends in higher education and the Board's vision for the future of Charter Oak State College.

Through a survey, staff were asked to present their visions for the College and to provide their analyses of its strengths and weaknesses as well as threats to and opportunities for the institution (SWOT). The College also held online focus groups of alumni who were asked to provide their views of the condition of and issues facing Charter Oak (**Evidence: StrategicPlanning/ST1**). The Office of Planning, Research, and Assessment compiled responses from the staff and results of the focus groups and Board retreat into a report which identified salient issues for further investigation. The entire staff met to discuss the report and used the findings to set priorities for the 2002-2007 Strategic Plan (**Evidence: StrategicPlanning/ST2**).

The priorities generated an action plan (**Evidence: StrategicPlanning/ST1**). Action committees, with membership drawn from across the institution, were established to set goals for addressing each priority and to create benchmarks for success; time lines; and budget triggers (points at which additional expenditures would be required to increase resources and/or staffing). The committees also designated persons to oversee the work of meeting the goals. Eight action committees were created to address the key areas of planning: distance learning, facilities, partnerships, technology, enrollment management, marketing, staffing, and tuition and fees.

The action committees present their reports at Cabinet meetings. Recommendations for policy or budget changes are brought to the Board for action. As a result, the Board has approved partnership agreements; positions for marketing and technology initiatives; and fee modifications, including the establishment of comprehensive fees for the military and other students. Some recommendations from the committees have been approved by faculty and include proposals for new concentrations and online courses. Other recommendations are approved administratively, such as Web site changes, marketing strategy initiatives and professional efforts.

In 2004 and 2005, the President presented to the Board strategic planning updates which describe the College's progress in meeting its goals (**Evidence: StrategicPlanning/ST3, ST7**). The updates were also distributed to all staff. The Board discussed the reports and did not recommend any major changes. Through its publications, *Connections* and *Update*, the College communicates information on its planning and evaluation efforts to the entire college

community. In these publications the President and other members of the executive staff describe the efforts and request feedback on these issues from all of its constituencies.

### ***Space Planning***

Despite the relocation of Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (CTDLC) to rental space to accommodate Charter Oak's increasing space needs, the College finds that it has outgrown its current facility. For the short term, Charter Oak is moving some operations into space contiguous to CTDLC. Meanwhile, the College and the CTDLC hired a consultant to conduct a study of long-term needs (five- and ten-year). This study served as the basis of a request to the State Legislature for \$50,000 in bond funds to plan for a new building which would have space for all of the operations of Charter Oak and the CTDLC (**Evidence: Facilities/FL1**). In the spring of 2005, the General Assembly authorized these funds, and the College began planning for a new home.

### ***Fiscal Planning***

In preparing budget requests for Connecticut's biennial budgeting cycle, the College is guided by the Strategic Plan which includes budget triggers that identify when new expenditures are required to meet goals. These new expenditures are incorporated into the budget when it is developed following the guidelines from the Office of Policy and Management and the Department of Higher Education. Further discussion of the financial planning process is included under Standard Nine Financial Resources (**Evidence: FinancialInformation/FN8**).

### ***Academic Planning***

Academic Planning is tied to the mission and goals of the College. Academic planning is conducted by Core Consulting Faculty and flows from the academic committees to the Academic Council and to the Vice President for Academic Affairs for implementation. The College has adopted an outcomes-based approach toward developing its concentrations, general education requirements, and distance learning courses (**Evidence: Academic Council Minutes: Document Room**).

### ***Enrollment Management***

Charter Oak State College is strongly committed to increasing the matriculation and graduation of racial and ethnic minorities, who have traditionally been underserved in Connecticut. In 2003, through an institution-wide effort, the College created the "Strategic Plan to Ensure Racial and Ethnic Diversity at Charter Oak State College." (**Evidence: StrategicPlanning/ST3**). This five-year plan addresses the need for such a priority, identifies barriers to access, strategies to mitigate access and success barriers, and sets goals for matriculation, retention, and graduation for specific racial and ethnic groups. The plan includes a budget to support these efforts and a specific monitoring and evaluation plan, and assigns oversight to the Dean for Development, Marketing and Enrollment Services. As with all of the College's planning efforts, the plan itself and the evidence of its implementation and success are reviewed by the Executive Council and by the appropriate departments.

### **Evaluation**

Charter Oak State College evaluates itself systematically by collecting both qualitative and quantitative data to answer questions about a number of issues:

- Who are Charter Oak students? To answer this question, the College collects data on demographics; who matriculates and who does not; persistence and graduation of all

students; online students; students coming through the partnership agreements; and students using special services such as testing, credit banking, and portfolio assessment.

- How satisfied are the present students with Charter Oak State College's courses, services, and overall education? To answer this question, the College surveys all graduating students.
- What do students know and what can students do as a result of a Charter Oak State College education? To answer these questions, the College assesses student learning in general education and in specific concentrations. It also surveys alumni nine months to a year post-graduation.
- What impact has this education had on students' employment? To answer this question, along with the Alumni Survey, the College submits data annually to the Department of Labor which analyzes the changes in students' income.
- How does Charter Oak State College perform institutionally within the Connecticut Public Higher Education System? To answer this question, the College submits data annually for the State's Accountability Report and reviews data submitted by the other State colleges and universities.
- How does Charter Oak State College compare with its peers? To answer this question, Charter Oak gathers data from its peers which is included as part of the Accountability Report.

The Office of Planning Research and Assessment analyzes the data on a regular basis and shares its analyses with appropriate staff, management and Board members. Much of this data is used to prepare an annual Accountability Report which is collected by the Department of Higher Education as mandated by the State Legislature. For each of those measures, which are defined across public higher education in Connecticut, Charter Oak has set goals that are reviewed annually and wherever possible, the data are benchmarked against data from its peers (**Evidence: Accountability Reports/AR1-AR6**).

The Office of Planning, Research, and Assessment also provides data to the Connecticut Department of Labor to determine how graduation from Charter Oak affects the earning power of its Connecticut graduates. For 2005 graduates, the average increase in income was over \$15,000 a year (**Evidence: CT Labor Report: Document Room**).

### **Academic Programs**

Charter Oak uses multiple measures and sources of information to determine whether it is meeting its academic mission. The academic team has created an effective set of methodologies to use in its outcomes assessment program (**Evidence: Assessment Document: Document Room**). This assessment effort is led by the Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Core Consulting Faculty. Core Consulting Faculty have created a strong and well defined system for developing and evaluating the general education requirements, distance learning courses, and concentrations. These evaluations are used by the Core Consulting Faculty to make decisions to improve the general education requirements and to improve or eliminate specific concentrations.

Learning outcomes for each concentration have been established and are listed in the *Official Catalog* and on the Web site. Four of the concentrations use capstone courses to measure achievement. The Assessment Committee is still working on methods for evaluating outcomes in the other 39 concentrations. All distance learning courses have stated learning outcomes. Those

outcomes are being mapped to general education and concentration outcomes. The Core Consulting Faculty created a graduation requirement, the Academic Autobiography, to assess writing and critical thinking skills and the ability of students to describe the cohesiveness of their programs.

## *Appraisal*

### **Strategic Planning**

Strategic planning involves the entire institution and is inclusive, public, and ongoing. College-wide planning flows from standing and ad hoc committees which meet regularly. Membership in these committees is inclusive and cross-departmental. Minutes are available in the "Staff Share" folder on the intranet. Recommendations are sent to the Cabinet, then to the Executive Council, and then to the Board when policy decisions are needed (**Evidence: Committee and Board Minutes: Document Room**).

Where possible, numerical benchmarks of success were built into the Strategic Plan as a way of both measuring success and allocating resources to meet growth needs (**Evidence: Strategic Planning**). Some examples include:

- **Enrollment of 2000 students by 2007.** In 2002 official enrollment was 1561. In October 2005 enrollment was 1902. However, much of the increase in enrollment was due to the partnership with Bridgepoint Education. With the termination of that program, Charter Oak recognizes that it may not meet this goal by 2007. Committees have been formed to discuss and develop strategies to increase enrollment.
- **Attain and maintain a persistence rate of 75 percent and a graduation rate for our associate and bachelor's degree programs of 50 percent.** While these rates vary each year, the five year average graduation rate for bachelor's degree students is 50 percent and for associate degree students is 54 percent. The average persistence rate over five years is 73 percent.
- **Maintain overall satisfaction ratings on our programs and services on the graduating students' survey of over 90 percent.** The three year overall satisfaction rate averages 98 percent.
- **Double distance education enrollments by 2005.** There were 1279 enrollments in our distance learning courses in 2002. In 2005, there were 2404, missing our goal by only 154 students.

Other goals have different measures of achievement. For example:

- **Maximize the use of technology to provide student services and support for all aspects of the College's activities.** Progress has been made toward this goal in two major ways. The College Web site has been redesigned to improve services and access to students. After a significant process analysis, the College decided to purchase a new student information system (SIS) and is in the beginning stages of implementation. The new SIS, coupled with new processes, is designed to improve student services and support for the College's activities.
- **Develop a comprehensive strategy for funding the College and meeting space needs.** Funds from grants and contributions to the Charter Oak State College Foundation have grown during this strategic planning period. The College has raised more than \$240,000 to support the Women in Transition Program and as of June 30, 2006 the Foundation's assets have grown to \$1,110,067. However, despite receiving additional State dollars, the



College is still below what was received in FY2000 considering inflation and dollars required to meet our collective bargaining obligations.

One of Charter Oak's statutory responsibilities is to promote access to higher education. The College has responded by planning for and initiating new modalities of education such as online learning, which eliminates time and distance barriers for students, and targeting those students who have been traditionally underserved by higher education. This planning resulted in both the creation of the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (CTDLC) and a decision to develop and offer Charter Oak's own online courses.

Planning is data based (**Evidence: Graduate Surveys; Alumni Surveys; Research Surveys and Studies; Distance Learning Courses/DL Course Evaluations**) and informs a constant improvement cycle. Three major examples of how data has driven change in the institution are:

- 1. Creation of a payment plan (1998).** An analysis of graduate and alumni surveys and a study of why applicants did not enroll at Charter Oak pointed to financial impediments. As a result, a planning committee recommended to management and the Board that a payment plan be enacted to enable students to pay fees over time rather than in one lump sum.
- 2. Application to join the Department of Education (DOE) Distance Education Demonstration Program (1998).** Federal Regulations prohibited institutions which offered more than 50 percent of their programs through distance learning from providing Title IV Financial Aid. These regulations limited Charter Oak's ability to provide financial assistance to its students. When data indicated that this was a major impediment for some students in enrolling at Charter Oak, the College lobbied the federal government for changes in these regulations. When the opportunity came for Charter Oak to participate in the DOE Distance Education Demonstration Program, the College led the effort for the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium by writing the proposal and became part of the first cohort. As a result, Charter Oak is able to offer Title IV financial aid to its students and can enroll students such as the students in the Women in Transition (WIT) program who otherwise would not have been able to attend the College.
- 3. Improvement of student access to library services (2005).** From the College's online course evaluation forms, it became clear that, despite its participation in iCONN, the State online library system, students did not all have appropriate access to the necessary academic resources. The College surveyed students and faculty to examine needs, current access, whether faculty believed students had appropriate library resources, and whether faculty had changed their requirements because of a lack of library resources. These results were distributed to the Cabinet and Executive Council. As a result, the College has contracted with Jones e-global library to provide online library resources and is in the process of creating better training for students in how to access online resources. A follow up study will be conducted after the new resources have been in place for at least two years.

Technology is used whenever possible to enhance assessment and evaluation efforts, but data is sometimes not readily available. The SIS has no warehousing capacity, so it is difficult to capture historical data. Moreover, the College does not currently use the National Student Clearinghouse to track applicants who do not matriculate, nor students who matriculate but withdraw. However, it has become easier to track students who graduate. Our most recent alumni survey, which is completed nine months to a year after graduation, had a 72 percent return rate

which is up considerably. This is primarily due to the fact that more and more students are accessible by e-mail.

Because the institution is small, committees designed to address long-term and short-term planning also must address immediate concerns. In cases of immediate concerns, it is sometimes necessary to bypass the committee structure and make decisions at the executive level. This occurs most often when Board approval is necessary, the decision needs to be made quickly, and a Board meeting is imminent.

Despite the inclusive nature of planning at Charter Oak, there are communication gaps across the institution regarding planning issues. The Strategic Plan and updates are distributed to staff, but not to faculty. Minutes of meetings are not always kept up to date; they are placed in a "Staff Share" folder which requires staff to actively seek them out, and busy staff members often do not do so. Deans and Directors may not consistently share with their staff the planning information discussed at Cabinet meetings.

While assessment, planning, and research activities have increased, there has not been a concomitant increase in staff in this area. Currently institutional research is handled by the Dean of Planning, Research, and Assessment, who is shared with the CTDLC and works 20 percent of her time for Charter Oak; a part-time (20 hour a week) data analyst; and a person reporting to the Vice President for Academic Affairs whose responsibilities includes preparing data reports as needed. Space planning has been handled primarily by the Chief Information Officer and the Executive Council. The College is in the process of hiring a part-time Director of Institutional Research (IR) who will work only for the College.

### **Benchmarking**

Charter Oak's data is benchmarked against that of its peers whenever possible. For the State's Accountability Report, the College uses Thomas Edison State College, Excelsior College, and Western Governors University (WGU) for this purpose, although at present not all of these schools collect the same data in the same ways. Charter Oak compares favorably with its peers in the areas of:

- retention rates: WGU reports a 73 percent retention rate, the same as Charter Oak;
- students' preparation for further study: over a five year period, an average of 89 percent of Charter Oak students report that they were well or very well prepared for further study; approximately 80 percent of Excelsior College's students responded positively to a similar question; 85 percent of Thomas Edison's student report that the college had enhanced their preparation for further study; and
- students' satisfaction with their educational outcomes: each institution calculates this somewhat differently. This data is available in the Accountability Report (**Evidence: Accountability Reports**).

This peer data has also affirmed that the College's goals in these areas are set appropriately for its student population. In order to enhance the College's planning and evaluation efforts, the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Planning, Research, and Assessment meet twice yearly with colleagues from peer institutions including Thomas Edison State College, Excelsior College, and Empire State College. This interaction with similar institutions is invaluable. Issues discussed include common benchmarks, Integrated Postsecondary Education System's (IPEDS) definition of full time equivalency (FTE), (a definition which does not "fit" these institutions), retention strategies, outcomes assessment, and strategic planning.

In addition, the College is participating in the Interactive Quality Assessment Tool (IQAT). This will provide benchmark data for distance learning.

### **Academic Programs**

The Core Consulting Faculty continue to work on methods for assessing student learning in both general education and the concentrations. Assessment of this learning is a challenging task since the learning can take place through so many options outside the College. As described in Standard Four, the Academic Autobiography is being used to assess students' writing and critical thinking skills and the students' ability to describe the cohesiveness of their programs. In addition, capstone courses are now required in four concentrations. These courses can demonstrate whether students have met the required competencies. The Core Consulting Faculty is continuing to work on this issue.

Over the past three years, Core Consulting Faculty have evaluated all concentrations in order to ensure that outcomes are well delineated, and have eliminated those which were under-utilized or no longer relevant. The fact that Core Consulting Faculty are employed full-time at other institutions of higher education in Connecticut brings a diverse perspective to this process. When the College creates new programs, professionals in the field as well as Charter Oak graduates currently working in these areas are consulted in the development of concentration and certificate requirements.

While there is now a robust assessment process in place, including the Academic Autobiography, to assess general education outcomes, and there are capstone courses in place in some concentrations, the College is still in the process of formulating outcomes assessment for all concentrations. The Academic Autobiography is intended to provide information on how well students have met the established outcomes and to provide evidence of how their academic work has enabled them to meet their goals in an academic environment. However, it may not provide a measure for all general education outcomes.

Assessment of Academic programs is a priority of Charter Oak State College. A complete discussion of assessment methods and outcomes is included in Standard Four.

### ***Projection***

#### **Strategic Planning**

The next comprehensive five-year strategic planning initiative is scheduled for 2007, directly after the NEASC visit, in order to allow the institution to take advantage of the insights of the visiting team. This initiative will again be an inclusive process involving the Board, faculty, staff, students, and the community. As was done in 2002, the process will be informed by a SWOT analysis. In this process, the College will pay special attention to whether the mission continues to be appropriate or whether modifications to it will provide a more accurate base for the future. Planning will also involve issues of facilities and space since planning will be underway for new space to house the growing College and the CTDLC.

The implementation of the new student information system, expected to be completed by the summer of 2007, will provide more robust and accurate data for evaluation and planning purposes. As the new system is implemented, the Executive Council will design a "dashboard" of reports which will provide all administrators the same information and enable easy monitoring of key metrics in such areas as enrollment management, distance education, and finance.

The institution will continue to look at ways to improve data collection, analysis, dissemination, and communication about planning through the use of technology, improvements to the College Web site, and the intranet. For example, moving the Graduate Survey on line and linking it with the graduation application and the SIS will provide more accurate data, improve the ease of use for students, and save staff time in the Registrar's, Academic, and Institutional Research offices.

### **Evaluation**

The College will continue to evaluate its performance. It will do so by:

- Looking to peers for benchmarks both for performance indicators and to take advantage of the variety of experiences of institutions which share a similar mission and student body. As the College designs its dashboard, it will continue to look for shared metrics which allow for ease in benchmarking.
- Conducting appropriate research studies to answer specific questions about the work of the College and its impact.
- Continually improving alumni and graduation surveys.
- Cooperating with State of Connecticut efforts to evaluate higher education such as the Accountability Measures, post graduation salary changes, and an effort to survey employers about graduate preparedness for work.
- Joining the National Student Clearinghouse to track students who apply but don't matriculate or matriculate but withdraw. The College will be tracking our students who graduate and go on to further education.
- The College will be implementing a new five-year follow-up of its alumni.

The faculty Assessment Committee will be evaluating both the general education and concentration outcomes methodologies. The Committee will assess whether graduating students are meeting the general education outcomes, whether the College's designated general education courses are appropriate for these general education outcomes, and whether the Academic Autobiography is an appropriate tool for measuring the students' understanding of general education. Along with the academic committees, the Assessment Committee will continue to assess how Charter Oak courses meet the concentration outcomes and explore the concept of capstone courses.

To improve communication, the Executive Council and Cabinet will keep minutes of their meetings and ensure that all staff have access to them through e-mail and/or the intranet.

### ***Institutional Effectiveness***

The Board for State Academic Awards, Executive Council, Cabinet, faculty governance committees, and the Office of Planning, Research, and Assessment regularly assess the planning and evaluation activities as well as the instruments and the methodologies used for these activities to ensure that they continue to provide the College with the most valid and reliable data for these purposes. Changes are made as a result of these evaluations. There are many examples:

- In 2005, the Board for State Academic Awards asked that the admissions and matriculation reports it receives allow them to more closely monitor partnership activities.
- After looking at response rates and the quality of responses, the Office of Planning, Research and Assessment recommended to the Cabinet that most surveys be moved to a Web-based form to better fit a College where all of the students are distance students and whose Internet use has grown.

- Another recommendation resulted in revising the Graduate Survey to reflect changes at the College and in attaching the survey to the mandatory application for graduation. This has increased response rates from about 50 percent to more than 98 percent.
- Where the planning process has indicated a need, other types of data collection have been added and continue to be discussed.

When the College is trying to answer a specific question about its students, it often designs a survey or a study to gather information to help in the decision-making process. This has included surveys of faculty and students regarding library access and use, analysis of retention patterns, and a qualitative study of applicants who did not matriculate.

The Core Consulting Faculty has been instrumental in assessing the effectiveness of the activities used to evaluate student learning. As described in Standard Four, they have revised the use of the Concentration Plan of Study (CPS) from an end-of-program evaluation document to a pre-concentration advising tool. They then created an Academic Autobiography requirement as a learning assessment tool which could be related to the goals students set in their CPS.

Outcomes assessment is guided by an improvement cycle. For example, during the pilot stage the Core Consulting Faculty reviewed the rubrics used to score the Academic Autobiography. They made recommendations to improve the rubric. Those recommendations were adopted by the Academic Council and further piloting of the Autobiography continued using the new tool **(Evidence: Minutes of Assessment Committee: Document Room)**.

Assessment, evaluation, and planning have all been enhanced by the strong, positive relationship among the faculty and between faculty and staff and faculty and the administration. The College benefits from a faculty with a broad range of experiences in working with adults and at a distance as well as in working in different higher education environments. This diversity of experiences enriches the College's planning and evaluation processes.

## **STANDARD THREE: Organization and Governance**

### ***Description***

The Board for State Academic Awards (BSAA), the administration, staff, and the faculty work together to ensure that the Charter Oak program maintains its adult focus, provides flexibility within appropriate academic standards and responds to the needs of its students and the State of Connecticut. The authority and responsibilities of Charter Oak State College's Governing Board are set forth in State statute (Section 10a-143). Charter Oak State College's administrative staff serves at the pleasure of the Board, and their authority and responsibilities are delegated by the Board as delineated in the BSAA bylaws (**Evidence: BSAADocuments/BS4**).

Consistent with its statutory authorization and its mission, the College does not have full-time faculty. As described later in this section and in Standard Five, its Core Consulting Faculty have responsibility for the quality of the academic program. Within policies and procedures approved by the Core Consulting Faculty, the College's Adjunct Consulting Faculty and Distance Learning Teaching Faculty have responsibility for the validation of learning and for the quality of distance learning courses. The Student and Alumni Associations and the Charter Oak State College Foundation support the work of the College.

### **The Board**

In accordance with State statute, Charter Oak State College is governed by the Board for State Academic Awards. The Board also governs the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium, a membership organization of educational institutions dedicated to promoting and delivering distance education. The CTDLIC provides the infrastructure for e-learning and related activities for Charter Oak and other colleges and universities in Connecticut. The statute provides for nine members. Eight members, including one who is a graduate of the College, are appointed by the Governor for staggered six-year terms. One member is elected by the students for a two-year term. The Governor appoints one of the eight gubernatorial appointees as chairperson (**Evidence: BSAADocuments/BS6**).

The relationships among the Board, administration, faculty, staff, and students are spelled out in two sets of bylaws (**Evidence: BSAADocuments/BS4, BS5**). One set of bylaws provides the framework for the way in which the Board carries out its responsibilities, including election and duties of officers, meeting requirements, and committees. The second set of bylaws focuses on the responsibilities and organization of the faculty for a college that has as a key component of its mission the validation of student learning. Both sets of bylaws address the administrative structure and define who is a student and who is an alumnus or alumna of the institution.

The Board appoints the Executive Director of the Board for State Academic Awards who serves as the President of Charter Oak State College. The Board annually reviews the performance of the President and sets new goals for the following year. The Board's Personnel Committee, in conjunction with the Board chairperson, has responsibility for coordinating the performance review. Board members receive a report on the past year and future goals from the President. The Board discusses the report, and members contribute to the performance review during an Executive Session held at a regular Board meeting. The Personnel Committee meets to write a report based on these comments. The report is shared for accuracy with all Board members. A meeting is subsequently held with the President to discuss the review and new goals.

The Board is required by its bylaws to meet at least quarterly but generally holds six meetings a year (January, March, May, July, September and November). Agendas and background information are mailed about ten days prior to a meeting and, at the same time, are shared with the union president, the staff, the student and alumni association presidents, and others requesting such information. All Board meetings are posted with the Secretary of State and are open to the public in accordance with the State's Freedom of Information statutes.

Board meeting agendas include action items related to the Board's policy and fiduciary responsibilities. Agendas also may include personnel items (staff appointments and personnel policies that are not part of collective bargaining) and approval of major new initiatives (related contracts or agreements). At every meeting, the Board receives financial information, enrollment and marketing data, and information regarding student financial aid disbursements.

Through the administration, the Board encourages the various constituent parts of the institution to come forward with suggestions and concerns regarding items before the Board and maintains open channels of communication with union representatives. Each July, the Board addresses the budget for the fiscal year, and every two years adopts a budget request which is forwarded to the Governor through the Office of Policy and Management, and to the Board of Governors for Higher Education, through the Department of Higher Education.

The Board also has responsibility for collective bargaining contracts (all BSAA employees with the exception of the Executive Director/President of Charter Oak State College, Vice President for Academic Affairs, dean-level positions, and confidential employees are members of the American Federation of State and Municipal Employees – AFSCME). The Board periodically engages in strategic planning and approves a new plan for the College every five to seven years with cyclic assessment and plan revisions. All areas of the institution, including staff, faculty, students and alumni are involved in the planning process.

The Board has established a Personnel Committee but has determined not to establish other committees because of the Board's small size. The Personnel Committee deals with personnel policies for management and for all personnel if the policies fall outside of collective bargaining. The Committee also considers collective bargaining issues, approves the establishment of new positions or position reclassifications, administrative salaries and some benefits.

The Board periodically assesses its structure and its performance. The most recent assessment was completed in December of 2004. A facilitator was engaged to develop a survey and to review the responses. A workshop was then held to discuss the survey results and to determine if changes were needed (**Evidence: BSAADocuments/BS2**).

### **Executive Staff**

The Executive Staff includes the President, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean of Development, Marketing and Enrollment Management, Chief Financial and Administrative Officer, Chief Information Officer, and Dean of Planning, Research and Assessment. The Board delegates to the Executive Staff responsibility for managing the institution. These individuals report directly to the President and comprise the President's Executive Council. Regular Executive Council meetings are held to discuss and make recommendations regarding policy, procedures, and possible programs or services. The Executive Council members also propose items for the Board agenda. In addition, discussions are regularly held with members of the Cabinet, consisting of administrators in information technology, admissions, financial aid, registrar, academic affairs, and finance, prior to bringing initiatives and policy and fee changes to

the Board or prior to making major procedural changes. The President also consults with the Student Association on issues such as fee increases and policies affecting the student body.

### **Offices and Divisions**

To accomplish its mission, the College is organized into the following offices and divisions:

**Office of the President.** The responsibilities of the Office of the President include financial development, institutional planning, overall assessment of institutional effectiveness, policy development, information technology, external relations, public information and legislative affairs, and test development. These responsibilities are carried out in conjunction with the other administrative officers. In addition to serving as the President's confidential secretary, the Director of Government Relations and Assistant to the President serves as the College's legislative liaison and coordinates many special projects. The Chief Information Officer has responsibility for the College hardware, the network, the student information system, the College Web site and staff training. The Dean of Planning, Research and Assessment (a position shared with the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium) also reports to the President and is responsible for Institutional Research for the College and supports planning activities, including strategic planning. The responsibilities of this position have changed due to program growth at CTDL. In addition, the research needs of the College have grown. Therefore, the College is hiring a part-time Director of Research to meet its needs.

**Academic Affairs Division.** The Division of Academic Affairs functions under the direction of the Vice President. Major responsibilities include academic counseling, student records, transcript evaluation, distance learning, academic program development, validation services, test administration and faculty relations. The Vice President has overall responsibility for the quality and integrity of the academic program in conjunction with the faculty. The Registrar, Director of Academic Services, Director of Distance Learning, Assistant Director of Academic Affairs, Assessment Coordinator, and coordinators for special programs all report to the Vice President. The new Director of Institutional Research will also report to the Vice President.

**Development, Marketing, and Enrollment Services Division .** This Division is under the direction of the Dean of Development, Marketing, and Enrollment Services with responsibility for admissions, marketing, communication and outreach, financial aid, veterans' affairs and the Alumni Association. The Dean also serves as Executive Director of the Charter Oak State College Foundation, which raises funds to support the mission of the College. Reporting directly to the Dean are the Director of Admissions, Director of Financial Aid, Senior Associate for Marketing and Communications, Senior Associate for Web Marketing, Foundation Accountant (part-time), and Foundation Assistant (part-time).

**Division of Finance and Administration.** This Division is under the direction of the Chief Finance and Administrative Officer (CFAO). The CFAO has responsibility for financial planning, budgeting, financial records, purchasing, contracts, personnel, affirmative action and financial aid disbursement. Reporting directly to the CFAO are the Director of Finance and Administration and the Associate Manager, Personnel and Business Services.

### **Faculty**

The Vice President for Academic Affairs is the academic leader of the College and guides the work of the faculty, which is described more fully in Standard Five. A chart depicting the various faculty groups appears in Institutional Characteristics.



Core Consulting Faculty (64) are appointed by the Board as independent consultants and are normally selected from persons serving in active status as teachers and/or administrators in Connecticut higher education institutions. Every effort is made to maintain a faculty with appropriate representation from two-year and four-year colleges and universities and balanced in terms of academic scope; racial, ethnic, and gender diversity; and public/private institutional background. Core Consulting Faculty appointments and reappointments are recommended to the Board following a search and approval by the President's Advisory Council and the Academic Council. The Board with the approval of the Academic Council, appoints a member of the Academic Council as Dean of the Faculty for a two-year term. Another member is appointed as Associate Dean of the Faculty.

All academic decisions and academic policies are considered and approved by the various academic committees and most are sent to the Academic Council for final approval. Through this structure, faculty engage in planning, development and revision of academic policies, and assessment of the academic program. Core Consulting Faculty also are called upon to make decisions on individual students. Some decisions are delegated to the Vice President but are governed by approved policy. These decisions are subject to review through regular graduation audits conducted by the faculty.

Distance Learning Faculty (90) are selected by the Vice President for Academic Affairs, reviewed by members of the College's faculty-based Distance Learning Committee and by the Board.

Adjunct Consulting Faculty (285) are engaged when special expertise is required for portfolio reviews, special assessments, contract learning or the review of non-collegiate-sponsored instruction. These individuals are usually selected from faculty teaching in Connecticut colleges and universities. However, in the case of an uncommon field, Charter Oak contracts with faculty who teach at institutions outside Connecticut (**Evidence: Faculty/FC5**).

As described in Standard Five, the Core Consulting Faculty, along with the Vice President for Academic Affairs, have responsibility for academic policies and the approval of bachelor's degree concentrations for every student. In conjunction with the academic counselors, the core consulting faculty guide students through their degree programs. These faculty are the academic voice of the College. During academic year 2005-2006, 12 percent of the Distance Learning Faculty were also members of the Core Consulting Faculty. Adjunct Consulting Faculty are not usually associated with the College in any other capacity.

#### **Other Organizations Associated with the College**

**Charter Oak State College Student Association.** The Student Association is a formal organization described in Standard Six. The Director of Academic Services is the advisor to the Association. The Association conducts an election every two years to select student representatives to serve on the BSAA and the Charter Oak State College Foundation Board. The President and Vice President for Academic Affairs meet with the Association periodically to discuss student fees and other matters, such as the Student Code of Conduct.

In addition, the needs and opinions of students are regularly solicited through surveys and e-mails on a broad range of issues, and this input is used to develop, revise, and enhance programs. Students serve on College committees. Students, along with alumni, regularly testify at legislative hearings regarding their Charter Oak experiences.

**The Charter Oak State College Alumni Association.** The Alumni Association is a volunteer organization of graduates of the College also described in greater detail in Standard Six. The Director of Admissions is the advisor to the Association. The Association is governed by a board elected at the Association's annual meeting. Through the Association and other outreach efforts, the College involves alumni in institutional support and fundraising, seeks alumni suggestions regarding programs and services, and provides opportunities for alumni to network and grow professionally. Twice a year, the College publishes *Connections*, which includes both College and Alumni news.

**The Charter Oak State College Foundation.** The Charter Oak State College Foundation was established in 1977 as a private, non-profit 501(c) (3) organization with the mission of supporting the needs of the College. Its structure and activities are detailed in Standard Nine.

### **Role as a Constituent Unit in the State Public Higher Education System**

As the head of one of the constituent units in the State Public Higher Education System, the Executive Director/President sits with the other unit heads and the Commissioner of Higher Education to discuss issues and policy directions. The College also is represented on the statewide Advisory Committee on Accreditation by the Vice President for Academic Affairs and on the Board of Governors for Higher Education's Standing Advisory Committee by the Assistant Director of Academic Programs. Charter Oak staff are also appointed to serve on other statewide committees such as the Board of Governors for Higher Education Performance Measures Task Force, the Textbook Task Force, General Education Task Force, and study committees examining Connecticut library and faculty standards.

## ***Appraisal***

### **The Board**

Board members are committed to the mission of the College and participate actively in formulating policy and in planning to enable the College to meet its mission. This is evidenced by the fact that the average number of years of service of the current Board is 5.25, ranging from a few months to nine years. Although the Board is small, by statute, attendance and participation in meetings is high. If members cannot attend in person, they attend through a conference call. In the past ten years, there has been only one occasion when business could not be appropriately conducted due to lack of a quorum. Board meetings are structured to address action items and reports. There usually is time to focus on a topic of importance to the institution, such as performance measures or the evaluation of the College's distance learning courses.

In 2004, the Board engaged a consultant to administer a survey and then conduct a two-hour session to discuss the survey's findings. The result of this appraisal was that Board members believe the size of the Board is adequate, the Board is structured appropriately and the Board is actively contributing to the development of appropriate policy for the institution. Board members are aligned with and enthusiastic about the unique mission of the institution. They did indicate that the orientation process for new Board members could be strengthened. In addition, Board members believe that they could be more involved in fundraising efforts. However, as a public Board, its members did not view this as a major responsibility of their involvement (**Evidence: BSAADocuments/BS2, BS3**). The Board believes it is accountable and requires that staff be accountable. Accountability is maintained through the evaluation of the President and the President's evaluation of senior staff.

In 1997, the Board created the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium. This is an indication that the governance structure is able to meet new needs.

### **Faculty**

Faculty serving the College come from diverse backgrounds and different institutions--a major strength of the institution. Faculty learn from each other and find that, in addition to contributing to the academic program of Charter Oak, they take ideas back to their respective institutions. There also is value in being able to make academic decisions in an environment that is independent of institutional politics. The commitment of faculty is evidenced by their years of service to Charter Oak (**Evidence: Faculty/FC1**).

In 1998, program committees (Distance Learning and Assessment) were added to the faculty structure, and the bylaws were amended. This action was taken because of the projected growth in distance learning courses and the requirements for assessment. This transition was easily made and the committees were incorporated as an integral part of the existing faculty structure.

There has been an effort to balance electronic and face-to-face meetings with faculty. There are at least three meetings scheduled for each committee each year. Between meetings, faculty members review student concentration plans, respond to questions, and receive other information electronically. Technology brings efficiency and more frequent contact. However, face-to-face meetings help to establish a common language and greater understanding of the College's mission. Faculty meetings are lively exchanges where faculty share recommendations based on the experiences at their home institutions.

### **Departments and Staff**

The staff structure is appropriate to carry out the College's mission. As staff has grown, there have been efforts across the institution to increase specialization. However, fiscal constraints and the inability to accurately project program growth sometimes cause workloads to expand before additional staff can be hired. During the 2002 strategic planning process, benchmarks were established to trigger the potential need for additional staff. For example, it is estimated that another academic counselor will be needed when caseloads approach 300.

Despite the hierarchical structure of the organization (**Evidence: HumanResources/HR2**), communication and interaction take place between and among various departments of the College. Academic and admissions staff meet regularly with faculty; information is shared with the Board; and the President shares Board actions with the Academic Council. There are joint meetings scheduled with the Board for State Academic Awards and the Foundation Board to discuss the needs of the College and to report on fundraising efforts. In addition, there is frequent sharing of newsletters, reports and other documents. Students and alumni have their own organizations, but staff coordinators share information with them about the College, and the President and Vice President for Academic Affairs periodically meet with these organizations. An example of this interaction is the consultation that occurred with students when the Code of Conduct was being revised. Student and alumni input is gathered through surveys and e-mail requests.

Communication among and between Board members, staff members, faculty and students can always be improved. Suggestions on how this will be accomplished are in the Projection section.

### ***Projection***

Although the organization and structure are appropriate for the mission of Charter Oak State College, Charter Oak staff have indicated that there is a need to improve communication among the various components of the institution. Therefore, in addition to the current vehicles for communication, there will be additional presentations and interactions, including faculty and Student Association presentations at BSAA meetings. As the College continues to grow, there will be greater need to further formalize communication. This will include the circulation of meeting notes from various staff committees, particularly when items under consideration will impact other areas. An assessment of BSAA agendas and an examination of meeting notes posted on the Web will verify if this has been happening.

The Executive Staff will continue to monitor and benchmark workloads and responsibilities. As part of the annual planning and budgeting process, recommendations regarding expected staff changes and resultant fiscal impact will be presented to the Board.

### ***Institutional Effectiveness***

The effectiveness of the College's organization and governance are formally discussed by BSAA members, staff and faculty as part of strategic planning. This formal discussion will take place again in 2007 and every five years thereafter. In addition, the Charter Oak bylaws are reviewed periodically and amended to reflect changes. For example, new faculty committees were created as a result of a need for more attention to distance learning and assessment. This called for changes in the bylaws. In addition, a department was created to meet growing information technology needs. Both of these changes were the result of strategic initiatives to grow the College's online learning program and enhance its use of technology in all aspects of its work. Once a plan is adopted, it is reviewed regularly and necessary changes are periodically made in staffing, organization or governance.

## **STANDARD FOUR: The Academic Program**

### ***Description***

#### **Degree Programs**

The programs of Charter Oak State College are designed to fulfill its mission of providing diverse and alternative opportunities for adults to earn undergraduate degrees by combining prior learning with the acquisition of new knowledge through a variety of sources. All students come to Charter Oak having earned a minimum of nine credits. Some have accumulated more than 120 credits but have no degree. Many students bring a wealth of experience and knowledge that is equivalent to college-level course work. Charter Oak is an aggregator of the students' credits, knowledge, and expertise.

The College offers four degrees in General Studies: Associate in Arts, Associate in Science, Bachelor of Arts, and Bachelor of Science. The associate degrees require a minimum of 60 credits and the bachelor's degrees require a minimum of 120 credits. The 40-credit outcome-based general education requirement meets State and NEASC standards for liberal arts and distribution requirements. Bachelor's degree candidates and associate degree candidates must have a minimum of 60 and 30 credits, respectively, in the arts and sciences. Although majors are not offered, the baccalaureate concentrations are similar to majors in that they demonstrate in-depth knowledge in one or more fields of study. There is no reference to specialization on the Charter Oak diploma, but the official transcript indicates the designated concentration.

The curriculum is designed to accommodate students' individual learning styles and personal goals and offers students several options for earning credits. These options include achieving successful scores on standardized tests approved by faculty; credits for prior learning based on portfolio assessment and special assessment of licenses; credits through contract learning (directed independent study under a Charter Oak faculty mentor); non-collegiate credits that have been duly evaluated and recommended by the American Council on Education (ACE), the National Program on Noncollegiate Sponsored Instruction (PONSI), or the Connecticut Credit Assessment Program (CCAP), a validation function of the Board for State Academic Awards; validation of credits from other sources (e.g., credits transferred from regionally accredited colleges/universities); and through Charter Oak distance learning courses. Charter Oak will also accept graduate credits for the undergraduate degree as long as the credits are not to be used toward a graduate degree. Students are so advised (**Evidence: Publications/PU1 pp. 67-73**).

#### ***Liberal Arts***

Charter Oak believes that all students should have a strong foundation in the liberal arts. At least 75 percent of the credits toward the Associate in Arts and Bachelor of Arts must be in the liberal arts and sciences. The Associate in Science and Bachelor of Science require that 50 percent of the credits be in the liberal arts and science.

#### ***General Education***

The objective of the general education curriculum is to ensure that students gain the knowledge to further develop their potential and enhance their capability to engage in a lifelong process of learning. The current general education requirements were developed in 2001-2002 and were revised by the Core Consulting Faculty in 2004 to clarify the outcomes and to better address State and NEASC standards. The new requirements went into effect on July 1, 2005 for matriculating students.

**Requirements:**

- ◆ Skill areas: communication (writing and speech); critical thinking, information literacy, and ethical decision making.
- ◆ Knowledge areas: U.S. History/Government; Non-U.S. History or Culture; Global Understanding; Literature and Fine Arts; Social/Behavioral Sciences; Mathematics; and Natural Science (**Evidence: Publications/PU1 p. 35**)

As part of the graduation requirement, baccalaureate students write an Academic Autobiography addressing the relevance and interrelationship of the subjects in general education and the concentration. The Academic Autobiographies are evaluated by Core Consulting Faculty (**Evidence: Faculty/FC3**). For assessment purposes, Distance Learning Teaching Faculty relate, where appropriate, their course outcomes to general education outcomes. Students also complete a general education self-assessment as part of the Graduate Survey (**Evidence: Graduate Surveys**).

**Concentration**

The baccalaureate concentration represents a major commitment on the part of the student. Students have the opportunity to select a degree plan that best meets their career, personal enrichment, or future educational goals. They can choose either a subject area concentration or design their own concentration (Individualized Studies or Liberal Studies). The Individualized and Liberal Studies concentrations integrate a broad range of accumulated knowledge and new learning, while the subject area concentrations require in-depth study of one area.

Each concentration requires a minimum of 36 credits, 15 to 18 of which must be at the upper level. During 2002-2006, Core Consulting Faculty developed or revised outcomes for concentrations in order to ensure that concentrations have clear learning objectives and breadth and depth, are up to date, and are similar to offerings of other colleges and universities. Capstone courses are required for concentrations in Business, Health Care Administration, American Studies, and Public Safety Administration to affirm sequential progression and synthesis of learning (**Evidence: Publications/PU1 pp. 38-61**). Prerequisites are listed in the course schedule and the standard 100 to 400 level course designation is followed.

The College has a process for reviewing and adding new concentrations. The process begins with the academic committees and ends with approval by the Academic Council. Requests for new concentrations can come from the administration, students, faculty, and from outside groups. The requests are reviewed for appropriateness to the mission of the institution, currency, and workforce needs. A committee consisting of faculty, academic counseling staff, students and practitioners develop outcomes for the concentration course requirements, patterning them after similar programs at other institutions. Concentration requirements are then approved, first by the appropriate academic committee and, finally, by the Academic Council (**Evidence: Minutes of Faculty Committee Meetings: Document Room**).

During 2003-2006, the Academic Council approved new concentrations in Organizational Management, Organizational Leadership, Health Care Administration, Public Safety Administration, and American Studies. Based on the review and recommendation of the academic committees, the Academic Council eliminated under-enrolled concentrations in Human Service Administration and Theatre History. The one student remaining in the Human Service Administration concentration was able to complete her degree.

### ***Concentration Plan of Study***

Students must submit a Concentration Plan of Study (CPS) for faculty approval. The CPS serves as a "learning contract" between the Core Consulting Faculty and the student for fulfillment of the concentration requirements. Core Consulting Faculty approval enables the student and the faculty to arrive at a mutual understanding regarding the content and characteristics of a particular program of study which, when satisfactorily completed, is the basis for a recommendation that the degree be awarded. The Concentration Plan of Study is to be completed by the students shortly after matriculation (**Evidence: Publications/PU1 p. 37**).

In July 2004, the College instituted the Concentration Plan of Study (CPS) and Academic Autobiography (AA) requirement to replace the Concentration Proposal. The new requirements were implemented to increase the role of Core Consulting Faculty in the academic advising process and to ensure that Charter Oak students possess college-level writing skills, are generally educated, and have developed a comprehensive program. The Concentration Proposal used to be submitted at the end of the student's degree program. Faculty wanted earlier input to allow time for students to make any necessary changes and to improve their writing.

The goal is to have students submit the Concentration Plan of Study to Core Consulting Faculty upon completion of 60 credits. This plan outlines the credits they expect to include in the concentration. In addition, students must present a rationale for the choice of credits which includes their goals for pursuing the degree, the focus for the concentration, and the manner in which the credits selected fit into the Plan of Study. Students also include their resumé. The CPS is submitted electronically, and the faculty reviewer responds accordingly. This medium allows the faculty to provide academic and career advice to the student. In evaluating the document, faculty assess students' writing ability, critical thinking skills, and ability to describe the cohesiveness of their programs.

### ***Academic Autobiography***

The Academic Autobiography requires students to reflect on their academic experience with particular reference to knowledge and understanding of the general education outcomes (**Evidence: Publications/PU3 pp. 106-107**). This document is submitted at least four months prior to graduation. To standardize grading, reviewers use a faculty-approved grading rubric to determine if the student should receive a grade of Pass or if the document must be rewritten. Training in use of the rubric occurs at the Core Consulting Faculty orientation and at academic committee meetings. These training sessions have been extremely valuable resulting in uniformity in scoring, changes in the scoring rubric, and in the directions provided to both students and faculty. As a follow-up to the orientation, academic counselors meet one-on-one with new faculty.

### ***Faculty***

The Faculty is one of the College's major strengths. The members of the Core Consulting Faculty are drawn from public and private, accredited two- and four-year colleges and universities in Connecticut and hold advanced degrees in their fields of study. The Adjunct Consulting Faculty and the Distance Learning Teaching Faculty are faculty at other colleges or are practicing professionals with appropriate academic degrees and teaching experience. This faculty model allows Charter Oak to be flexible and innovative in meeting programmatic and workforce needs. For example, a statewide study identified a need for a credit-based after-school education credential. Charter Oak was selected to develop the curriculum in cooperation with an advisory

committee. Charter Oak was able to hire adjunct faculty with the expertise to develop and teach the courses and the program was launched in less than six months.

There are three groups of faculty: Core Consulting Faculty, Adjunct Consulting Faculty, and Distance Learning Teaching Faculty. Charter Oak faculty often fill multiple roles. For example, a Core Consulting Faculty member may also be a member of the Distance Learning Teaching Faculty (see Institutional Characteristics for Faculty Venn Diagram, p. xii).

Core Consulting Faculty develop academic policy, approve Concentration Plans of Study and Academic Autobiographies; conduct graduation audits; approve new distance learning courses; monitor new courses; review course evaluations; and develop concentration outcomes/reviews. They are organized into two types of committees: academic committees and program committees. Faculty committees operate on a consensus model.

Adjunct Consulting Faculty conduct special assessments of non-collegiate programs and evaluate portfolios when the Core Faculty does not have the expertise.

The Distance Learning Teaching Faculty develop and teach online courses and video-based courses and mentor contract learning courses. They are also asked to evaluate their own courses for currency and to evaluate the services of the Distance Learning Office.

The appointment process and more detail on faculty responsibilities and organizational structure are provided under Standard Five.

### ***Courses***

Charter Oak has evolved from an institution that offered no courses to one which offers more than 150 online, credit-based distance learning courses. By 2002, the College was offering enough distance learning courses to fulfill more than 50 percent of its degree requirement; as a result, it submitted to NEASC a Substantive Change request which was approved (**Evidence: BSAADocuments/BS12**). Charter Oak also offers a small number of noncredit distance learning courses to meet workforce needs in the State of Connecticut.

Charter Oak is proud of its online program and the quality of its instructors, 45 percent of whom have terminal degrees (July 2006). The student retention rate for the online courses is around 90 percent. Students consistently rate the services of the Distance Learning Office highly: 97 percent in Spring 2005. Charter Oak has faculty-approved policies in place for developing courses; assessing contents, instruction, and satisfaction; faculty development; maintaining integrity; and providing support services.

The distance learning courses are offered primarily online. There are still a few video-based courses, and the College also offers contract learning (independent study). Charter Oak offers its own courses so that students have ready access to distance learning courses they need to complete Charter Oak's requirements. The courses are offered two or three times a year and are listed on the Web site, in the *Official Catalog* and in the course schedules which are produced three times a year.

Charter Oak often is invited to develop courses or programs that serve all of the other State colleges or state-wide initiatives. For example, Charter Oak was chosen to host the RN refresher course, the After School Age Credential, and the Perioperative Nursing course.



Course development is funded by grants, the Charter Oak State College Foundation, and income generated from course tuition. The courses have been instrumental in helping Charter Oak students meet their educational goals while providing a steady revenue stream for the College.

Courses are recommended for development by the College's Strategic Planning Distance Learning Committee (staff), the Distance Learning Faculty Committee, faculty, Academic Committees, students, and outside agencies. Through its Distance Learning and Assessment committees, Charter Oak has established a course approval process that includes faculty evaluation of content, level, and pedagogy (**Evidence: Distance Learning Courses/DL1, DL2, DL10**). Course outcomes are linked to those of general education or concentration outcomes.

Since Charter Oak teaching faculty are all adjuncts and are paid per student, Charter Oak rarely cancels courses. Average enrollment is approximately 13 students (**Evidence: Distance Learning Courses/DL9**) Charter Oak also allows an individual student to develop a course-specific learning contract (faculty-directed independent study) when a course needed for graduation is not available.

All courses are taught by faculty who have the requisite expertise and are approved by the Core Consulting Faculty. Charter Oak offers credit courses in 15, eight, and five-week formats (the noncredit courses are offered in a variety of formats, including tutorials). Threaded discussions are an integral part of most of the courses and many of the business-related courses are team-dependent. Students in credit courses are required to submit numerous written assignments. Turnitin, a software program is used by faculty to check for plagiarism. Students are informed about the College's policy on plagiarism through course syllabi and the *Student Handbook* (**Evidence: Publications/PU3 p. 17**).

Core Consulting Faculty have developed guidelines for Distance Learning Teaching Faculty that include expectations for appropriate response time to students, grading rubrics and grading scale, and academic policies (**Evidence: Distance Learning Courses/DL12**). As a result, course satisfaction is at 90 percent (**Evidence: Distance Learning Annual Report: Document Room**).

### **Academic Support Services**

Strong, personalized academic advising is at the heart of the Charter Oak model. The advising process takes into account a student's preferred method of acquiring credits and personal circumstances. Academic counselors are expert at working with students at a distance. From the time of enrollment, students have ready access to their academic counselors by electronic means or in person for assistance in customizing their programs of study within Charter Oak guidelines. Counselors guide students in finding appropriate learning resources and/or methods of having their learning evaluated and assist students in planning their baccalaureate concentrations. For guidance with curricular matters, counselors have ready access to Core Consulting Faculty.

Information literacy is essential for Charter Oak students, both for success in degree completion and to function in today's society. It is a general education requirement. Students can avail themselves of a one-credit, diagnostic/prescriptive self-paced course which covers fundamental computer and information literacy skills necessary for success in school, business and industry. Students can also demonstrate this competency through other coursework and documented experience. Through the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (CTDLC), students also have access to a basic computer literacy tutorial.

Students have online access to their status reports, fees paid, graduation information, the *Student Handbook*, the *Portfolio Handbook*, concentration worksheets, and information about transcripts received. They can connect with fellow students via the e-Lounge. The Blackboard tutorial and a Tip Sheet for searching iCONN, Connecticut's digital library, are available online.

E-tutoring, a CTDLC online enhancement tool, provides students with help in math, writing, and other academic areas. Charter Oak also provides online and on-ground workshops on how to navigate an online course, how to use an online library and internet resources, and how to cite resources correctly in term papers. In 2005, Charter Oak contracted with MSB Direct, an online book vendor that provides study tactics and research assistance, and with the Jones e-global online library to provide 24/7 library services.

A Charter Oak degree requires six credits in English/Written Communication. Students whose Concentration Plans of Study have been deemed grammatically unacceptable or who have not completed their writing requirement are encouraged to use Criterion, a writing assessment tool which also is built into the two composition courses offered by Charter Oak. Students who matriculate at Charter Oak without having completed their composition requirements are strongly encouraged to take those courses first. Charter Oak has also developed a one-credit research writing course for students who have completed their writing requirements but need assistance in writing a term paper. The full scope of student services is discussed under Standard Six of this document.

Charter Oak acknowledges that adults return to college to earn their degree as quickly as possible so they can advance in their careers, attend graduate school, or obtain a job. Therefore, Charter Oak graduates its students six times a year. A formal graduation ceremony is held in June. For those who cannot attend, a Web cast is available via the Internet.

### **Partnerships**

Charter Oak has established several partnership agreements that have been approved by the Board. In all cases the College followed its normal procedures for program and course approval.

**Aetna Healthcare Program.** Charter Oak entered into a contract with Aetna in 2001 to provide on-site academic advisement for Aetna employees enrolled in the College's associate degree program. Two-years later, the program was modified to allow Aetna employees to pursue baccalaureate degrees as well. Aetna provides funding for employees to pursue degrees from Charter Oak and for an academic counselor whose office hours are split between Charter Oak and the corporation. Originally, the program was designed so the students would complete an associate degree with a focus in Health Care Studies, a program developed in collaboration with Rio Salado College in Arizona. A number of students are now pursuing bachelor's degrees, most with concentrations in Individualized Studies or Healthcare Administration. As of June 30, 2006, there were 63 matriculants in associate degree programs and 109 in bachelor's degree programs. To date, 53 have earned an associate degree, 30 a bachelor's degree, and four a certificate (**Evidence: Aetna Agreement: Document Room**).

**Bridgepoint Education.** Charter Oak entered into a partnership with Bridgepoint Education in 2004. This program was an expansion of an earlier partnership with Charter Learning. Both entities are for-profit companies that provide courses recommended for credit by the American Council on Education (ACE). The program began July 1, 2004 and is scheduled to end June 30, 2007. No new applications have been accepted since July 31, 2005, and those who had applied had to be matriculated by December 31, 2005. The partnership allows students to earn their

degree from Charter Oak by taking ACE approved courses offered by Bridgepoint Education and, in some cases, by completing courses from Rio Salado College. The partnership also provided initial startup dollars for a student data base upgrade and for a Charter Oak staff person to develop articulation agreements with community colleges. Seven hundred and forty students have matriculated through the Bridgepoint Education partnership (see Addendum: Bridgepoint Education).

**Allen Institute.** The Allen Institute, located in Hebron, Connecticut, is a non-profit residential and innovative learning center facility for young adults with learning disabilities. The agreement has evolved into an arrangement that allows Charter Oak to exchange information about the Allen Institute students with Allen Institute staff and to work together to provide academic support services to the students. It also allows Allen Institute students to take courses at Charter Oak even though they may not have the nine-credit requirement for matriculation. Students take Charter Oak's online courses and on-ground courses at Manchester Community College. The Charter Oak Director of Academic Services assists with student advising and coordinates the program. Sixteen students have matriculated at Charter Oak and four have received their degrees from Charter Oak.

**Briarwood College.** Under a joint agreement, Briarwood College, a NEASC accredited institution, refers its students to Charter Oak for distance learning courses (**Evidence: AcademicProgram/AC4**). This agreement provides Briarwood students access to distance learning courses not offered by Briarwood.

**Public Safety Education Institute (PSEI).** PSEI is a company based in Phoenix, Arizona, and dedicated to providing collegiate-level educational opportunities to public safety professionals. Charter Oak faculty have approved their courses for content and pedagogy and have developed a concentration in Public Safety Administration based on these courses. The courses have also been approved by PONSI for on-ground delivery, although PSEI does not currently offer them on-ground. The original courses were also a part of Grand Canyon University's curriculum. Since the agreement was established, some of the courses have been dropped and others added to better reflect current changes in the field. The new courses and faculty have also undergone Charter Oak's review process. Charter Oak licenses their public safety administration courses. PSEI is responsible for recruiting the instructors; however, Charter Oak has final approval of the instructors, and the pedagogy must conform to Charter Oak guidelines. These courses and faculty fall under the same review and evaluation process as all Charter Oak courses. The agreement grants a permanent license for the courses to Charter Oak should PSEI dissolve its corporation (**Evidence: AcademicProgram/AC3**).

**Paier College of Art.** Paier College is a private college accredited by the State of Connecticut and the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of Technology to offer the Bachelor of Fine Arts and Associate of Fine Arts. Charter Oak and Paier entered into an agreement in 2004-05 that permits Paier College students to earn a bachelor's degree from Charter Oak while earning a bachelor's degree from Paier (**Evidence: Two-Year College Agreements: Document Room**). This agreement is primarily for students who want to earn their master's degree and need a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited institution. The Paier students have to meet all of Charter Oak's requirements as well as the requirements from Paier. Charter Oak has always accepted credits earned from non-regionally accredited colleges that are licensed and accredited by the State of Connecticut. This agreement formalized the process with

Paier and was based on a review of their programs and approval of the Academic Council. To date, four students have enrolled through this agreement (**Evidence: AcademicProgram/AC5**).

Additionally, Charter Oak has articulation agreements with the public two-year institutions in Connecticut and a number of two-year institutions in other states (**Evidence: Two-Year College Agreements: Document Room**).

### **Workforce Development Initiatives**

Using its expertise in distance learning, Charter Oak tries to meet the course needs of both its students and the workforce. Therefore, it actively pursues grants to assist with course development and has received grants from the CTDLC, Connecticut Charts-a-Course, and Connecticut's Career Ladder Program. These outreach efforts have resulted in:

**LPN Bridge course.** This course was first offered in Spring 2001 for nurses who want to return to college for their RN. This course is the approved course for the state-wide LPN to RN articulation agreement. Students enrolled in this course have been accepted into RN programs at one of the two-year colleges. As of July 1, 2006, 169 students have completed the course.

**RN and LPN noncredit refresher course series.** These courses were developed in conjunction with the Connecticut League for Nursing (CLN) with funding from the CTDLC to meet workforce needs. The RN course series was developed in Fall 2001 and has had 126 students successfully complete the series. The LPN course series was developed in Fall 2002 and has had 15 successfully complete. The LPN series is being revised to fit an on-demand format.

**Home Health Care noncredit course.** To meet workforce needs, this course was developed in Fall 2003 in conjunction with the CLN and with funding from the CTDLC. As of July 1, 2006, 11 students have completed the program. This course is being offered in an on-demand format. Home health care facilities can also license the course.

**Pharmacy Refresher noncredit course series.** This series was developed in Fall 2003 in conjunction with the Connecticut Pharmacists Association (CPA) with funding from the CTDLC to meet workforce needs. As of July 1, 2006, three students have completed the entire series. However, 59 have completed Module One. Module Two is state-oriented. Currently Charter Oak and CPA have agreements with New York and Massachusetts to provide their training; therefore, if students are not from Connecticut, New York, or Massachusetts, Module Two is not relevant. As the number of states who participate in the program increases, enrollment should also increase. Many pharmacists do not take Module Three because they are currently employed and are enrolling because they have been in the field for a long time and would like to get updated on the newer drugs or, if unemployed, are able to find employment without taking the third module. However, according to the CPA, the College can expect an increase in the number of students completing Module Two and going on to Module Three.

**Perioperative Nursing noncredit course.** The course, for nurses who want to move into the operating room setting, was developed in conjunction with CLN and the Connecticut Hospital Association with funding from a Career Ladders Grant from the Office of Workforce Competitiveness. The pilot will be offered Fall 2006.

**Child Care Director's Credential.** This credential was developed in collaboration with Connecticut Charts-A-Course, the Connecticut Department of Social Services, and the Hartford Area Child Care Collaborative. The Connecticut Director's Credential (CDC) seeks to recognize expertise in leadership and promote development of professional outcomes and competencies among directors of childcare programs. Charter Oak administers the program. Funding was provided by Connecticut Charts-a-Course. From Summer 2003 to July 1, 2006, 11 had received the initial credential, 37 the provisional, 9 the standard, and 8 the masters.

**After School Education Credential (ASE).** This credential was developed in 2006 through collaboration with Connecticut School-Age Care Alliance, and Connecticut Charts-a-Course. The ASE seeks to recognize after school education professionals. Funding for the program startup and course development came from Connecticut Charts-a-Course. As of July 1, 2006, four students have completed the credential.

### **Integrity in the Award of Academic Credit**

The Charter Oak Core Consulting Faculty work with the Charter Oak administration and staff to ensure the integrity of the academic program. The degree requirements are clearly published in print and on the College Web site. The part-time nature of Charter Oak students makes it difficult to predict length of time needed to meet degree requirements; therefore, length of time to complete the program is published as an average.

The Associate in Arts and Associate in Science require a minimum of 60 credits; the Bachelor of Arts, and Bachelor of Science, a minimum of 120 credits. The baccalaureate concentration requirements, which are similar to those of a major and established by Core Consulting Faculty, are outcome-based. The general education requirements, which are also outcome-based, are reviewed and approved by the Core Consulting Faculty. They are in compliance with standards set by the Connecticut Department of Higher Education and NEASC and support of the College's definition of an educated adult.

Core Consulting Faculty establish and supervise the College's academic standards and regulations. They ensure that, no matter how the learning is acquired, a degree is equivalent to a same degree awarded by traditional, regionally accredited institutions of higher education. Core Consulting Faculty are drawn from regionally accredited colleges and universities; therefore they know the standards for accreditation, the curriculum standards in their respective degrees, and academic standards at their respective campuses. They have developed Charter Oak concentrations based on major requirements at their own institutions and at other regionally accredited institutions, they conduct the final graduation audits on a random sample of twenty percent of each graduating class, and they evaluate and approve the Academic Autobiography graduation requirement. They evaluate the course content and pedagogy of our distance learning courses, something that is not usually done at other institutions.

As evidence of the quality of the degree, Charter Oak graduates have been accepted into graduate schools in all disciplines, including medical science and law. Graduates have gone on to colleges, including Yale University, Harvard University, Central Connecticut State University, University of Phoenix, Tufts University, Florida State University, Yeshiva University, Western New England School of Law, University of Hartford, Arizona State University, and Rio Salado College's post-baccalaureate teacher certification program. A more extensive list appears in the *Official Catalog*. Ninety-seven percent of Charter Oak graduates who entered graduate school stated that their college education prepared them for an "advanced degree" (**Evidence:**

**GraduateSurveys/GS1-GS6**) and 98.4 percent of the alumni surveyed in Spring 2005 stated the same (**Evidence: AlumniSurveys/AS1**). In addition, the Assessment Committee has looked at grades earned and have found that Charter Oak student grades are consistent regardless of where courses are taken (Table 1).

<b>Courses taken after matriculation at Charter Oak</b>	<b>GPA</b>
Courses from all sources	3.51
Charter Oak courses only	3.48
Non-Charter Oak courses only	3.51

**Table 1: Graduate grade point data 2002-2006**

Core Consulting Faculty have established policies for the acceptance of credits from other institutions. For example, credits must have been earned by completion of a course of instruction that is acceptable toward a degree offered by the issuing institution; and the courses must come from a regionally accredited institution or an institution accredited by the State of Connecticut. Both college-wide and program-specific articulation agreements have been established with numerous community colleges.

Methods of assessing the quality of testing programs have been accepted by Charter Oak and approved by the Academic Council. When Charter Oak develops a test to assess learning, a psychometrics process is used. When Charter Oak decided to accept tests developed by Excelsior College and Thomas Edison State College, the Assessment Committee evaluated the psychometric used. The tests and the credit recommendations were then approved by the Academic Council.

Courses offered by Charter Oak are developed, monitored and evaluated under policies approved by the Academic Council.

The Academic Council has also approved acceptance of credit recommendations made by the American Council on Education (ACE), National PONSI, and assessments of noncredit programs under Charter Oak's Connecticut Credit Assessment Program which follows procedures set by the Core Consulting Faculty. Core Consulting Faculty have reviewed the process used by ACE and PONSI and have accepted the credit recommendations with some exceptions. Exceptions are primarily in the area of business where the Academic Council decided to treat the courses such as Principles of Management and Principles of Marketing as lower level courses regardless if they were taken at a community college, four-year institution, through standardized testing or recommended following ACE or PONSI reviews.

There are instances where the Core Consulting Faculty question the level of a course when they are reviewing the Concentration Plan of Study. In those cases, Charter Oak acquires the course syllabus and sends it to two faculty with expertise in that area for review. Charter Oak accepts the recommendation of the review. This happened most recently with computer science courses offered by the University of Phoenix where the faculty reduced the level of the course, and with computer science courses transcribed by Western Governor's University where faculty reduced both the number of credits and the level of the course.

In order for Charter Oak to accept credits for experiential learning from another regionally accredited institution, Charter Oak checks to ensure that the other college followed CAEL guidelines for experiential learning credit. Charter Oak transcripts clearly show how courses, tests, ACE and PONSI credit, etc. are accepted.

Students with foreign credentials must have them evaluated by organizations approved by the Academic Council. These include Educational Credential Evaluators, Inc. (ECE) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; World Education Services in New York City; and the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers in Washington, D.C. To be admitted to Charter Oak, students with foreign credentials must have completed the six-credit English writing requirement. To complete their degree at Charter Oak, they must earn at least 30 acceptable credits for a bachelor's degree or 15 acceptable credits for an associate degree from appropriate institutions based in the United States.

The College has a Student Code of Conduct (SCC) and Academic Appeals and Academic Honesty policies to which students are expected to adhere. They are mentioned in the *Official Catalog* and in the Distance Learning Course Schedule and fully explained at length in the *Student Handbook*. Turnitin, a software program, is used by Distance Learning Teaching Faculty to check for plagiarism. A lengthy article on plagiarism has appeared in *Update*, the newsletter for students. Other methods used to heighten students' awareness are links on the College Web site on correct citing of sources; information in course syllabi on the College's cheating and plagiarism policy; and on-ground student workshops regarding correct citations. Distance Learning Teaching Faculty are notified of Charter Oak policies and of ways of preventing cheating.

Charter Oak established an Academic Forgiveness Policy that allows students a one-time option of requesting to have transferred grades permanently removed from their transcript. Matriculated students are notified that they can have these credits removed if they make their written request by a specified date, which is approximately one month after receiving their first Status Report from the academic counselor. This policy allows students who had a poor start in college a number of years ago a chance to improve their grade point average (**Evidence: Publications/PU1 p. 29**).

Charter Oak also has policies concerning academic probation, repeat courses, and dismissal that are clearly outlined in the distance learning course schedule. If a student on academic probation cannot bring his or her grade point average up to the required 2.0 within the equivalent of a semester, the dismissal policy requires that the student be dismissed for a year. The academic probation policy includes an academic counseling component to help the student return with good academic standing. Many of these policies were established when the College began to offer a significant number of courses.

Charter Oak adheres to a standard grading scale. Until 2004-05, Charter Oak did not use the plus and minus system for its own distance learning courses or for transcribing courses in transfer. Based on the recommendation of the Distance Learning Committee and with the approval of the Academic Council, the plus and minus system was adopted to more accurately reflect student work in Charter Oak courses and in transfer courses listed on Charter Oak transcripts.

In 2004-05, Charter Oak redesigned its criteria for awarding honors at graduation. This change was made because the previous criteria had to be calculated manually, were subject to error, and resulted in too many students receiving honors. The criteria allow students to earn Honors in General Scholarship based on a minimum of 60 graded credits from any source with a QPA of 3.5 or higher and Charter Oak State College Honors based on a QPA of 3.5 or higher and a minimum of 30 credits in Charter Oak courses or through exams that yield letter grades. The

designation of Honors in General Scholarship is also available to associate degree students who have earned 30 graded credits from any source with a minimum QPA of 3.5.

The College routinely conducts surveys of student learning. The graduate survey, conducted immediately upon completion of graduation requirements, assesses the extent to which students think they mastered the general education requirements. Results of the Spring 2005 survey indicated that they felt that upon graduation they were "very competent" or "competent" (scores ranged from 92 percent to 99 percent) in all of the general education areas. The Distance Learning Teaching Faculty, academic counselors, Core Consulting Faculty, Assessment Committee members, and the Director of Institutional Research regularly monitor students' progress (**Evidence: Assessment Guide: Document Room**). These assessments have resulted in the establishment of a one credit research writing course, a developmental math course, monthly chats on how to write the Concentration Plan of Study and the Academic Autobiography, an examination of what courses meet the general education requirements, a reduction of the number of general education requirements that can be met by one course, and the planned development of an orientation course.

There are faculty-developed outcomes for each concentration that determine the concentration requirements. The outcomes were revamped between 2002 and 2006. Charter Oak offers all the courses for some concentrations; however, students can still take these courses elsewhere or earn the required credits through other means. Capstone courses are required in such concentrations and enable students to demonstrate that they have met concentration outcomes. The Assessment Committee will be evaluating the capstone requirement to determine if it should be required in all concentrations.

The Concentration Plan of Study serves as an initial measure of student learning. The plan allows the Core Consulting Faculty to assess whether the student has college-level writing ability. If not, the faculty can recommend that the student get assistance. The Concentration Plan of Study format provides students the opportunity to receive advice from faculty experts soon after matriculation in the particular disciplines, in the subject or interdisciplinary plan. Whenever faculty recommended that students get assistance with writing, those comments are sent to the students and reinforced by their Charter Oak academic counselor. Since the results of the Concentration Plan of Study are sent to the Core Consulting Faculty at the time the Academic Autobiography is reviewed, the faculty can see if the writing ability of the student has improved. Although Charter Oak has not done a systematic study of this, it appears that the writing quality of those who sought assistance showed marked improvement. The reverse is also evident.

Assessing student learning is a challenge when not all of the learning has taken place at Charter Oak. However, progress has been made in this area by requiring the Academic Autobiography, a policy instituted during the 2004-2005 academic year. The Academic Autobiography is designed to assess the overall academic experience inclusive of the general education and concentration requirements, and students' writing ability. Members of the Core Consulting Faculty evaluate each student's Academic Autobiography using a faculty-developed rubric. The Academic Autobiography measures students' ability to write at a college-level and their ability to articulate the degree earned—how the general education courses and the concentration meet the College's definition of an educated student. Students also have to be able to explain how the general education courses and concentration courses have impacted their personal and/or professional life.



The Academic Autobiography process was the result of a year-long deliberation on outcomes assessment and involved each of the Core Consulting Faculty academic committees, the Assessment Committee and the Academic Council. The Academic Autobiography process was piloted for one-year in order to make sure that the grading rubric was measuring the writing level accurately and to ensure students and faculty understood the process. Adjustments were made to the grading rubric, grading instructions were clarified for faculty, and an administrative tracking process was implemented and directions for the students were improved. Analysis of the grading rubrics has shown that students have the most problem addressing the section on general education. As of May 2006, only two students have not graduated because they could not successfully complete the academic autobiography. However, 22 percent (28 percent of students recruited by Bridgepoint Education) had to do a rewrite.

At each Core Consulting academic committee meeting, the faculty are given the number of Concentration Plans of Study and Academic Autobiographies approved and two or three are scored as a group to ensure consistency in grading. During these meetings, the faculty are given a chance to discuss the process and questions they have about the scoring. As mentioned earlier this has resulted in improvements in the process and an increase in the number of "chat" sessions and "Web casts" held for students on the two requirements.

## *Appraisal*

### **Degree Programs**

Surveys of alumni and graduating students confirm that the College's practice adheres to its mission. Surveys indicate that students select Charter Oak because the College acknowledges past learning and learning from outside the traditional formats (98 percent), offers students the freedom to choose how and where they want to learn (96 percent), and allows them the opportunity to design their own degree (95 percent) (Average of 2003, 2004, and 2005 data). Sixty-five percent of the 2005 graduating class earned degrees in either Individualized Studies or Liberal Studies. The College's practice also exemplifies an adult model that is student-directed and makes sense for mid-professionals (**Evidence: Graduate Surveys; Alumni Surveys; Graduation statistics**).

Some students have expressed disappointment because the name of their self-designed concentration does not appear on their transcript (it states Individualized Studies or Liberal Studies). The staff has taken this concern to the Academic Council and, after much discussion, the consensus was to retain the current policy. The Academic Council felt that if the foci of the concentrations were to be named, the number of credits in each area would have to be defined, thus taking away the flexibility of the concentration.

Subject area concentrations are based on majors offered at regionally accredited institutions and guided by the expertise of the Core Consulting Faculty. Although these concentrations are not as popular as the Individualized and Liberal Studies concentrations, their availability is what often attracts prospective students to Charter Oak.

The Charter Oak degree programs prepare the students well for acceptance to graduate and professional studies programs (**Evidence: Publications/PU1 pp. 98-99**). The Alumni Survey for Spring 2005 shows about 50 percent of graduates go on to further study, and 98 percent of those who responded say they are well prepared. The fields of study include: Business (15 percent); Education (18 percent); Organizational Management (5 percent); Psychology (5 percent); Information Systems (5 percent); Nursing (4 percent); and Health (4 percent).

## **General Education**

The Core Consulting Faculty review of general education requirements in 2002-2003 resulted in a number of changes which were implemented in 2005. The general education requirements specify the knowledge that the College expects its students to acquire, are in line with State and NEASC recommendations, decrease the number of courses that can fulfill more than one requirement, and provide for more flexibility in meeting the requirements.

## **Concentration**

The College's Assessment Guide contains a timeline for review of concentrations by the faculty committees. During the review of the Business Administration concentration and the development of the Health Care Administration, American Studies, and Public Safety Administration concentrations, the Core Consulting Faculty decided that a capstone course should be required in each concentration to ensure sequential progression and synthesis of learning. Charter Oak offers all of the courses required for these concentrations. As mentioned earlier, the College will be evaluating the effectiveness of the capstone course as an assessment tool.

## **Courses**

Charter Oak has a sound course proposal and approval process in place, and the Distance Learning Faculty Committee and the College's administration review it annually. Recently two changes have been made to the course proposal process. The course developer must now submit a resumé with the course proposal for Core Consulting Faculty review, and course outcomes must now be linked either to general education outcomes or concentration outcomes. The College also requires that Core Consulting Faculty monitor courses the first time they are taught.

Charter Oak uses the student evaluation form developed by the CTDLC (**Evidence: Distance Learning Courses/DL13-DL14**). These evaluations are used for course improvement and are considered when renewing distance learning faculty contracts. The evaluation results are submitted to the administration, Assessment Committee, Distance Learning Committee, and Distance Learning Teaching Faculty and are reported to the Board annually. Instructors also evaluate their own courses to determine whether changes should be made to the content or the method of delivery, e.g., video to online. The Assessment Committee and Distance Learning Committee have approved the implementation of five-year reviews of all courses, both for content and pedagogy.

## **Academic Support Services**

The key to a successful experience for students at Charter Oak is the personalized academic advising process which the College provides. The survey of graduating students indicates that 92 percent of the students are satisfied or very satisfied with the academic counseling they have received (**Evidence: Graduate Surveys**). Academic counselors contact students on a regular basis to discuss academic progress with their students. In turn, the students are encouraged to contact their counselor to receive current and accurate information regarding their progress and help in the selection of courses and tests. Comments on the graduate survey and other anecdotal evidence acknowledge the value of this interaction.

Contact between the student and the academic counselor is important for student retention. At the same time, with "instant" access of e-mail comes the expectation of 24/7 response. This coupled with the new CPS and AA processes has increased the work load of the staff. The new

student information system, a Web-based CPS and AA tutorial, and the proposed orientation course will help address some of the time concerns.

When the Concentration Plan of Study (CPS) and Academic Autobiography (AA) processes were implemented, counselors developed printed materials to help students understand how to prepare the documents. To supplement the materials, the counselors instituted online chats and on-ground workshops and wrote articles for *Update* to supplement the printed materials. The College has increased the frequency of the workshops, which have an average attendance of 30 for on-ground sessions and 50 for online sessions. These strategies have had a positive impact on the quality of the work being submitted.

The College recognizes the need to encourage students to submit the CPS and the AA in a timely manner. The *Student Handbook* and *Official Catalog* specify when they should be submitted. The current CPS process allows for faculty to review the plan early in the student's enrollment; however, students tend to procrastinate. An orientation course and a Web-based tutorial are under discussion.

The autonomy of Charter Oak's program, which allows students to design their own degrees and choose how, where, and when to earn credits, is both a strength and a weakness. Occasionally, students take the wrong course/test because they have not sought guidance. Students currently do not need a course approval form signed by their academic counselors before earning credits, with the exception of those on financial aid and those who come through the Bridgepoint Education program. The College is considering requiring this process for all students.

Increase in the number of distance learning courses and out-of-state students require better access to library services. The College has upgraded library service to include the online 24/7 Jones e-global library to supplement those of iCONN.

The College has instituted an online tutorial on how to navigate Blackboard in response to the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium's assessment and to the wealth of studies on retention in distance learning courses which indicate the value of such a service. The College has also added a self-paced information/computer literacy course to support the general education requirement in Information Literacy. It will also offer a noncredit computer literacy tutorial through the CTDLC. Charter Oak is currently reviewing the literacy assessment tool developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS).

The College has adopted the use of Criterion, a writing assessment tool developed by ETS, for students enrolled in English Composition courses. Criterion is available to any student free of charge.

### **Staffing**

The increase in demand for distance learning courses has placed a strain on staffing and the technical infrastructure. A part-time administrative assistant was added in 2005-06. A full-time director was hired in Fall 2006. The process analysis conducted in 2005 confirmed that some staffing issues could be resolved by having a better technical infrastructure in place. For example, it would be more efficient if faculty could input grades online directly into the transcribing process, if the College's e-commerce system were designed to meet Charter Oak's needs, and if the College could collect faculty evaluation data online.

A number of additional factors have placed demands on staff and faculty: the addition of the CPS and AA requirements, partnerships, the need for assessment driven decisions, more proactive

contact with students, the demand for a quicker turn around time for transcript evaluations, and more written articulation agreements with two-year colleges.

Charter Oak baccalaureate students often present multiple transcripts of prior learning, including documents of military training for evaluation by the Registrar's Office. Length of time for completion of an evaluation varies by student because of the complexities associated with this activity. Recently, additional staff have been added.

The case load of an academic counselor can be as high as 300 students, so the counselors sometimes have difficulty responding to students as quickly as students expect in this electronic age. The new SIS will provide the students with the tools to access the information they currently can receive only through their counselors, and that the system will provide counselors better access to information to enable faster communication with students.

### **Assessment**

Once the general education outcomes and most of the concentration outcomes were in place, the Assessment Committee developed a formal Assessment Plan to maintain currency and quality. The Plan calls for a regular cycle of review of distance learning courses, concentrations, the portfolio assessment process, and the evaluation procedure of non-collegiate course/programs. Currently, students assess the online courses using the form developed by the CTDL. The College's goal is to be able to add its course outcomes to that form so students can assess how well they believe they have achieved the outcomes and how well the outcomes were addressed. Charter Oak also participated in a pilot program funded by CTDL with a Davis Grant to use e-portfolio for outcomes assessment in distance learning.

Charter Oak supports development programs for Core Consulting Faculty and Distance Learning Teaching Faculty so that they can become more knowledgeable about assessment by attending conferences and participating in grant funded programs.

### **Partnerships**

With each new partnership, the College has learned better ways of serving its students. However, Charter Oak has also found that partnerships can stretch the staff and make it difficult to control quality, ensure services, and maintain integrity. Following issues raised by its partnership with Bridgepoint Education, the College has established a Partnership Committee that reviews partnership proposals for quality, fit with mission, benefit to the College, resources available or needed, and benefit to the College. The committee makes its recommendations to the administration.

### ***Projection***

The College will undertake a number of assessments of various aspects of its programs. Beginning in Fall 2007, The Assessment Committee will be evaluating the general education outcomes to determine how well they have been met by graduates, if the College has accurately designated courses as meeting the outcomes, and if the Academic Autobiography is an appropriate tool for evaluating students' understanding of general education and its impact on their personal and professional goals.

During the summer of 2007, the Director of Institutional Research, in conjunction with the Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Assessment Committee, will evaluate the use of online library services by both students and faculty to determine if the services are meeting students'

needs and if faculty are requiring assignments that assist students in developing information literacy skills. Evaluations of online library use will be conducted on a yearly basis.

Faculty have begun the examination of concentration capstone courses to determine if they meet the outcomes of the concentrations. The Assessment Committee will decide, based on the results of the faculty examination, whether capstone courses are indeed a sound assessment tool and if they should be implemented for all concentrations. The Assessment Committee had also discussed having students submit a portfolio, to demonstrate outcomes learned, but determined that this would not work because students would not have samples of work for courses being transferred to the College. The College's Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Director of Institutional Research meet with their counterparts at Thomas Edison State College, Excelsior College, and Empire State College to discuss similar issues and to share data and research. Assessment is one of the key issues discussed. These peer institutions are also looking at capstone courses because they have not been satisfied with other methods they have tried, such as testing.

The College will continue to improve processes to orient students to the requirements of its program and to assist them in fulfilling requirements. The Director of Academic Services, with the assistance of the academic counselors and input from the Core Consulting Faculty, will continue to work on ways to improve students' ability to prepare the Concentration Plan of Study and the Academic Autobiography. The goal is to facilitate the process and encourage students to submit the documents in timely fashion. At the same time, the Director of Academic Services will work with Core Consulting Faculty and academic counselors to develop an online orientation for students to be implemented during the 2006-2007 academic year.

With the installation of the new student information system (SIS), academic counselors will be able to be more proactive in contacting students, thus increasing retention. The system will allow them to contact students easily on a regular basis, track contacts, and personalize contacts. In addition, the new SIS will enable the College to automate the process of identifying courses that meet the general education requirement on the students' record

The College will continue to expand its distance learning course offerings to meet the needs of its students, the concentrations, and the work force. Courses will be evaluated on a five-year rotating basis beginning Spring 2006. Once the new SIS is in place, a new course evaluation form will be developed to facilitate assessment of course outcomes by students.

In response to the growth of the distance learning program in Fall 2006, the College hired a director with expertise in instructional design and assessment to oversee the program. The director will also have limited teaching responsibilities. Additional staff will be added throughout the College, as program growth requires, to provide quality student services. Charter Oak will determine if it would be advantageous, when hiring new academic counselors, to require that they have teaching experience, and that they teach one course per year.

The College will continue to develop partnerships to attract adult students. It will carefully evaluate each partnership for fit with the College's mission and its impact on staffing and finances.

### *Institutional Effectiveness*

The culture of Charter Oak is one of assessment. It is founded on the principle that it is possible to assess learning, regardless of its source. Faculty, administration, and staff are in full support of this principle and exemplify it through policy development and implementation of programs.

Policies for the assessment of learning are developed by Core Consulting Faculty and implementation of these policies is monitored through regular evaluations. The College regularly surveys students and graduates to determine if they are satisfied with their experience at Charter Oak and if it has prepared them for further study and/or career advancement (**Evidence: Graduate Surveys**).

The College employs an outcome-based approach to developing courses, concentrations, and general education requirements and has a process in place for regular evaluation of quality of instruction and acquisition of knowledge. Charter Oak has implemented the Academic Autobiography as an assessment tool to determine if the College is graduating students who can write, understand general education, and can explain how the elements of their degree program fit together. Evidence to date indicates that the Autobiography is an effective tool.

Charter Oak regularly assesses its programs and services through student and faculty surveys. It responds appropriately to student requests for better service as is evident in the expansion of library services and the acquisition of a new book vendor. Faculty and academic counselors are instrumental in assessing student needs and their recommendations have led to changes including the development of an elementary algebra online course and new concentrations and to the use of a writing assessment instrument.

The commitment of Charter Oak to evaluating the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of its programs is exemplified by the fact that the College's Assessment Committee, working with the Vice President for Academic Affairs, has begun developing an academic assessment plan to evaluate institutional effectiveness.

## **STANDARD FIVE: Faculty**

### ***Description***

Charter Oak's faculty model is different from that of most institutions. It presents great challenges, but also great rewards. The faculty model allows the College to employ individuals with content expertise and knowledge about adult learning from across the state of Connecticut, and, at times, across the nation.

Charter Oak employs three groups of faculty: Core Consulting Faculty, Adjunct Consulting Faculty, and Distance Learning Teaching Faculty (see Institutional Characteristics for Venn Diagram, page xii). As defined by State statute, the Core Consulting Faculty have no full-time teaching or administrative duties at Charter Oak, unlike the faculty of a traditional teaching institution. Members of the Core Consulting Faculty are drawn from public and private accredited colleges and universities in Connecticut and bring with them discipline expertise and information about academic policies on their home campuses. Adjunct Consulting Faculty and Distance Learning Teaching Faculty either come from regionally accredited colleges and universities or are professionals in their field of expertise. All hold appropriate advanced degrees. Charter Oak has 64 Core Consulting Faculty, 73 percent of whom have terminal degrees; approximately 90 Distance Learning Teaching Faculty, credit and noncredit, 45 percent of whom have terminal degrees; and approximately 285 Adjunct Consulting Faculty, 65 percent of whom have terminal degrees (2005-06 data).

The process of appointment differs for each group. Members of the Core Consulting Faculty are appointed/reappointed by the Board for State Academic Awards based on the nomination of the President, recommendation of the President's Advisory Committee (PAC) and approval of the Academic Council (Bylaws 7/29/2004). The President, in conjunction with appropriate staff and Core Consulting Faculty, is authorized to hire Adjunct Consulting Faculty and Distance Learning Teaching Faculty. The Distance Learning Teaching Faculty are also approved by the same Core Consulting Faculty members who review the courses for content. The Board receives bimonthly reports of the Adjunct Consulting Faculty appointments and approves continuing appointments every three years (**Evidence: BSAADocuments/BS9**). The Board approves new Distance Learning Teaching Faculty at the beginning of each semester (**Evidence: Board Reports: Document Room**). Upon appointment, a faculty member receives a letter of engagement or a contract that explicitly states the nature and term of the appointment (**Evidence: DistanceLearningCourses/DL4-DL9**).

The College adheres to its affirmative action policy of seeking diversity of race, gender, and ethnicity where possible in filling faculty positions. A comprehensive profile of current faculty is attached. The composition of the Core Consulting Faculty includes 49 percent women; nearly 18 percent minorities; 35 percent from public institutions and 84 percent from four-year institutions (**Evidence: Affirmative Action Policy: Document Room**).

Stipends are reviewed every two years and are based on function and service provided. Core Consulting Faculty are paid for each function they perform, including attending faculty meetings; evaluating students' concentration proposals (advising); reviewing new course proposals; developing concentrations; assessing portfolios; establishing course/concentration outcomes; performing graduation audits; evaluating Academic Autobiographies; developing, teaching, or approving learning contracts; and participating in Connecticut Credit Assessment Program (CCAP) evaluations. They voluntarily participate in graduation and other social and

professional functions held at Charter Oak. Adjunct Consulting Faculty are paid for each service they perform, and Distance Learning Teaching Faculty are paid for teaching and/or developing courses. A schedule of the faculty compensation is included in the *Faculty Handbook (Evidence: Faculty/FC3)*.

### **Core Consulting Faculty**

Charter Oak selects Core Consulting Faculty from public and independent two- and four-year institutions in Connecticut. They are chosen for their particular expertise and an educational philosophy which is compatible with that of an external degree program. Faculty must be knowledgeable about adult learning theory and possess an understanding of non-traditional students. Once faculty are nominated based on these criteria, they are interviewed by the Vice President for Academic Affairs to determine their understanding of non-traditional students and non-traditional education.

The Core Consulting Faculty are the backbone of the College. They help the College carry out its mission with integrity and quality. Core Consulting Faculty establish and supervise the College's academic standards and regulations. They are primarily evaluators of learning. Core Consulting Faculty ensure that, no matter how the learning is acquired, a degree from Charter Oak is equivalent to the same degree awarded by a traditional, regionally accredited institution of higher education.

This equivalency is achieved by the following: Core Consulting Faculty have developed Charter Oak concentrations based on major requirements at their own institutions and at other regionally accredited institutions; they evaluate and approve the Academic Autobiography graduation requirement; and they conduct the final graduation audits on twenty percent of each graduating class. They evaluate the course content and pedagogy of our distance learning courses, something they state is not done at their own institutions. Evidence of the equivalency includes: Charter Oak graduates are accepted into graduate schools in all disciplines, including medical science and law (**Evidence: Alumni Surveys/AS**). Review by the Assessment Committee of grades earned have found that Charter Oak students' grades are consistent regardless of where courses are taken.

The Core Consulting Faculty structure allows Charter Oak to gain from the experience the faculty have gained at their own institutions. And, because they are "adjunct", the faculty are free to express their opinions and ideas. For example, when Charter Oak was revising its general education requirements, faculty could concentrate on "what an educated student should know instead of whether or not they or their department would lose courses as is often the focus on a traditional college campus." As a result, there are lively discussions about such topics as general education, outcomes, policies, cheating, grades, and the state of academia. These discussions result in well-thought-out policies for Charter Oak.

Core Consulting Faculty have evaluated the quality of work of Charter Oak students as equal to or better than the work of the students at their respective campuses.

The faculty are highly dedicated to Charter Oak. Twenty-two of the Core Consulting Faculty (FY2005-06) have served for ten years or more, ten of those for more than 15 years. They volunteer to do "chat" sessions once a month even as late as 9 p.m. so the students on the West Coast can be accommodated; one conducted his "chat" from Starbucks. Another volunteered to do a live Web cast and another a streaming video to help students better understand the Concentration Plan of Study and Academic Autobiography. Faculty volunteer to be part of



advisory committees that are developing new concentrations; respond quickly to academic questions from Charter Oak academic counselors; and volunteer to attend workshops related to Charter Oak's needs.

The disadvantage to not having "regular" faculty is that some things seem to move more slowly, and with only three meetings a year, it is hard to get decisions made in time to meet the *Official Catalog* publication deadline. As a result, Charter Oak uses e-mail to conduct necessary business between scheduled meetings. The other disadvantage is that Charter Oak has to work around faculty schedules, sometimes resulting in delays in getting the Concentration Plans of Study and Academic Autobiographies approved in a timely manner.

The recruitment of Core Consulting Faculty is usually conducted once a year and begins in the spring semester. The Charter Oak Vice President for Academic Affairs sends letters to the vice presidents and academic deans at colleges across the state describing the role of the Charter Oak Core Consulting Faculty and requesting nominees in the areas of expertise needed. All nominees for the Core Consulting Faculty are interviewed by phone or in person by the Charter Oak Vice President for Academic Affairs. The nominees are presented by the President to the President's Advisory Council (PAC) for selection and recommendation to the Academic Council, and are then forwarded to the Board for State Academic Awards for three-year initial appointments beginning on October 1. Approved reappointments are for a five-year period (**Evidence: BSAADocuments/BS4**). In the selection process, the PAC looks at diversity in race, gender, and type of institution.

Faculty are organized into four academic committees and two program committees which are empowered by the Academic Council to assist in its work. The Academic Council establishes academic policy and the requirements and standards for award of academic credit, sets requirements for such degrees as the College is authorized to award, validates credits earned at other accredited institutions, and makes recommendations to the BSAA for award of degrees to duly enrolled and qualified candidates. The Council is composed of 17 senior Core Consulting Faculty members, including the chairs of each of the academic committees, and two Charter Oak staff. Core Consulting Faculty who retire from teaching at their home institutions are eligible to be appointed to the PAC. As members of the PAC, they are non-voting members of the Academic Council. One member of the Academic Council serves as the Dean of the Faculty and another as Associate Dean. Both serve for two years; ordinarily the Associate Dean becomes the Dean. The Dean and Associate Dean are approved by the Board upon the recommendation of the PAC after consultation with the Academic Council and nomination by the President.

There are four academic committees: History and Humanities; Behavioral Sciences and Human Services; Mathematics, Science and Technology; and Business. The Academic Council delegates authority to the academic committees to establish policy matters that are distinctly discipline related. Academic committees approve concentration plans and essays, grade Academic Autobiographies, develop or revise concentrations, establish concentration outcomes, and approve learning contracts. Committees consist of a maximum of 16 members, each of whom is a content expert in a field appropriate to the committee. All members of the Academic Council also serve on an academic committee. Each academic committee is chaired by a member of the Core Consulting Faculty who is nominated by the Vice President for Academic Affairs in cooperation with the Dean of the Faculty and is approved by the PAC, the Academic Council, and the Board. The chairs of the academic committees serve for a period of two years (**Evidence: Faculty/FC6**).

There are two program committees: Distance Learning and Assessment. Members are appointed to each committee using the process noted earlier. These committees are empowered to develop policies and procedures in their area of responsibility and present them to the Academic Council for approval (**Evidence: Faculty/FC5-FC10**). The Distance Learning Committee is comprised of Core Consulting Faculty and Distance Learning Teaching Faculty. Members of this committee also review course content and monitor new instructors of distance learning courses. The Assessment Committee is comprised of Core Consulting Faculty and other faculty with expertise in assessment. Its members develop general education outcomes and participate in the assessment process of the College.

The College holds an orientation for all new Core Consulting Faculty members. At the Core Consulting Faculty orientation the President of the College, Dean of the Core Consulting Faculty, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Director of Academic Services, Distance Learning Administrator, Registrar, and Portfolio Assessment Coordinator explain the mission, structure and policies of the College and introduce them to the Concentration Plan of Study and Academic Autobiography. The *Faculty Handbook* is distributed by the Vice President for Academic Affairs. Under the auspices of Charter Oak, Core Consulting Faculty members are invited to participate in professional development activities during the year. Core Consulting Faculty also participate in activities in their own disciplines at their home institutions, and through their professional associations.

Core Consulting Faculty play a key role in advising students on course and degree selection and in assessing writing ability as part of the Concentration Plan of Study and Academic Autobiography processes. They also are available to assist the Charter Oak academic counselors with advising questions. Faculty interact with the counselors through faculty committee meetings, phone, and e-mail (see Standard Six, Academic Counselors' Role).

Core Consulting Faculty are evaluated through consultation with staff and the committee chairs on the basis of their attendance and active involvement in committee meetings, evaluations of subject-matter consultative services, and mentoring distance learning or learning contracts.

#### **Adjunct Consulting Faculty**

Adjunct Consulting Faculty are appointed on an as-needed basis to conduct special assessments and portfolio reviews when members of the Core Consulting Faculty do not have the expertise in the field being evaluated. Adjunct Consulting Faculty may come from outside Connecticut when appropriate expertise is not available at Connecticut institutions (**Evidence: Faculty/FC4**).

#### **Distance Learning Teaching Faculty**

Charter Oak's Distance Learning Teaching Faculty bring a diversity of experiences to the distance learning program as well as knowledge and expertise they have acquired in their discipline or profession. The Distance Learning Teaching Faculty members are recruited through various means including advertising and recommendations from academic administrators or current members of the Core Consulting Faculty. They are hired for course development and/or course instruction. When the Core Consulting Faculty review the course proposals, they also review the academic credentials of the instructor to make sure they have the appropriate expertise, and the Distance Learning Administrator checks teaching references. Some members of the Distance Learning Teaching Faculty also serve on the Distance Learning Committee. The contract between the College and the course developer outlines copyright and ownership rights

**(Evidence: Distance Learning Courses/DL4-DL9).** Rehiring is based upon successful evaluations and need.

Charter Oak's Distance Learning Teaching Faculty are located as closely as Central Connecticut State University and as far away as Hawaii. Having faculty from Connecticut was important when Charter Oak first started developing online courses because many of the faculty required training, but today, most of the faculty Charter Oak hires have experience teaching online and are already familiar with Blackboard, Charter Oak's learning platform.

Since most of the Distance Learning Faculty teach at other institutions, they meet the professional developmental requirements of their home institutions and maintain currency in their particular subject area. Charter Oak provides development for this faculty through a handbook and a faculty development site on Blackboard. The College also provides information and copies of articles on the latest in online pedagogy, research on adult online students, and new technologies and an electronic subscription to a distance education newsletter. Faculty are also invited to attend other professional development activities such as those offered by the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (CTDLC) and Charter Oak **(Evidence: Faculty/FacultyDev/FD1)**. For example, through its partnership with Allen Institute, the College conducted an on-ground workshop on Asperger's Syndrome that is now available on CD-rom to all faculty.

Distance Learning Teaching Faculty are provided with grading rubrics, with specific guidelines for course development and interacting with the students, and with methods for ensuring academic integrity **(Evidence: Distance Learning Courses/DL12)**. They also receive information on how to direct students to the sample online course available for orienting the student to the distance modality, tutoring, the Information Literacy and Research Writing courses for students who need assistance, the help desk, and the online library services.

Distance Learning Teaching Faculty are evaluated by members of the Distance Learning Committee who monitor the courses and by students who complete course evaluations (see Standard Four). Academic/distance learning professional staff have input in contract renewal recommendations. End-of-course evaluations are sent to faculty to identify any pedagogical problems that may exist. The Graduate Survey requests students' comments on their experience with distance learning courses.

### **Academic Integrity**

Faculty and administration work together to ensure an environment of academic integrity. The Academic Council and the Board approved changes to the Student Code of Conduct and in 2003-2004 developed Academic Appeals and Academic Honesty Policies to reflect changes in the College. Policies on honesty and plagiarism are published in course syllabi, online, and in the *Student Handbook* and *Official Catalog*. Faculty use Turnitin, an online service for detecting plagiarism. Faculty also make Turnitin available to students to use as a learning tool. The Vice President for Academic Affairs has authored a series of articles in the student newsletter to highlight the seriousness of plagiarism.

The Distance Learning Teaching Faculty has reported more than 20 cases of plagiarism in the last two years (January 2004 – January 2006). One resulted in a formal hearing. The others were resolved between the student and the Vice President for Academic Affairs. In a number of cases the students were required to take a course in research writing **(Evidence: Publications/PU1-PU3; Distance Learning Courses/DL15)**.

### **Scholarship, Research, and Creative Activity**

Charter Oak provides opportunities for faculty to participate in workshops and grant funded projects, such as the Davis and FIPSE grants on assessment and e-portfolio development, the American Academy for Liberal Education assessment project, and the NEEAN/NEASC workshop on assessment. Charter Oak provides a stipend to the faculty for their participation and pays the registration fee, if applicable.

The College also provides opportunities for its Distance Learning Teaching Faculty to remain current with distance learning pedagogy and offers a Blackboard site for faculty development. Some instructors have conducted research with their students. A policy on faculty, staff, and student research is in the process of being developed.

Charter Oak does not have research requirements for its faculty nor does it grant tenure. The faculty have to meet the requirements of their home institutions. Charter Oak requests that they update their resumés periodically and inform Charter Oak of promotions and publications. Charter Oak expects the faculty to remain current in their academic field, and if they teach for Charter Oak, the distance learning evaluation process ensures that the courses are kept up to date. As mentioned earlier, Charter Oak provides development opportunities for its faculty. Charter Oak also provides an opportunity for faculty to learn skills that they can share and use at their home institutions and at other institutions where they may be teaching on a part-time basis. For example, a number of faculty had never written learning outcomes until they developed them as part of Charter Oak's concentration outcomes; other faculty learned to develop online courses by developing and teaching them for Charter Oak; and Charter Oak exposed a number of faculty to outcomes assessment, portfolio development, and working with students with disabilities.

### ***Appraisal***

A critical appraisal of the effectiveness of the Charter Oak faculty requires a clear understanding of the College's distinctive mission, characteristics of its students, and the responsibilities of each of the different faculty groups.

### **Recruitment and Orientation**

Charter Oak has been successful in recruiting and retaining highly qualified and diverse faculty who understand the mission and context of the College. They have adapted well to the institution's non-traditional structure and are supportive of the College's culture and philosophy.

The qualifications and diversity of Core Consulting Faculty ensure that the Charter Oak degree reflects the standards of the accredited colleges and universities in Connecticut. Several Core Consulting Faculty members have given more than ten years of dedicated service to the College while others are new to Charter Oak. The Distance Learning Teaching Faculty and Adjunct Consulting Faculty also come with solid academic credentials and many have served the College for a number of years. Faculty and staff possess a visionary stance, adapt to program changes readily, and provide a blend of institutional memory and new ideas (**Evidence: Faculty/FC1**).

A concerted effort in orientation and training is essential in helping faculty adapt to Charter Oak's non-traditional structure. Anecdotal information from Core Consulting Faculty indicates that the orientation provided by Charter Oak is more extensive than the one at their home institutions. However, with the growth in the number of portfolio assessments, the Assessment Coordinator has determined that there is a need to expand the orientation for the Adjunct Consulting Faculty who conduct these assessments.

## Evaluation

The process for evaluating Core Consulting Faculty is specified in Section 5c of the Charter Oak State College by-laws. This process works well. The chair of each committee recommends reappointment through the Vice President for Academic Affairs to the President's Advisory Committee. The Charter Oak staff contributes information to the process because the chairs are sometimes not aware of work that faculty members perform outside of the committee meetings.

Evaluation of Distance Learning Faculty is ongoing and takes into consideration the assessments by student, faculty, and staff (**Evidence: Distance Learning Courses/DL Course Evaluations/ COSC Course Evaluations**). Currently, the College uses the evaluation instrument developed by the CTDLC, which is also used by a number of the colleges in the Consortium, but the form does not provide all of the necessary data. There is a need to tie the online assessment completed by students to the goals of the courses and to be able to compile data on faculty over several semesters.

The administration reviews all evaluations of Distance Learning Teaching Faculty and, if there are poor evaluations, the Distance Learning Administrator discusses them with the instructor, and the instructor is given an opportunity to improve. In cases where there have been concerns, a member of either an academic committee or the Distance Learning Committee monitors the course and evaluates the instructor and the course. If no improvement is made, the instructor receives a warning from the Vice President for Academic Affairs of possible termination. If there is still no improvement, the instructor is not given a contract for the next term. Generally, this process works well. Given feedback, faculty modify their courses and their interactions with students. However, one faculty member was not renewed for Fall 2006. This process is currently not covered in the *Distance Learning Faculty Handbook*, so the College will take steps to correct the omission.

## Instruction

The College currently uses Blackboard as its distance learning platform because it is well suited to both the course development needs of Charter Oak's faculty and to student learning. In addition, most faculty hired to develop courses have teaching experience using Blackboard. Assistance is available for faculty who have not previously used Blackboard.

Distance Learning Teaching Faculty are expected to establish a sense of community in their courses. They are expected to introduce themselves to the students and to have the students introduce themselves to each other. They are also expected to monitor and interact in online discussions and respond within 48 hours to student issues. Distance learning surveys indicate there is positive interaction in the College's online courses. Additionally, Charter Oak students and faculty have conducted research together, and some student groups have found ways of meeting in person. In the video-based courses, at the students' request, Distance Learning Teaching Faculty have also increased the amount of interaction with the students. The College recognizes that building student-faculty relationships beyond the classroom in a distance learning college brings its own unique set of problems. Staff and faculty have begun discussing ways to continue to improve this relationship.

The College continues to review and change its Course Proposal Guidelines to reflect changes in assessment requirements and policies approved by the Academic Council at the recommendations of the Distance Learning Committee and/or the Assessment Committee.

### **Advising**

Core Consulting Faculty assist the academic counselors with the advising process. They answer questions about course and concentration selection and provide feedback to students in the process of writing their Concentration Plans of Study (CPS) and Academic Autobiographies (AA). The Core Faculty score the CPS and AA and the College has developed a system which enables the electronic transfer of the CPS and AA between faculty and students. The College also provides the opportunity for students to ask Core Consulting Faculty questions through online chats. Local students have the opportunity to meet faculty at various functions held at the College, but unfortunately only a few students avail themselves of the opportunities.

The College has noted that faculty in popular concentration areas tend to receive an inordinate number of CPS's to review, so serious consideration is being given to increasing the number of Core Consulting Faculty in these areas. There is also a need to continue working with faculty to ensure consistent scoring of the CPS and AA. The electronic system of transferring the CPS and AA between students and faculty needs to be connected to the new student information system for better tracking. Finally, the College needs to find more ways of building a stronger learning community by building stronger connections with the Core Consulting Faculty.

### **Academic Integrity**

The Academic Council works closely with the administration to ensure that academic quality is maintained. The revised Student Code of Conduct, revised Course Proposal Guidelines, and the five-year review of courses are examples of policies that have been developed and implemented to help ensure integrity.

### **Scholarship, Research, and Creative Activity**

The College does not have a scholarship requirement for the faculty since they serve in an adjunct capacity and are hired on a contractual basis for specific assignments. The Core Consulting Faculty have to fulfill the requirements of their home institutions. However, the College encourages faculty to become involved in activities that enhance their teaching and service at Charter Oak. Charter Oak does not have an institutional research policy. The Vice President for Academic Affairs, along with the Assessment Committee, will be drafting such a policy in 2006-2007.

### ***Projection***

Charter Oak will continue to refine its recruitment process and seek faculty consultants who are familiar with non-traditional higher education, understand the adult learner, are willing to expand the higher education paradigm, understand the principles of distance learning, and have strong subject matter expertise. The College will continue its efforts to maintain a diverse faculty.

To further strengthen the learning community at Charter Oak, the College is considering highlighting the faculty on a routine basis in *Update*, the student newsletter, and on its Web site. It is also examining other possibilities such as conducting more online chats.

Beginning in Fall 2006, the Vice President for Academic Affairs, in conjunction with the Academic Council, will review the size of Core Consulting Faculty committees and the number of meetings to determine if changes need to be made to accommodate the assessment load and timing of policy decisions.

The Vice President, in conjunction with the Academic Council, will review the evaluation process for Core Consulting Faculty to determine if there is a more appropriate method to evaluate performance based on objective measures. The Director of Institutional Research will develop an instrument to assess the results of Charter Oak's orientation for faculty, including a comparison of Charter Oak's process to the process on their own campuses. This will begin Spring 2007.

The Portfolio Assessment Coordinator will develop an online orientation for portfolio assessment faculty to enhance the existing orientation materials. A first pilot of the orientation is scheduled for Fall 2006.

Although the Distance Learning faculty are hired on a contractual basis, the College needs to have a policy to ensure consistency in its practice and to cover instances when it chooses not to rehire an instructor. The Vice President will develop such a policy in 2006-2007, to be approved by the Academic Council and the Board.

### ***Institutional Effectiveness***

The Core Consulting Faculty are effective in meeting the needs of the College and in assisting the College in carrying out its mission. They understand the mission of the College and are dedicated to ensuring that the College carries out its mission with integrity.

Charter Oak has the ability to hire adjunct faculty as needed to meet the needs for course development and instruction, to conduct prior learning assessment, to teach contract learning courses, and to conduct special assessments. This allows Charter Oak to be responsive to individual student needs, workforce needs, and to the needs of outside agencies and institutions. The adjunct status of the Distance Learning Teaching Faculty also allows Charter Oak, despite its relatively small size, to offer a variety of instructors to the students.

Charter Oak has a process in place for evaluating its Core Consulting Faculty, Distance Learning Teaching Faculty, and Adjunct Core Consulting Faculty, although the latter needs to be better integrated into the overall assessment plan of the College. The College uses the assessment results for faculty development, rehiring faculty, and for improving student learning. The results are also used in the strategic planning process to address issues of retention, student satisfaction, enrollment, and mission.

## **STANDARD SIX: Students**

### ***Description***

Charter Oak State College's student body and student services are consistent with its mission: to provide diverse and alternate opportunities for adults to earn degrees. The average age of the Charter Oak student is 41, approximately 90 percent are employed, and most baccalaureate degree-seeking students matriculate with 85 or more credits in transfer. Reflecting national trends, there has been an increase in the number of female students since FY2000-2001. This is in part due to the contract with Aetna to provide programs for the employees in its call centers (who are mostly female), the Women in Transition program and the addition of financial aid. The increase in out-of-state students is due to the Charter Learning/Bridgepoint Education contract, increased marketing, and the increase in online course offerings. The following table is a brief summary of the Charter Oak student body.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Enrollment</b>	<b>Average Age</b>	<b>Percentage Female</b>	<b>Minority Percentage</b>	<b>Percentage Employed</b>	<b>Percentage in State</b>
2005-06	1902	40	60%	19%	92%	44%
2004-05	1496	43	56%	19%	94%	61%
2003-04	1578	41	56%	18%	91%	62%
2002-03	1561	42	55%	19%	92%	66%
2001-02	1496	41	50%	15%	81%	73%
2000-01	1459	41	48%	14%	91%	73%

As a distance learning institution, Charter Oak has a student services structure in place that does not require students to come to its campus. These services use technology as a communication and course delivery tool and are grounded in best practices for meeting the needs of adult students.

### **Admissions**

The College's Office of Admissions is staffed by a Director, an Assistant Director, and three admissions counselors. Given the unique mission of Charter Oak, admissions counselors must be able to work with applicants who may enter the institution with as few as nine credits or as many as 120 or more. The College works to ensure that the counselors are able to discuss with applicants all aspects of their educational experience at the College as well as options for earning credits for remaining degree requirements. They are regularly briefed regarding possible and actual programmatic changes, serve on a wide variety of planning committees, and attend faculty committee meetings.

The College achieves its goal of recruiting a qualified student body through a variety of scheduled outreach activities conducted each year along with paid advertising targeted to diverse adult populations. Resources such as networks of transfer counselors at community colleges, human resource professionals, military education officers, educational consultants, community organizations, graduate program counselors, and career counselors play an integral role in augmenting the recruitment efforts of the admissions staff. In addition, partnerships that Charter Oak develops with other institutions, educational providers, and companies enhance its mission of serving adult students and add to the diversity of the student body.



The Admissions Office establishes annual enrollment goals that are derived from the College's Strategic Plan. The staff meets on a monthly basis to measure progress. Recruiting and marketing are a coordinated effort.

Through studies conducted of Charter Oak's student body and its graduates, it is evident that students who have already earned a substantial amount of credit have the best chance for success (**Evidence: ResearchSurveysAndStudies/RE**). Surveys of Charter Oak graduates also show that the major reasons they select Charter Oak are the flexibility of programs, acceptance of credit already earned, the type of concentrations available, and the opportunity to complete the degree in less time than at a traditional college (**Evidence: GraduateSurveys/GS**). Therefore, the College's advertising and outreach efforts are directed at students who match this profile (**Evidence: OutreachAndMarketing/MK1**).

Applicants to Charter Oak must be sixteen years of age or older and must have earned at least nine acceptable college-level credits from an accredited college or university, in the armed services, by evaluation of non-collegiate sponsored instruction, or by completing standardized college-level proficiency examinations with a score that is acceptable for credit toward a Charter Oak State College degree (**Evidence: Publications/PU1**). International applicants must fulfill Charter Oak's requirements in written communication before they may be accepted for admission.

Students who do not meet minimum requirements are encouraged to take standardized examinations or courses offered at a community college. Admissions counselors work with these individuals to help them select appropriate courses or tests. With some partnership programs such as Aetna and Allen Institute, the College will provisionally admit students who do not have the nine credits and allow them one year to meet this criterion. Students who do not earn the nine credits within one year are not permitted to continue.

The College adheres to a policy of nondiscrimination in its recruitment efforts and believes that there should be no racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, economic, or condition of handicap as barriers to higher education. Efforts are made to target underrepresented students through minority education fairs, minority organizations, corporate affirmative action offices, and similar venues. State-supported grant funds such as the Connecticut College Access and Success Program (ConnCAS) are directed toward the recruitment, enrollment and retention of underrepresented minority students. As a result, since 2001 (with the exception of one year when they were equal), the percentage of minority students enrolled in the College has been greater than the percentage of Connecticut adults 25 years and older with some college and no degree (**Evidence: AccountabilityReports**).

The College has secured private foundation and corporate support and other funding for its Women in Transition Program (WIT). This program recruits single mothers in low-paying jobs who have some college credit but no degree. The College provides them with a laptop computer and Internet access so that they are able to take their courses online, eliminating the need for childcare and transportation. Additional counseling and technology support also are provided. Eighty percent of the participants in this program are African American or Latina.

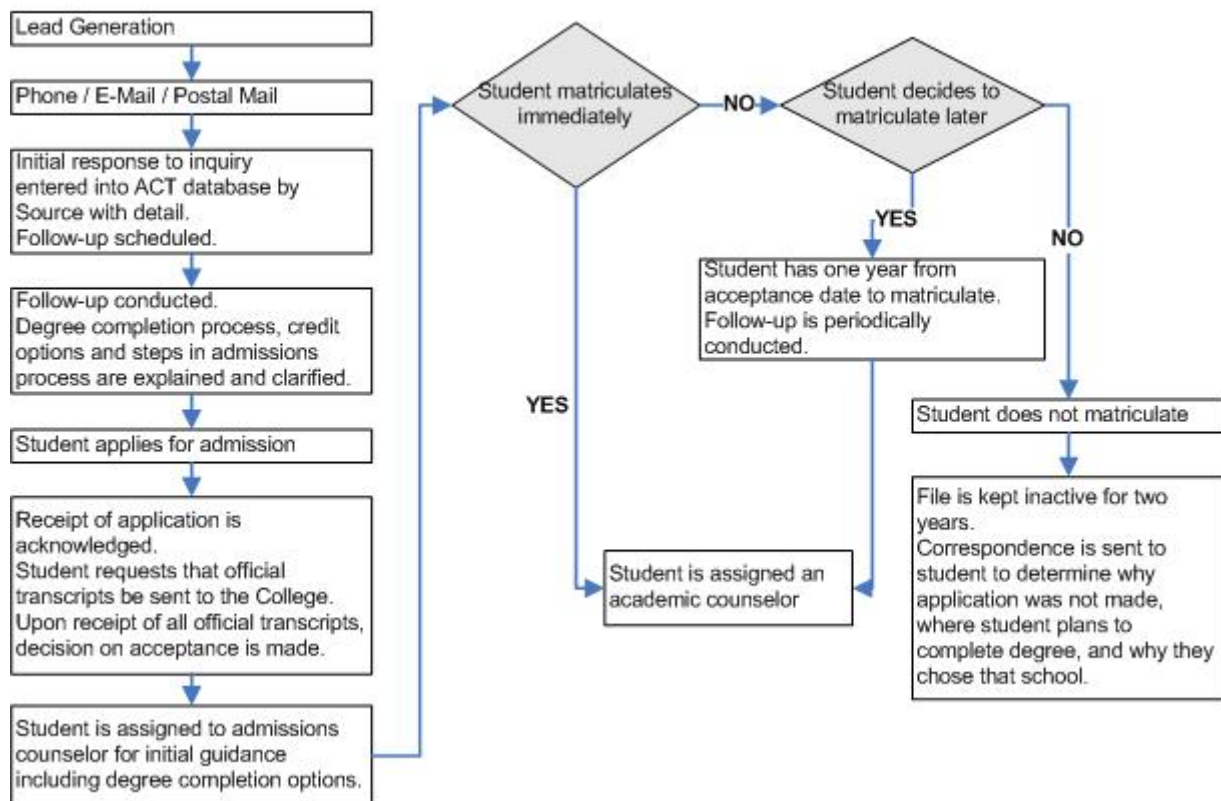
Because of the nature of the College's degree completion program, students need to be self-directed, independent learners. These requirements are discussed with applicants as part of the admissions process through chat rooms, face-to-face meetings, phone conversations, and through e-mail correspondence. Preliminary credit evaluations are conducted so that applicants are aware

of the number of credits they will need to complete a degree. Definitions of liberal arts, general education, and upper division courses are reviewed to clarify program requirements and options for completing remaining requirements. Information is shared with prospective students about concentration requirements. Applicants with foreign credits are provided with information on how to have those credits evaluated by an outside agency.

Although there are opportunities for Connecticut students to meet with an admissions counselor at the College's New Britain administration building or at community colleges across the state, most admissions discussions occur by e-mail or telephone.

Applicants may apply online or submit a paper application. The College acknowledges receipt of the application and provides instructions on how to request official transcripts and reports of test scores. Upon receipt of supporting official documentation, the candidate is accepted and assigned to an admissions counselor for follow-up. The admissions counselors specialize in certain fields of study. An applicant's file remains active for one year. Until July 1, 2006, students had the option of selecting a preliminary evaluation completed by an admissions counselor or a more detailed, official evaluation conducted by the Registrar's Office, but this was replaced by a new review process that includes the transfer credit analysis and number of credits remaining, with the goal of providing a faster turn around time.

### The Admissions Process



## **Student Services**

The hallmark of Charter Oak State College continues to be the delivery of student-centered services. These services assist students in making sound academic choices in keeping with their personal and professional developmental goals.

Support services for students who have academic difficulties are covered in Standard Four and include tutoring, writing assessment, a one-credit research writing course, and a one-credit math course. Services for students with disabilities are coordinated by the Director of Academic Services.

Charter Oak State College provides a viable way for students with a variety of disabilities to earn a degree. The College is committed to serving students with disabilities and seeks to provide effective services.

Charter Oak is a member institution of AHEAD (Association for Higher Education and Disability) and CT AHEAD and participates in activities sponsored by those organizations. Academic counselors regularly attend workshops and conferences on a wide variety of disabilities to enhance their counseling skills and are adept at supporting the needs of their students appropriately.

Disability laws, such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, prevent colleges from asking students to self-identify disabilities on the application for matriculation, thus making it difficult for a distance learning college to determine how to best reach students who may need accommodations. For this reason, it is incumbent upon students with disabilities to provide this information as soon as possible after matriculation. To that end, students are asked through the Distance Learning course schedule, the student newsletter (*Update*) and other publications to notify the Director of Academic Services concerning the need for accommodations. Charter Oak looks to AHEAD to provide guidelines for documentation of a disability and is currently a participant in the development of statewide guidelines based on IDEA 2004.

Disability information is treated with confidentiality and any information concerning a student's disability is kept separate from his or her academic file. The information contained in the disability file is shared only with college personnel to whom the student has given permission. Accommodations such as extended time for testing, readers for standardized tests, and assistance with access to electronic books for students with visual impairment are among considerations most often requested.

Charter Oak began offering student services during evening hours to accommodate the needs of the Bridgepoint Education students, since the majority live on the West Coast. By expanding its hours of operation, the College has been able to increase staff within its limited space. In addition to being more appropriate for reaching West Coast residents, the evening hours have proven to be effective in enabling academic counselors to reach more students outside of normal working hours. Even with the termination of the program with Bridgepoint Education, evening hours will continue.

### ***Academic Counseling***

Academic counselors are the key to student success at Charter Oak. There are seven full-time academic counselors. Charter Oak counselors hold advanced degrees and are experienced in academic service areas. The College encourages continued professional development for all of

its counselors. It provides funding from State and union sources for tuition and professional development courses, and ongoing training in technology literacy.

Academic counselors with specialized expertise are assigned to assist student groups such as those from the Allen Institute, the WIT program and Bridgepoint Education. Other students are assigned to counselors by area of concentration. Once an academic counselor is assigned to a student, the counselor assists the student until graduation, ensuring continuity and creating a stronger tie to the institution.

Academic counselors assist students in locating courses that meet their degree plans and learning styles. They also guide students in developing their degree plans and concentrations, serve as the link between students and the faculty, provide the support and encouragement the students need to meet their educational goals, and often serve as the liaison to other offices within Charter Oak. Counselors need to be very precise when mentoring students through the Concentration Plan of Study (CPS) and Academic Autobiography (AA) processes and when helping students meet deadlines. Through this collaborative mentoring process, students gain the knowledge necessary to qualify for the degree and, in addition, acquire insight into how they learn, which allows them to become more astute learners as they move on to other educational experiences.

### ***Testing Administration Services***

As a service to the public and its students, Charter Oak offers CLEP, DSST/DANTES, Thomas Edison State College (TECEP), and Charter Oak testing on a regularly scheduled basis. CLEP examinations are administered electronically. The facilities are accessible to people with disabilities. Testing is administered by the Registrar's Office. As of January 2005 students have been able to schedule their testing times online.

### ***Financial Aid***

The Financial Aid Office administers and/or coordinates federal, state and institutional aid and veterans benefits. Staff strive to ensure that the delivery of student aid funds is conducted accurately, expediently and with integrity while demonstrating a deliberate effort to encourage students to minimize their loan indebtedness.

The College makes financial aid available to all qualified individuals who meet the basic requirements for eligibility. On average, 200 (approximately 13 percent) of the College's non-Bridgepoint Education partnership students receive financial aid. Through consortia and other agreements among institutions that provide online as well as campus-based course delivery, Charter Oak processes financial aid for its students who elect to enroll in courses offered by other colleges and universities. For the academic year 2004-2005, approximately 70 percent of Charter Oak aid recipients took courses at other institutions. Through this consortia arrangement, Charter Oak has developed a system for the exchange of documents relevant to concurrent registration, transcripts of record, monitoring of academic progress, and program pursuit.

Financial aid for Charter Oak students is awarded on a term-based calendar. When the College entered into a partnership agreement with Bridgepoint Education, it contracted with a third party financial aid service, Affiliated Computer Service (ACS), to award non-term financial aid to those students enrolled in Bridgepoint Education courses. The Office of Financial Aid is responsible for administering financial aid, regardless of source, for other students and for providing the administrative oversight for financial aid administration conducted by ACS.

Continuous efforts are made to obtain funds for need-based support for academically qualified students. The College's Foundation and funds that are received in support of the College's Women in Transition Program have contributed significantly toward the further realization of Charter Oak's goal to ensure that qualified students have access to higher education.

### ***Records Service***

On July 1, 2006, the College instituted a new records review process as part of its enrollment plan initiatives. Upon receipt of the application fee and transcripts, the Registrar's Office will conduct an evaluation and provide the admissions counselors with an evaluation designating requirements met, range of credits left to take to complete the degree, estimated cost based on Charter Oak's tuition, and estimated time to degree completion. This evaluation will be e-mailed to the applicant by the Admissions Office and followed up with a telephone call. Once an applicant matriculates, the Registrar's Office will enter the evaluation into the SIS. After they matriculate, their records are updated whenever new credits are earned, and students can keep track of their academic progress online. Students can view their record online at any time.

All academic records are electronically stored in the SIS as well as in paper files. Per State guidelines, the Registrar's Office periodically purges paper records. The policy on Disclosure of Student Records appears in the *Official Catalog* and is sent annually to students.

Transcript services are available, for a nominal fee, for both enrolled students and graduates. Rush services are provided for an additional fee.

### ***Credit Registry***

Charter Oak offers a credit evaluation and record-keeping service for people who wish to accumulate credits on a single transcript without matriculating into the College. Participants usually use this service to store credits earned through programs evaluated by entities such as ACE, National PONSI, DSST/DANTES, and CLEP. After paying for this service, participants can add credits to the transcript for one year. During FY2004-05, the Charter Oak State College credit registry service accepted 398 applications: 345 were special credit registries (credit granted by Charter Oak faculty upon reviewing noncredit courses/training); 32 were teacher credit registries; and 21 were general credit registries.

In cooperation with the Connecticut State Department of Education, Charter Oak has established a credit registry for Connecticut teachers who elect to use examinations to meet certification requirements for cross endorsement, or for individuals who have worked in approved private schools for two years or more in an appropriate teaching assignment and might be eligible for transcript review in lieu of college recommendation.

### ***Online Book Vendor***

Charter Oak contracts with an online book vendor, MBS Direct, to provide textbooks for faculty and students. The vendor offers new and used books, electronic books, favorable buy-back and return policies, a service for faculty so that they may check book prices, a voucher program for students on financial aid, and a number of special programs for students, including tutoring and resumé writing (**Evidence: MBS Contract: Document Room**). To help keep the price of books down, Charter Oak was able to negotiate a five percent reduction in the cost of the textbooks.

### ***Student Association***

The Student Association provides a forum for students to express their views and ideas. The Director of Academic Services serves as the coordinator. The Student Association sponsors a

number of events throughout the year at the College and also, whenever possible, provides the same programming online. The Association also sponsors an e-lounge for students. The Student Association elects officers and coordinates the election for a student representative to serve on the Board for State Academic Awards and the Board of the Charter Oak State College Foundation. Students from the Association and from the student body at-large serve on other committees as needed and give testimony annually at the State Legislature on behalf of the College's budget requests.

### ***Alumni Services***

The Charter Oak State College Alumni Association was established in 1983 to advance the reputation of the College, to support its educational services, and to assist the graduates in furthering their education and their careers. The Director of Admissions serves as the organization's coordinator. The Association provides career and educational programs, both on-ground and online, sells College merchandise, provides scholarship funds, and honors graduates with academic citations. The Governor appoints a graduate to serve as a member of the Board for State Academic Awards. Alumni have served on committees as needed and have given testimony at the State Legislature.

### ***Alpha Sigma Lambda Honor Society***

In 2004-05, Charter Oak inducted its first students, faculty, and staff into its newly formed chapter, Chi Omicron, of Alpha Sigma Lambda, the national honor society for adult students. Twenty-eight students, eight faculty, and six staff have been inducted.

### **Student Code of Conduct**

The Student Code of Conduct was revised in 2004-05 to reflect changes in academic policies of the College. The policy was reviewed by the Student Association, faculty, and approved by the Board for State Academic Awards. The Student Code of Conduct, the Academic Appeals Policy, and other policies directly impacting students are included in the *Official Catalog* and the *Student Handbook* and are available online.

### **Retention and Graduation**

The College has established retention goals as part of its performance indicators. Charter Oak monitors the rates each year and reports results to the Board and to the State and uses the report to improve services. Charter Oak State College is an open admissions college and graduates an average of 50 percent of its Bachelor's degree students within six years and 54 percent of its Associate degree students within three years (**Evidence: Accountability Reports**). Charter Oak graduates students six times per year. For those who cannot attend, a Web cast is available on the College Web site.

Careful attention is paid to the retention of recruited students. Students are contacted on a regular basis by their academic counselors to ensure that they are actively engaged in the learning process and on track with their degree completion objectives. Student status reports of academic activity are updated each time students have earned additional credits toward their degrees. Students have the ability to view their academic records online. The student newsletter, *Update*, is also sent to students three times per year. This publication contains information on new distance learning courses, workshops, Student Association activities, online testing, graduation deadlines and other informative news. E-mails are sent to the general student population to announce workshops, activities, and online chats, and to distribute guidelines on submitting the required Concentration Plan of Study (CPS) and Academic Autobiography (AA).

Charter Oak does not generally offer an orientation to the College although staff have recognized the need for one. Charter Oak does, however, offer an orientation for students in the WIT program. Currently, when students matriculate at Charter Oak, they receive a welcome packet that includes a course schedule, *Student Handbook*, and student login ID.

For the last four years, at the beginning of each term, Charter Oak has sponsored on-ground and online sessions on how to navigate an online course. In addition, the College offers a weeklong series of workshops each semester on such topics as how to write a term paper, how to conduct research online, online graduate degree programs, programs in nursing, Connecticut's Alternate Route to Certification, the value of networking, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and how to write the CPS and AA. Many of these workshops are also conducted online or are Web cast. Some are open to the general public (**Evidence: StudentServices/ StudentServiceEvents/ SE1:SE33**).

Special attention has been given to the distance learning students to help to ensure their success. Charter Oak provides a Blackboard tutorial, a computer literacy tutorial, a writing assessment, online tutoring, numerous references on how to write term and research papers, and online 24/7 library support. The retention rate in the distance learning courses has been consistently in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile.

### ***Appraisal***

The Accountability Report, which is prepared annually for the Connecticut Department of Higher Education, contains performance indicators and goals that are benchmarked against peer institutions, state, or national data. For example, minority enrollment is benchmarked against the Connecticut census figures for adults 25 years of age or older with some college, but no degree. Retention rates are benchmarked against two of the College's peers, Thomas Edison State College and Western Governors University. And in all cases, annual data is compared with goals set by the Executive Council. The report and the goals are reviewed annually by both the Board and the Executive Council.

The Graduate Surveys provide important data which have been used by the College to understand students' experiences with the array of services available to them. Because of the importance of this survey, efforts have been made to improve the response rate and to ensure that it reflects current College policies and services. A decision was made in 2002 to incorporate the Graduate Survey with the application for graduation which is sent to all students when they are within a specific number of credits from graduating. This change has resulted in a 98-99 percent response rate and a belief that the data are now more representative of all students' experiences. So that more accurate data could be obtained, the Graduate Survey was revised in 2002 and 2004 to reflect changes at the College.

The Office of Planning, Research, and Assessment also conducts studies when changes to services are contemplated or to assess specific programs. These have included retention and graduation studies, studies of applicants who do not matriculate, and studies of specific students such as those in the WIT program. Results are widely distributed and are used in decision making by committees, departments, and the Board. Because the Office of Planning, Research, and Assessment is small, studies are undertaken judiciously and the College makes an effort to ensure that these resources are used widely.

## **Admissions**

The College has identified factors which discourage applicants from matriculating. One of them concerns the length of time, three to four weeks, required to produce an official evaluation of applicants' transcripts (**Evidence: StudentServices/SS2**). Applicants pay a special fee for this evaluation in order to determine if Charter Oak is the best choice for their degree completion. Another factor is the annual Matriculation Renewal fee which students must pay to remain matriculated. When students still have a great many credits to earn toward the degree, they often choose a traditional degree program rather than pay the Charter Oak annual fee in addition to incurring the cost of earning the credits. Recognizing that the annual fee had a negative impact on enrollment and retention, in 2004 the College developed a Comprehensive Matriculation and Course Enrollment Fee applicable to the first-year and renewal fees. This new fee went into effect in Fall 2005 and is being monitored for effectiveness. The College has changed its admission process for 2006-07 in order to shorten the time to matriculation. The College will assess this process at the end of the fiscal year.

In order to continue to attract a qualified body of students, the College needs to increase public awareness of the unique opportunities for degree completion it has to offer. In addition to traditional advertising, the College has placed emphasis on developing Web-based inquiry traffic. In so doing, the College has implemented an inquiry management system and has hired staff to follow up on traffic to its Web site. As an initial step, the College has installed ACT inquiry management software and added part-time staff in Fall 2005 to include an Internet marketer and an inquiry manager. The inquiry management software has provided a more organized response to inquiries. When Charter Oak installs its new SIS, the features and functional enhancements will allow for a more robust inquiry-to-response approach to prospective students utilizing both computer and telephone.

As more Connecticut colleges have expanded recruitment efforts focusing on the adult student, Charter Oak has not significantly expanded its recruitment budget or efforts within the Connecticut market. The College and the Board recognize that more funds need to be spent on this effort if the College is to maintain or increase its share of the adult student market (**Evidence: OutreachAndMarketing/MK3**).

## **Academic Services**

From the point of application to the College through graduation, staff maintain phone and electronic communication with all students. Support services include but are not limited to assistance in course selection, testing options, tutorial help when necessary, guidance in accessing library resources, dissemination of information on workshops, and clarification on constructing the Concentration Plan of Study and the Academic Autobiography. Although a variety of support services are made available to its students, the College has recognized that a student orientation could serve as a valuable induction tool and improve retention.

Evening hours have proven to be successful, so even after the termination of the Bridgepoint Education program, the College will continue to maintain an evening staff to strengthen outreach and follow-up to its students. The College will continue to monitor evening staffing.

According to the Survey of Graduating Students Spring 2005, overall satisfaction with academic counseling is high (91 percent). The Director of Academic Services contacts students who indicate on the graduate survey that they were not satisfied with services provided by Charter Oak. Academic counselors meet on a regular basis to examine ways of improving advising and



retention and have established specific goals. Academic counseling is also discussed in Standards Four and Five.

### **Financial Aid**

Staff strive to ensure that the delivery of student aid funds is conducted accurately, expeditiously, and with integrity while encouraging students to minimize their loan indebtedness.

The administration of Title IV financial aid funds is complex at Charter Oak. The student preparation process requires enrollment verification for students who register for courses at institutions outside of Charter Oak. Prior to July 1, 2006, unlike traditional institutions which deal with two to three different budgets for their undergraduate populations, Charter Oak dealt with individualized budgets for each financial aid student because students had the option of taking courses at any regionally accredited institution and still receive financial aid. If students decided to take a course at an institution different from the institution for which they were originally packaged, it required additional staff time for repackaging and resulted in delayed disbursements.

As a result, for 2006-07, the College has changed the process and will be developing a student's budget based on Charter Oak's tuition and fees. This will eliminate the need for repackaging unless students provide evidence that they are attending a substantially more expensive college.

In addition, the ED Express financial aid software currently in use lacks the functional robustness necessary to meet complex process needs and is not integrated with the current Charter Oak SIS. This lack of integration prevents users outside the Financial Aid Department from being able to go to a single source to check the status of the financial aid process for a student. Also, there is no automated mechanism to track if satisfactory academic progress is being made by the student to fulfill financial aid requirements. The tendency for students to routinely change between full-time and less-than-full-time status also causes significant rework within the Financial Aid Department.

This will be remedied with the introduction of PowerFAIDS in January 2007 and its connection to the Jenzabar system in July 2007.

Because of the College's financial aid terms, Charter Oak students are limited to when, and thus where, they can take their courses. If a student takes a course at another institution, the course must start and end within Charter Oak's semester. This prohibits students from taking winter session courses and courses at institutions that have semester start and end dates different from those at Charter Oak. The U.S. Department of Education has been consulted about the issue of providing financial aid to students who wish to take courses at institutions with terms that do not coincide with Charter Oak's. While this is possible, it would require additional staff to administer a non-term program. The College will continue to examine the feasibility of this option and others. This issue will become more significant as the College moves students from the Bridgepoint Education partnership non-term aid to term aid, as the College serves more students from outside of Connecticut, and as more colleges move away from the traditional 15-week semester.

### **Records Service**

In Spring 2002, a course reference compendium was added to the student data base. This compendium provides a comprehensive list of officially evaluated courses and is updated when new courses are evaluated. When the new SIS is in place, enhancements will be added which

will lead to greater efficiency in evaluating transcripts. Course transfer articulation agreements with community colleges will also be added to the system.

### **Alumni Services**

The Alumni Association is guided by its Board of Directors. The extent of its effectiveness correlates directly to the interest and enthusiasm of the membership of its board. It has been a priority of the Alumni Coordinator to recruit board members with both the willingness and energy to devote to the mission of the Alumni Association. In addition, because of the nature of the College program, most of the graduates have not established camaraderie with fellow classmates. Their only opportunity to meet one another is at the graduation ceremony.

A graduating class may range in age from 18-70 and hail from all over the country. Because of this, event planning is done with a local, supportive constituent in mind. The College recognizes that it needs to expand its services to and build connections with out-of-state alumni.

### ***Projection***

#### **Admissions**

An Enrollment Management Committee consisting of representatives from Admissions, Academic Counseling, the Registrar's Office, Business Office and Institutional Research will continue to examine the new admissions-to-matriculation process implemented in Summer 2006, including review of the data gathered by the Admissions Office on why students choose not to attend Charter Oak and how the new SIS can assist in minimizing such decisions. This committee will report its findings and recommendations to the Cabinet in late Spring 2007.

Enhancements to and improvements in navigation of the College's Web site are expected to allow for better online interaction between applicants and the College. The improvements in interactivity will allow the College to collect data that will enable it to better predict application and enrollment figures.

In Summer 2006, the Fees Committee evaluated the effectiveness of the new Comprehensive Matriculation and Course Enrollment Fee and recommend its continuance. Other fees will also be carefully examined in Fall 2006 (**Evidence: OutreachAndMarketing/MK2**).

The Admissions Office, in conjunction with Academic Affairs, will develop a plan for increasing Charter Oak's presence within Connecticut, including marketing, recruitment efforts, and new programming.

#### **Academic Support Services**

The Director of Academic Services, with assistance from the academic counselors and Core Consulting Faculty, will develop a student orientation for all students for implementation in Spring 2007.

The new SIS will facilitate communication between the counselors and their students and enable the counselors to maintain electronic records to expedite their work. The new system is expected to be operational in Summer 2007.

#### **Financial Aid**

The new SIS will enable the Financial Aid office to process financial aid and track students more efficiently.

## **Records Service**

A process analysis conducted by a consulting company has determined that the implementation of a new SIS will significantly reduce the time required to evaluate transcripts because the system will maintain an authoritative list of transferable credits. This will shorten the turnaround time for official evaluations and reduce the waiting time that currently exists for students to learn of their status.

## **Alumni Services**

Alumni Association members will develop approaches to expand the number and geographic base of the resource network and ambassadors.

## ***Institutional Effectiveness***

Admission to the College or any of its course offerings, both credit and noncredit, is guided by published statements with clear policies that govern the procedures that are followed. Charter Oak State College uses a variety of methods to evaluate the effectiveness of its student services, as well as its effectiveness in recruiting, retaining, and graduating students. Bi-monthly Board reports and the annual Accountability Report are used to track applications, enrollments, retention and graduation statistics. The annual Graduate Survey is used to analyze students' evaluations of a wide variety of student services including admissions, advising, financial aid, the virtual bookstore, tuition and fees, testing services, library services, and disability services. The analyses are widely distributed to staff, the Cabinet, Executive Council and the Board and, where appropriate, information from these studies is reported in the College's publications for faculty, students, and alumni.

Institutional effectiveness can also be summed up by listening to our graduates. Here are a few excerpts from two of our recent graduation student speakers:

"I never worked as hard at any school as I did in my two years at Charter Oak, never before pulled an all-nighter to finish a paper, as I did a couple of times here. On nights like those, facing a full day of work in the morning, I may have questioned whether I had a brain (*he was comparing Charter Oak to Oz*) But it certainly takes heart to get a degree this way, amidst the obligations of work, family, and community, and it takes courage to improve, to reinvent yourself, not knowing what the reward at the end of the journey might be. On my next birthday I'll be 50 years old. I've already been through most of the really enjoyable rites of passage, so there probably aren't too many 'firsts' to look forward to. First bout of sciatica? First colonoscopy? (Actually I have already been through that one. And it wasn't too bad.) So at this point, I better manufacture some firsts. In the Fall I intend to start on my first graduate degree, ironically from Boston University, the first college I ever attended (and quit). Distance learning, of course, I can't imagine any other way to do it now. The subject of my Master's degree: Project Management." (He had taken project management courses from Charter Oak and had a great experience.) *Barry Rahmy, Class of 2006.*

"In mid-1995 we woke up in the United States of America (her family fled Bosnia). With no language skills and no formal American education the range of available positions was limited to simple, low paid jobs. Coming from a Law School program completed at the University of Sarajevo, I was unhappy with an assembly line job in a Stratford-based cable company. In search for the best way to employ my accumulated credits and knowledge, I came across the information about the Charter Oak State College. . . . My education became a bridge between my old and new life. Now I hold a management position in a small American company. I am well prepared to continue my education in an MBA program. The Charter Oak State College is the school that truly deserves a name "Degrees without Boundaries". There are no state boundaries, no language boundaries, and no age boundaries. This is a rare college that understands working adult students, their time, their needs, and their potential." *Nina Ilic, Class of 2004.*

## STANDARD SEVEN: Library and Other Information Resources

### *Description*

#### **Information Resources**

As a distance education institution, Charter Oak State College requires a reliable, up-to-date technology infrastructure in order to effectively and efficiently serve its student body. This infrastructure delivers information technology services which are of critical importance to the College:

- **Basic computing for staff/faculty** (e-mail, network access, data security, internet access, phone service).
- **Student database** – A custom-developed system for non-traditional students. Charter Oak has dedicated information technology (IT) staff to support the student database and modify, as needed.
- **College Web site** – The College's Web-presence seeks to provide information on the College's programs, courses, and mission to prospective and current students, and alumni.
- **Course delivery and electronic community** – Online learning management systems (LMS) with access to electronic training, electronic library, and student-centric electronic forums.

Since information technology services are of paramount importance to the functioning of Charter Oak, the College has established multiple institutional committees to monitor and evaluate the impact of its information technology services:

- **iTeam** – This cross-departmental committee from the College and the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (CTDLC) consists of help desk staff, learning management staff, instructional designers, network administrators, system administrators, and senior IT managers and concerns itself with Data Center (Application/LMS/Service) issues related to the College and information technology operations.
- **Web Marketing Committee** – This committee includes members from admissions, marketing, public relations, information technology and distance learning. It reviews the Web sites of the College and its competitors and oversees the development of content and marketing pieces.
- **Strategic Planning (Information Technology)** – This cross-institutional group evaluates the institution's IT priorities and helps to determine which IT activities will provide the greatest benefit to the organization. It provides departmental feedback and communications to the Information Technology department (**Evidence: InformationTechnology/IT7**).

As further means of monitoring and evaluating IT services, information is gathered from surveys of graduates and library users. In addition, faculty and students complete evaluations at the end of their online classes. The iTeam and Web Marketing committees use qualitative tools such as Web Trends, which are trending reports for Web site activity (**Evidence: InformationTechnology/IT3**) and Microsoft Operations Manager (designed to determine real-time server health) (**Evidence: InformationTechnology/IT8**). Two of the College's strategic planning committees (Marketing and Technology) continually review the information technology presence of the College and discuss strengths, opportunities, threats, and weaknesses.

Charter Oak State College budgets for information technology in two phases. Capital equipment is budgeted for during the Connecticut biennial budget process. Salaries, maintenance, software, and contracts for IT services are budgeted for on an annual basis. Over the past five years, Charter Oak's expertise and knowledge in the use of technology have deepened in some areas and broadened in others. They have deepened in the areas of online learning, student information systems, and online student-centered services. At the same time, the College has faced expanding challenges in the areas of firewall administration, switching/routing, backups, and disaster recovery services. In these highly specialized areas, Charter Oak contracts on a part-time basis with experts.

Charter Oak obtains both efficiency and cost effectiveness by leveraging the core skills of other State agencies and purchasing collectives. Currently, the College uses the State of Connecticut's Department of Administrative (DAS) services to provide computer and professional development training for its staff. DAS offers a wide variety of courses targeted at multiple skill levels. In-house IT staff also provide periodic training for system upgrades and new employee orientation. In addition, Charter Oak contracts with the Connecticut State University (CSU) System for its phone system and with the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (CTDLC) for its eLearning applications and support. This means that the College is dependent on CSU and the CTDLC to be responsive to the College's requests for service.

In addition, Charter Oak leverages State of Connecticut, Connecticut College Purchasing Group, North East Regional Computing Program, and CTDLC purchasing agreements to provide economy of scale when purchasing IT services, licenses, and hardware.

To obtain further economy of scale, Charter Oak and the CTDLC have implemented an employee-sharing initiative. Since both organizations use similar computer architectures, shared employees have little difficulty moving from one organization to another. This arrangement benefits both organizations since it allows them to attract top-level IT staff. Charter Oak is able to grow its IT staff slowly while being assured of the availability of staff with the necessary skill set.

Charter Oak's information technology staff generally hold degrees in computer science, management information systems, or information technology. In some cases, staff hold degrees in other disciplines, but they have acquired significant work experience and knowledge in adult learning, online instruction, programming, systems design and computer engineering. Occasionally, staff are hired for their technical expertise and hold certificates in software applications. Charter Oak allocates professional development funds to ensure that IT staff maintain technological currency. Two IT staff members are currently pursuing master's degrees at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and one is pursuing certification in Project Management.

The College provides services to acclimate and educate students in the use of the information technology services available to them. Students taking online courses for the first time are directed to the introduction to online learning course available through Blackboard's learning management system (LMS) which the College uses for its courses. The computer and software training curriculum, CAT1, is available to students to increase and demonstrate their computer literacy. To instruct students in the use of online tools, the College holds workshops such as "How to Use the Virtual Library and Other Online Resources" and "How to Navigate an Online Course" throughout the year. Charter Oak has also arranged with the CTDLC to use eTutoring for its tutoring service and monitors reports from that service on a monthly basis.

Charter Oak provides workshops and instruction for its faculty in the use of learning management systems and best practices in facilitating online classes. The College also contracts with the CTDLC for instructional design services for the faculty. These workshops are held throughout the year and include instruction in developing, authoring, and coordinating the use of online tools with academic work, and in course development and instructional methodology.

The College's infrastructure is protected from the outside world by Checkpoint Firewall, Symantec Anti-Virus Gateway, and anti-virus server products. In addition to providing protection from external attacks, the equipment also blocks, logs, and alerts staff when suspicious activity is being attempted either outside the firewall or from internal resources. Also, the College contracts for a 7x14 help desk with the CTDLC, which allows the College to respond to student needs seven days a week with a multi-tier IT support network to address both student and staff problems.

Oversight of the use of information technology by staff and faculty is regulated by a Connecticut State System Office Acceptable Use Policy and a Board for State Academic Awards Acceptable Use Policy. These policies govern users' access to the public Internet and to College systems. Students are governed by a Student Code of Conduct that discusses the inappropriate use of technology.

### **Library Resources**

Despite its lack of a library facility, Charter Oak is able to offer its students a number of library services. A core level of information resources, including secured access to licensed databases and specialized research, is available to the College's students and faculty through iCONN, Connecticut's virtual library. iCONN is a joint project of the Connecticut State Library and the Department of Higher Education. The project is administered by the Connecticut State Library under the auspices of the Commission for Educational Technology and the Connecticut Digital Library Advisory Board (CDLAB). Charter Oak has a representative on this Board. Funding is provided by the Connecticut General Assembly. This library offers access to a wide selection of databases and other electronic resources. An on-ground workshop that demonstrates navigation of iCONN is offered in the spring of each academic year. Online chats on the virtual library are also offered periodically to allow students to ask questions concerning the library. All matriculated students and those who are taking Charter Oak courses receive a barcode giving them entrance to iCONN at <http://www.charteroak.edu/Advising/Studentservices.cfm>.

In order to provide a broader range of resources, Charter Oak has recently contracted with Jones e-global library (**Evidence: Information Technology/IT11**). This library allows students to access electronic books, the 24/7 "Ask an Online Librarian," and other library components such as online tutorials and research guides.

In addition, all Charter Oak students receive an identification card that allows them to use on-ground library facilities at other public institutions of higher education in Connecticut. Students also have online access to these libraries through Public Act 00-187, An Act Concerning Education Aid, which establishes the Connecticut Commission on Educational Technology and provides access for all public libraries and libraries at institutions of higher education to a core set of on-line full text resources as well as the ability to purchase collaboratively for other collections in order to maximize buying power. To further provide access, Sec. 10a-151 (formerly sec. 10-327c) mandates that any student enrolled, full or part-time, in any of the

constituent units of the State system of higher education has permission to use library facilities and services of other state higher education institutions in that system.

## *Appraisal*

### **Information Resources**

Charter Oak avails itself of multiple information technology systems to plan, administer and evaluate its programs and services. The College has implemented procedures for gauging the quality and effectiveness of these systems. Cross-institutional committees have been created with the mandate to review assessments of the College's informational technology systems in a timely manner and to provide recommendations for changes in operations.

Charter Oak has greatly benefited from its strategic personnel partnerships, collective purchasing, and outsourced service agreements which have resulted in superior service to the College and have allowed it to devote its resources to its student service mission. The College is fortunate to have the CTDLC as a technical partner, which reports to the same Board. The most significant benefit to the College is in the personnel sharing agreement crafted with the CTDLC.

To track the uptime, health, and usage of its core applications Charter Oak has implemented monitoring and trending programs WebTrends, Nagios, and Microsoft Operations Manager in its data center (**Evidence: Information Technology/IT5**). By storing and evaluating data electronically, Charter Oak can monitor and deploy its limited technology resources where the students need them most. The enhanced monitoring that has been recently implemented represents a fundamental shift in the College's practice from one of reactive maintenance to one of proactive response/repair. The College has not devoted a significant amount of monitoring resources to its local area network largely because Charter Oak does not support any on-campus student computing. In the College's virtual student environment, Charter Oak follows trends in the storage and maintenance of academic information technology records with the goal of creating a formal plan on the storage and recoverability of this data.

Charter Oak is fortunate to have quality IT equipment and an excellent infrastructure. To date, the State Legislature has appropriated adequate money for capital equipment (servers, desktops, equipment), and the College has implemented a four-year equipment lifecycle replacement program to constantly refresh its technology. However, Charter Oak did not receive its FY2006 allocation until April. This required the College to pay for extensions on maintenance contracts which were not planned for in the FY2006 budget. If this pattern continues, it will be problematic.

Purchasing through collective groups allows Charter Oak State College buying power that its FTE count cannot provide. These economies of scale provide an average discount of 22 percent against list price on equipment. Much of the technology advancement at Charter Oak is due to infrastructure purchases that were made possible through purchasing against collective contracts. Charter Oak uses collective purchasing agreements in approximately 82 percent of its IT purchases. These are responsible for significant yearly savings.

The small and capable IT staff keeps the College on the cutting edge of traditional software products (Microsoft, Veritas, Checkpoint, etc.). Charter Oak is currently the only public higher education agency in Connecticut that has completed the full migration from Windows NT/2000 to Windows 2003 (including all applications, e-mail, domain controllers). Charter Oak actively supports and uses professional development and training funds to maintain the technology

proficiency of its IT personnel as well as to expand their expertise in related systems. Each year, Charter Oak solicits contracts with leading training companies for its professional IT development and training needs. This ongoing professional development has gone beyond the traditional "deep technology training" to include training in softer skills such as project management, client management, help desk and customer support.

Charter Oak's transition from a dumb-terminal environment to a networked, redundant, client-server environment is a testament to the quality of the planning, funding, and personnel that manage the institution's information technology and information resources. While the capital dollars spent on equipment and infrastructure services are adequate, the dollars devoted to software and licensing are limited. Single software packages such as PowerFAIDS, LiquidMatrix, and Adobe eForms server are strong products that offer significant value in higher education but are priced for institutions with larger FTE counts and budgets. The average enterprise software package costs around \$50,000-\$60,000 before implementation. As a result, the IT staff have tried to use programming staff to create custom software similar to these expensive commercial products. The resulting software, while solving the immediate problem at a reduced cost, obligates the IT staff to continue the development and support of that software for the rest of its life.

The current student database is deficient and presents a major problem for the College. The current system is similar to its previous mainframe versions and compartmentalizes student activities making it difficult to follow the status of students. It is basically an information logging system. The database's major deficiency is that it does not support the automation of routine student activities or student services.

Unfortunately, advances in student information systems have out-paced the IT staff's capacity. For this reason, Charter Oak has invested significant funds in the strategic process analysis of its operations and the purchase of a new student information system (**Evidence: Information Technology/IT13**). The benefit of Charter Oak's lagging position in the adoption of a new student information system is that it is able to implement a proven best of brand/breed system. Charter Oak has now selected and will implement a new Jenzabar student system built on proven technologies, with referencing case studies and implementation notes from other institutions.

In addition to the current student information system gaps, Charter Oak identified a weakness in its control over personnel with direct access to confidential network information. To correct this problem, the College hired two new employees in May 2004 to secure the data of the institution.

Charter Oak continues to benefit from the strength of its network infrastructure to promote new and innovative academic initiatives on its Web site, such as Web-based conferencing conducted by admissions, real-time chats, and net meetings. In addition, students have electronic access to their records so that they can obtain timely information about their degree progress. To increase support of graduating students, the College has migrated graduation applications and institutional surveys to electronic forms allowing for electronic response from students.

Increased interest and attendance at on-ground academic workshops have induced the College to video-cast them using streaming servers real-time. For high-resolution purposes, Charter Oak edits and authors DVDs of workshops for viewing by students and faculty.



When it began offering online courses, the College employed WebMentor as its learning management system (LMS). In 2002, it became evident through student and faculty surveys that this system was inadequate. As a result, Charter Oak decided to migrate to Blackboard (Bb), offered through the CTDL. This LMS provides multiple paths for student action and interaction. In addition, Bb allows for threaded discussions, real-time chats, power point presentations, online tests and quizzes and shared Web space. Faculty now have the advanced tools they need to facilitate online learning and students have access to multiple technologies through which they can demonstrate the knowledge they acquire in their courses.

The distance learning staff, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Director of Academic Services and information technology staff regularly monitor trends in distance learning and the feedback from faculty and student to determine if changes in services are needed. Two years ago, the evaluation of Bb usage data in conjunction with WebTrends Web site monitoring data informed Charter Oak that it should increase the hours of its help desk to better serve its student population. Using this electronic data, Charter Oak State College adjusted its hours of operation accordingly.

To ensure that its students are competent in the use of information technology, Charter Oak has added a general education requirement in information literacy. The College uses the curriculum of the online service CAT1, which assesses technology skills and provides instruction in information technology skills and computer software. All Charter Oak online courses require students to use online resources. The College provides the online eTutoring service ([www.etutoring.org](http://www.etutoring.org)), which evaluates and assists students with their writing, math, statistics, science, and accounting coursework.

### **Library Resources**

Once Charter Oak began offering online courses, it became evident that the College needed to provide library services directly to its students rather than instructing them on ways to access libraries at other facilities. While the College's Connecticut residents have access to library resources at other State universities and colleges, borrowing privileges are not always possible and library staff are not always aware of policies. Moreover, out-of-state students have no such recourse.

In 2001, Charter Oak began to offer its students electronic access to the Connecticut Digital Library (iCONN). While iCONN provides students with access to specialized databases mainly in business, health, and psychology subject areas, the humanities and sciences are underrepresented and there is a lack of full texts. In 2005, after reviewing survey data from student and faculty on library services, the College contracted with a second online library, Jones e-global library (**Evidence: Library/LB2, LB3**). Jones e-global library does not replicate but builds upon the data in the iCONN library and offers 24/7 support, online tutorials, research guides, a virtual reference desk, as well as other features not offered by iCONN. A question on satisfaction with library services is included on the Graduate Survey; however, it is a general question, so Charter Oak will evaluate the library services again in Summer 2007.

To ensure that graduates have acquired the skills necessary to use library resources for research and to cite their work properly, information literacy is among Charter Oak's general education requirements. To this end, the majority of Charter Oak's courses require students to conduct library research and to write a research paper. A one-credit online course, ENG 102A, is offered for those students who need to acquire or improve their knowledge of conducting research.

Additionally, MBS Direct, Charter Oak's online book vendor, provides information on research paper writing, Charter Oak's course syllabi contain links on how to write research papers, and both address how to find, evaluate, and cite resources. In addition, the Vice President for Academic Affairs has written a number of articles for *Update* on the importance of knowing how to correctly write a research paper, with an emphasis on correct citations.

When instructors have charged students with plagiarism and it is determined that the students do not know how to write a research paper, the students are often directed to take an additional writing course. Depending on their individual needs, they are placed in either ENG 102 or ENG 102A. All but one who complied by completing the course and re-submitting their papers have been able to pass the course in which they had plagiarized. Charter Oak has found that students, rather than overtly using the work of others in their papers without citation, are misinterpreting the rules of citation or are guilty of overuse of cited material rather than integrating their own thoughts into their papers. ENG 102 and ENG 102A effectively deal with this issue. In addition, the 24/7 library support provides assistance to students with questions on proper research and citation practices.

## ***Projection***

### **Information Resources**

As the College has grown, so has its need for effective and efficient information technology. Between 1999 and 2005, small "needs" were supported in an ad-hoc manner, making it difficult to quantify the usage of information technology resources. Beginning in 2005, with the addition of a full-time Management Information Systems (MIS) Director, the College implemented a central information repository that analyzes the usage of IT resources, including the Help Desk for the Business Office, staff training, Web site management, and network services (**Evidence: Information Technology/IT14**). Reports are made quarterly to the IT Committee to determine the usage, success, and alignment of information technology resources with the needs of academic and support staff. At the conclusion of each fiscal year, the IT Committee reports to the Executive Council on the state of IT at the College and projections for the next year.

To support the institution's goal of being a "high tech" college, staff must be available to design, architect, build, monitor, and support student-centered IT applications. The 24/7/365 nature of online learning creates a need for support services to be available outside of regular business hours. Employee-sharing with the CTDLIC provides resources such as a student help desk and allow the College to maintain core student and staff services at a minimum cost. The College will continue to pursue cost sharing and employee-sharing initiatives as long as they positively impact student/staff service and system stability. At the same time, the College's five-year technology plan (**Evidence: Information Technology/IT7**) will continue to project costs with both shared and non-shared options so that the College's dependence on outside support is understood. At the end of each fiscal year, the President, the Executive Director of the CTDLIC, the CIO, and the Board will meet to determine if there is continued synergy in employee cost sharing.

The College has used the revenue from its increased distance learning operations and partnerships to fund institutional studies on process systems and system improvement. These processes will continue to be reviewed by the IT Committee and updated as necessary.

Charter Oak's current infrastructure and infrastructure planning are satisfactory for the institution's current needs; however, the College will continue to work with the State of

Connecticut to ensure that sufficient funds are available to support the College's five-year Technology Plan. As technology dependence deepens, the College needs to create a contingency account in the event that bond funding is unavailable. In addition, increased security and business continuity plans need to be established and tested to ensure that the College and College information are secure and can be reconstructed in the event of a disaster. While the College and CTDLC have a disaster recovery plan, Charter Oak needs to expand its Technology Plan to include complete facility destruction planning. The CIO will work with industry leaders as well as current software vendors to determine which high-availability architecture is supported with the products that are in use at the BSAA data center. The Board will conduct a business impact analysis to determine what the key technology systems are and will contract an out-of-state disaster recovery agency to plan for the restoration of those systems in the event of a disaster. The Board plan will be developed in calendar year 2007 with budget funding allocated in FY2008 for off-site disaster recovery space.

The College expects to make changes in or evaluate technologies in a number of areas:

### **Student Information System**

Charter Oak has selected Jenzabar as its new student information system. Jenzabar is a client server, student-centric system which should address many of the deficiencies in the College's current system. During the 18-month conversion, Charter Oak will need to simultaneously support two systems, the current "legacy" system and the new Jenzabar system. The Chief Information Officer and the MIS Director will work with the executive staff and Cabinet to ensure that there is institutional and project alignment throughout the project for a successful implementation. Precautions will be taken to classify and protect sensitive information as it migrates into the new system.

Charter Oak currently supports multiple, disparate systems to provide Web-accessibility to its students, including an e-commerce course registration system, an online Web site for academic information, a learning management system, and sundry eTutoring and test registration systems. Each system requires separate usernames and passwords and contributes to an overall inconsistency in the College's electronic presence. As the College moves to the Jenzabar System, it will implement the Jenzabar Internet Campus Portal. This portal will serve as a single point of entry and information for students for all of these disparate systems. It will provide one consistent "image" of Charter Oak to the students and will also interconnect the associated backend databases, sharing data between each system. The result will be a cleaner, more secure, and more user-friendly system that limits students' need to enter information more than once.

Jenzabar will allow for rapid analysis of data from surveys and other sources. It will also provide the means to offer better student services and access by students to their records. While the new system will be welcome, it will almost triple the College's annual software budget. As Jenzabar and other systems are installed, the College will evaluate what it considers to be its key performance indicators. These measures will be custom-built into the systems to allow real-time and long-term analysis of the status of the institution, its students, and trends. When phase I of the Jenzabar rollout is completed, the Cabinet will receive training on how to view and create real-time reports on key performance indicators.

### **Web Site**

The [www.charteroak.edu](http://www.charteroak.edu) Web site currently meets the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) standard for Web site accessibility. In addition, the Web site is "Bobby Approved," a program

that determines the level of ADA accessibility. As Charter Oak continues to build its online presence, care will be given to select tools and technologies that will continue to allow accessibility of Charter Oak's online resources.

### **Learning Management Systems**

As a member of the CTDLC, Charter Oak is annually offered the option to select a new learning management system. As the proliferation of high-speed connectivity reaches a greater percentage of Charter Oak students, the LMS vendors will create new tools and systems to facilitate distance learning. The College will continue to collect and review learning outcome data as well as faculty and student course surveys; and the distance learning staff, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Director of Academic Services, and information technology staff will review this data and trends in distance learning to determine if a change in LMS is necessary.

The College's computer literacy course provided by CAT1 has received positive responses from the students who have taken it. Unfortunately, enrollment in the course has been very low. The Distance Learning Office will examine the CAT1 data to see if there is any correlation between students taking the course and their performance in online courses (Summer 2007). The College will make greater attempts to publicize the course to its students.

### **Library Services**

Students have access to two online library resources, the State of Connecticut iCONN library and Jones e-global library. The Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Chief Information Officer, the Assistant Director of Academic Programs, and the distance learning staff will continue to monitor both trend and usage reports on the iCONN and Jones e-global library. In addition, the Vice President and her staff will consider the development of a course to assist students in availing themselves of library resources online and on-ground.

### ***Institutional Effectiveness***

The College has attempted to construct a "high availability" network in-line with industry standards. It has adopted a best-in-brand, best-in-breed technology approach that allows for the best product, not the least expensive or easiest to maintain, to be installed. In addition to monitoring staff, faculty, and student satisfaction, Charter Oak regularly uses industry experts and consultants to review, audit, or recommend solutions to the expanding network and networking services. Those audit reports are reviewed by the Chief Information Officer who works with the IT Committee and information technology staff, as appropriate, to remedy any issues that are presented. Information Technology assets, disaster recovery plans, and licensing agreements are reviewed every two years by the State auditors to ensure compliance.

It is anticipated that the implementation of Jenzabar will expedite academic and financial functions across the College. New real-time and data-driven reports will allow the College more effective access to information that will enable improved decision making

Library Services are reviewed by the Vice President for Academic Affairs and academic affairs staff. Student and faculty evaluations of library services are conducted at the conclusion of each semester. New surveys have been created to gauge the response to the Jones e-global library. The Vice President and her staff will review the survey information and make needed adjustments to the services.

## STANDARD EIGHT: Physical and Technological Resources

### *Description*

#### **Physical Resources**

Charter Oak State College has been operating in its location at 55 Paul Manafort Drive since 1999. The building, designed for a distance learning institution, is located adjacent to the campus of Central Connecticut State University (CCSU). Charter Oak supports an impressive infrastructure of electronic equipment. The size, scope, and purpose of the College's data center far exceed the technology facilities at institutions of similar size in order to provide 24/7/365 support of its online activities up to and including the disaster recovery of its core servers.

Management of the facility is the responsibility of the Director of Finance and Administration. The Director is assisted in a number of areas by the Assistant to the President and by the Associate for Business Services. Charter Oak contracts with a number of State entities to provide the commodity services associated with facility management. The institution contracts with Central Connecticut State University for office cleaning, minor building repairs, snow removal, lawn mowing, and police service. Office equipment and the heating, ventilating and air conditioning system are maintained through contracts with outside vendors. Mission critical phone and learning management systems (LMS) services are contracted with Connecticut State University (CSU) System and the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (CTDLC) respectively.

In order to maintain its physical plant, the Board has established an interest-bearing planned maintenance reserve of \$52,400 (about three percent of the building's value on June 30, 2000) to provide for upkeep that is not covered by current services or capital funding. Capital funding from the State covers major repairs such as roofing. With assistance from the Department of Higher Education, the College undertook a Facilities Condition Assessment in 2002 which sought to identify building deficiencies in need of remediation (**Evidence: Facilities/FL3**). The College has since undertaken projects aimed at rectifying deficiencies identified during the assessment. Projects include code compliance for access and building integrity and functionality.

The College has installed an electronic surveillance system which is armed when the building is locked after business hours. Staff members can enter the locked building with electronic passes and use a security code to disarm the surveillance system. For safety reasons, members of the staff are required to sign in and out of the building, and the College has an emergency evacuation plan (**Evidence: Facilities/FL2**).

The building originally housed both the College and the CTDLC. In 2003, the CTDLC leased space elsewhere to accommodate the growth in space needs by both organizations. Since 2003, the College has continued to grow, and now faces the need for additional space. The College is moving down two paths to address this issue. In the short term, it plans to lease space in the facility housing the CTDLC. Simultaneously, the General Assembly has authorized the College \$50,000 in Bond Funds to begin the planning process for a new building that would be sufficiently large to support both the College and the CTDLC (**Evidence: Facilities/FL1**).

#### **Technical Resources**

As a provider of distance education, Charter Oak operates a data center from its building that serves both the College and the CTDLC. The data center supports the Charter Oak student information system, e-mail system, Web site, data storage, and Internet access. Within the same

data center, the CTDLC operates the Charter Oak learning management system (Blackboard), the student help desk, and Charter Oak's online registration and payment system. The personal computers for the Charter Oak staff all use the data center for file storage, data base access, printing, security, software updates, and operating system patches. The College operates a testing center equipped with networked computers and dedicated testing servers. The College has developed a four-year replacement schedule for computer equipment which is developed in line with the Strategic Plan and the five-year Technology Plan (**Evidence: Information Technology/IT7**).

The technical capacity of the Charter Oak data center includes redundant generated power, uninterruptible power supplies, remote IP-KVM server access, Checkpoint Firewalls, and EMC storage. Backups are performed on site and stored both on site and off site at a cold disaster recovery location. The current mean time to recovery for the Charter Oak mission critical applications is 72 hours. In addition, the College has implemented monitoring and trending programs (Web Trends, Nagios, and Microsoft Operations Manager) to track the uptime, health, and usage of its core applications. This represents a fundamental shift in operations from one of reactive maintenance to a proactive one.

## *Appraisal*

### **Physical Resources**

Charter Oak benefits from a relatively new facility which was constructed in 1999 that supports current technology and building systems. This facility has relatively new mechanicals, and has allowed for some expansion of office space. The College strategically monitors the condition of its largest capital asset and plans improvements as necessary. Charter Oak has created an emergency facilities account to cover building improvements/emergencies. When a facility assessment conducted by Vanderweil Facility Advisors identified deficiencies in the building, funds were allocated to correct the electrical, HVAC, and emergency lighting problems (**Evidence: Facilities/FL3**).

Now that the College has outgrown its relatively new facility, it has made changes in its hours of operation and in the physical configuration of the facility in order to address immediate space needs. Some walls have been removed and closets, lobbies and reception areas have been sacrificed to accommodate the need for additional office space. Hours of operation have been expanded from 8 a.m. - 6 p.m. to 8 a.m. - 10 p.m. to allow staff on different shifts to share work space. The extended hours have led to adjustments to the security of the building, including upgraded alarms, new locks, and intercom systems. In order to accommodate the increased demand for CLEP testing, Charter Oak has expanded the number of testing sessions and uses conference rooms for additional testing lab space. It is contemplating moving the testing lab to a second location which can accommodate more stations.

There are positive and negative aspects to the relocation of space and extended hours. The extended hours allow the College to serve its students, located throughout the United States and abroad, more effectively. However, the cramped, makeshift quarters and shared space provide less-than-ideal working conditions for the staff.

### **Technology Resources**

Charter Oak supports an impressive infrastructure of equipment that is appropriate for an institution which is committed to providing 24/7/365 support of its activities and the disaster recovery of its core servers. The configuration of the network and implementation of firewall

technologies are designed to discourage hackers and protect the data that the College servers hold. In 2005, the Board created two information technology positions responsible for the security and protection of the data that are held in the Data Center. These positions ensure 24/7 on-call support. As Charter Oak begins the programming of its new student database, a change is being made to convert the College's unique student identifier from social security numbers to automatically generated numbers in order to protect students' privacy.

The College is dependent on outside entities for commodity services such as facility maintenance, telecommunications, and cleaning. The College believes that contracting with organizations whose core expertise encompasses such tasks as phone service and learning management system hosting provides superior service to the College and frees it to devote its resources to its student service mission. In the case of the CTDLC, the College is especially fortunate to have a technical partner that reports to the same Board and whose Executive Director reports to the President of the College, who also serves as the Executive Director of the Board.

### ***Projection***

#### **Physical Resources**

The College has begun working with space planning and architectural consultants on a proposal to the Department of Public Works (DPW) for expansion of the current facility or construction of a new facility. In the meantime, as needed, the College will lease additional space contiguous to that leased by the CTDLC.

State building guidelines provide for only a limited excess capacity to be built into new construction. As the College works with the DPW and the Connecticut State Legislature on planning its next facility, it will articulate its need for a facility that meets the current State guidelines but allows for economical expansion to accommodate rapid growth and the dynamic style of the College.

While planning its next facility, the College will continue to work with the DPW, Central Connecticut State University facilities department, and the State Department of Homeland Security to confirm that it is following all State guidelines and ensuring the safety and security of its employees.

#### **Technology Resources**

The expansion of technology resources is addressed in detail in Standard Seven. The majority of growth in Charter Oak's physical and technological presence will revolve around the implementation of a new student information system (SIS), Jenzabar. The project will take between 12-18 months and will require that both physical resources and systems mature to meet the needs of the students, faculty, and staff. The SIS will require technological, network, and personnel "space." Charter Oak will engage a Jenzabar project manager to work with the Charter Oak project manager. The executive staff will evaluate quarterly progress reports to ensure academic and information technology resource alignment.

### ***Institutional Effectiveness***

Charter Oak avails itself of the talent of both internal committees and external support to assess its physical and technical resources. Internally, a strategic Technology Committee and a strategic Facilities Committee evaluate and address technology and building issues. Information technology industry experts and consultants review, audit, or recommend solutions to the

expanding network and networking services. Audit reports are reviewed by the Chief Information Officer who works with the Information Technology Committee and IT staff to remedy any issues that are presented.

Charter Oak has partnered with the Department of Public Works, the Department of Higher Education, and Central Connecticut State University for the assessment and repair of the current facility.

The President is working with the Department of Public Works, the Office of Policy and Management, and the State Legislature, as well as outside industry consultants, to substantiate the need and to seek funding for a new, larger Charter Oak State College facility.



## STANDARD NINE: Financial Resources

### *Description*

#### **Revenue and Expenditures**

The College administers a single Operating Fund to support its mission-driven activities. Revenue for the Operating Fund comes primarily from two funding sources: the General Fund (GF), which is appropriated by the State Legislature, and the Educational Services Account (ESA), which is generated from tuition charged for courses and fees to Charter Oak students or to others for testing, the credit registry, portfolio review and the Connecticut Credit Assessment Program. Additional revenue comes from State bond funds for computer, equipment and facility projects; contractual obligations through partnerships; interest on the average daily balance of the Operating Fund invested with the State's Short Term Investment Fund; grants to the College, one of which is Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF); bonus funds for a two-year support of its Women in Transition Program; and grants and private contributions made to the College through the Charter Oak State College Foundation. Any non-grant balance of revenue over expenditures in a given year is kept as reserves.

As a public institution in the Connecticut system of higher education, Charter Oak relies on State funding for a portion of its activities and has experienced a decline in State support of the Operating Fund. Given the current fiscal environment, however, Charter Oak has fared well compared with other colleges both in and outside Connecticut. The General Fund, which includes funds for personnel costs of 19 employees and partial funding for an additional position, currently provides less than half of the budget for day-to-day operations. During the past five years, the State's contribution to the College's operations varied from 61.8 percent in FY2000 to 46.9 percent in FY2004, including fringe benefits and Bond Funds. The ESA supports 22 full-time employees, 24 part-time employees and all other day-to-day operations not covered by the General Fund. The increase in ESA dollars over the years has been due to new program development, such as online learning, and student access to financial aid programs.

The College must establish fee rates for its programs which cover the gap between State funding and what is needed to support the annual budget. When there are reductions in State funding, the College must access reserves, reduce operating expenses, or increase fees at the risk of disenfranchising students. The Charter Oak Fee Committee is responsible for recommending new fees or changes in existing fees to the Board for its consideration. Fee recommendations incorporate both student access and budget needs.

When new programs are created, Charter Oak builds a realistic budget and establishes appropriate fees which are approved and reviewed on an annual basis by the Executive Council and the Board. The financial goal is to minimize reliance on reserves to cover the cost of running a program. The College takes the same fiscally conservative stance when entering into partnerships and activities which produce a new revenue stream. Careful projections of revenues over expenses are made, careful consideration is given to the integrity of the enterprise, and the initiatives are closely monitored to ensure that they meet both fiscal and programmatic goals.

To protect the College's fiscal stability, the Board has established a policy which requires a contingency reserve of between five and ten percent of the College's budgeted expenditures for the current year (**Evidence: Fund Balance Guidelines: Document Room**). The contingency reserve provides insurance against unanticipated adversities such as significant enrollment decline or GF reductions. Should the contingency reserve fall below the five percent, the College

will develop an action plan to restore the contingency reserve balance to the designated level. In addition, the Board has established a planned maintenance reserve of \$52,400 (about three percent of the building's value on June 30, 2000) to provide for physical plant maintenance not covered by current services or capital funding. Capital funding from the State covers major repairs such as roofing. As part of the FY2006 budget development process, reserves have been designated to upgrade the College's student information system.

Charter Oak is in a financially stable position as a result of several years of conservative budgeting and management. The following chart shows major trends in the College's enrollment, revenue, expenditures and fund balances in selected years between FY1996 and FY2005.

	FY 1996	FY 2001	FY 2005 *	Change FY2001-2005
Number of Applications	904	984	2,560	160%
Number of New Matriculants	516	611	1,100	80%
Total Matriculants	1,290	1,459	1,495	2%
Total Distance Learning Enrollment	NA	822	2,402	192%
Total Graduates	249	386	519	35%
Financial Aid Awarded	\$27,945	\$141,501	\$5,284,833	3,635%
Total GF State Appropriation	\$939,782	\$1,680,000	\$1,559,124	-7%
Total ESA Revenue	\$597,452	\$1,326,907	\$3,415,435	157%
Total ESA Expenditures	\$546,422	\$1,243,476	\$3,093,378	149%
Total Fund Balance	\$195,829	\$444,818	\$1,182,335	166%
Foundation Asset Value	\$28,288	\$469,380	\$933,079	99%

\* The figures were impacted by the Bridgepoint Education partnership

The College's Strategic Plan and its budgeting process are closely linked. New funding is based on the priorities of the Plan. The Board carefully considers budget requests in light of the overall plans of the institution. The College follows an established biennial budget process which involves a number of constituencies: staff, the President's Executive Council, the Cabinet and Board members (**Evidence: Financial Information/FN10**). The Student Association also reviews student fee increases. Budget development follows guidelines provided by the Office of Policy and Management and the Department of Higher Education (DHE) and involves a five-year model: actual revenue and expenditures for the previous and current years, and projections for the following three years. Budget decisions, which are reviewed and approved by the Board, are based on collective bargaining costs, Charter Oak's Strategic Plan goals, priorities established by the DHE Board of Governors and priorities established by the Governor of Connecticut.

The College's Division of Finance and Administration (DFA) manages the College's fiscal operations using the State's CORE-CT Financial System which was implemented in FY2004 and mirrors Connecticut's fiscal policies detailed in the *State Accounting Manual*. The DFA prepares monthly financial reports for the College's administration and the Board. These reports analyze actual to budgeted revenue and expenditures. Reports are also prepared for the Office of Policy and Management, the Department of Higher Education, the Office of Fiscal Analysis and other pertinent State agencies.

Financial records are audited every two years by the State's Auditors of Public Accounts to ensure compliance with State laws, regulations and contracts and to evaluate the College's internal control structure for compliance. The most recent audit covered FY2003 and FY2004

**(Evidence: FinancialInformation/FN1)**; the audit for FY2005 and FY2006 is currently in progress. The audit is conducted in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards applicable to financial-related audits contained in *Government Auditing Standards*, issued by the Comptroller General of the United States. The audit is reviewed by the Executive Council, the Cabinet, and the Board. The DFA and the Executive Council take appropriate action on resulting recommendations **(Evidence: FinancialInformation/FN1)**.

### **Financial Aid**

In July 2000, Charter Oak began processing aid under Title IV. This was an important step for the College in providing students with financial need access to a degree program that accepts their previous credits and provides flexibility for degree completion. In addition to federal Pell Grants and FFELP programs, students receive fee waivers, Foundation grants, State grants, and grants provided by the Student Association. In addition, the Foundation has established a book loan fund for financial aid students whose aid will not be disbursed by the start of the term. With this aid, students can take advantage of the increasing availability of distance learning opportunities at Charter Oak and other accredited institutions, as well as on-ground courses across the country. In FY2005, 70 percent of the Student Financial Aid funds disbursed by the College supported coursework taken at other colleges and universities.

The availability of financial aid enabled the College to create the Women in Transition program. Approximately 50 women are currently completing their degrees through this program, and to date, over 100 women have participated in the program. They are single-mothers in low-paying jobs, many of whom were former welfare recipients. The goal is to provide the education these women need to gain better paying jobs and break the cycle of poverty. The College has secured grant funds to provide these students with laptop computers, printers, and Internet access. Federal financial aid covers the majority of their educational costs.

In September 2001, the Board endorsed a State legislative initiative to create a Student Financial Aid program for Charter Oak State College. The legislation passed, and funding has continued since that time. The amount requested from the General Assembly through the biennial budget process is equivalent to the amount of the tuition waivers provided to Connecticut residents by the College the year before the biennial budget is adopted.

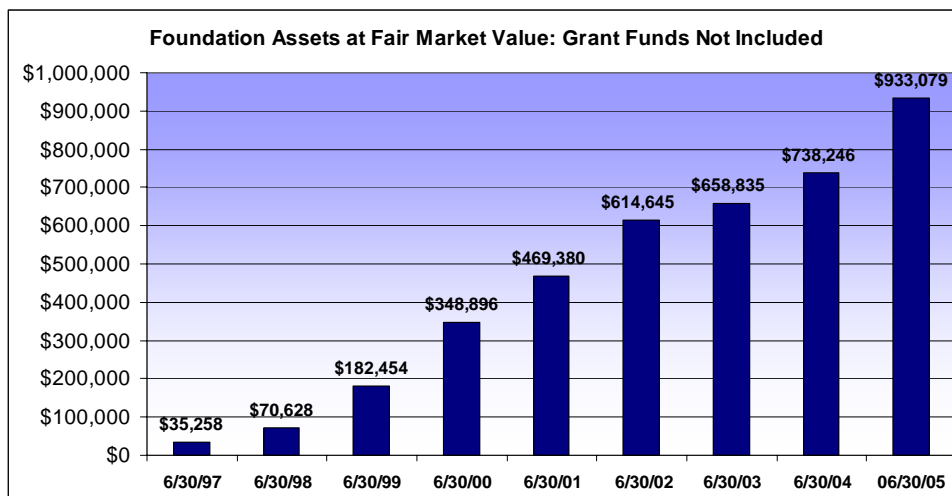
Six times per year, the Board receives financial aid reports which contain information on the gender of the aid recipients, type and source of aid received, including dollar amount and total aid awarded. Any questions or clarification on aid disbursements that may be raised by a Board member are typically addressed at the meeting. At the end of each fiscal year, the Board receives an annual summary report that details the number of students who were awarded aid; the amount of aid awarded by source; and a profile of recipients in-state and out of state, by gender, and by ethnicity.

### **The Charter Oak State College Foundation**

The Foundation is incorporated under the Nonstock Corporation Act of the State of Connecticut and holds an IRS 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt status. It was established in 1977 under the name Connecticut Open Learning Assistance Corporation. As the College changed its name, so did the Foundation. In October 1983, it became the Charter Oak College Foundation, Inc., and in July 1992 it took its current name as the Charter Oak State College Foundation, Inc.

The Foundation, which is in compliance with State statutes concerning foundations, is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors comprised of up to 20 voting members. A Charter Oak student is elected by students and serves as a non-voting member. The Board is composed of a diverse mix of professionals which includes attorneys, certified financial advisors, corporate managers, former and current bank presidents and graduates of the College. The College's Dean of Development, Marketing and Enrollment Services serves as its Executive Director. There are six standing committees: Audit and Finance, Executive, Financial Development, Grants, Investment, and Nominating. The full Board meets four times per year.

The Foundation solicits and receives donations for the support of the educational purposes of the College from corporations, foundations and individual donors. It also provides grants to the College for financial aid to needy students, scholarships in accordance with donor criteria, and support for College activities including online course development. Assets at the close of FY1997 were \$35,258. In May 1998, the Foundation embarked on its first major endowment campaign with a five-year goal of \$750,000, which included the State of Connecticut match (\$1 for every \$2 raised). The Foundation reached its goal in that time frame. Foundation assets have continued to grow steadily over a nine-year period. In 2005, the Foundation set a goal of reaching \$1 million in its endowment, and by July 2006 it had over \$1 million in assets.



In compliance with State statutes, the Foundation is audited every year when gross receipts are \$100,000 or greater. The State of Connecticut Auditors of Public Accounts conducted an audit of the foundation's financial statements for the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2003. The audit was conducted in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards. The auditors also tested the Foundation's compliance with Sections 4-37e to 4-37j of the Connecticut's General Statutes. The results of these tests disclosed no instances of noncompliance. Further, no matters involving internal control over financial reporting and its operations were considered to be of material weakness. The FY2004 audit has been conducted and the FY2005 audit is in progress **(Evidence: Foundation/FO4)**.

There is a good relationship between the Foundation Board and the Board for State Academic Awards (BSAA). Joint meetings are scheduled periodically so that the Foundation Board can share information on its fundraising efforts with the BSAA, and the BSAA can discuss future College needs.

## *Appraisal*

The financial position of Charter Oak is solid and stable. New initiatives such as distance learning and partnerships have enabled the College to build a fund balance of approximately 1.2 million dollars at the end of FY2005. The reserves balance has increased from \$195,829 in FY1996 to \$444,818 in FY2001, and to \$1,182,335 at the close of FY2005. The fund balance is supporting several of the College's new planning initiatives in FY2006 that include the purchase of a new student information system (SIS) and related support costs. The balance will also fund the lease expansion for the College at the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (CTDLC) site in Newington.

The financial reporting and auditing of all types of externally monitored funds, such as Foundation, ESA, General Fund, grants, and State Bond funds, are thorough, effective, and compliant with external guidelines. Sound fiscal policies are also applied to revenues and expenses, financial aid, and the Foundation.

Charter Oak monitors and plans its use and acquisition of financial resources in an effective manner. During the State's biennial budget process, the College works closely with the State Legislature and appropriate agencies to ensure that Charter Oak receives favorable consideration throughout the appropriation process. Internal processes and operations are regularly reviewed to improve efficiency and provide better service to the students. Fee assessments are reviewed regularly by the College's Fee Committee to keep them aligned with expenditures. The major indices for success of Charter Oak are also reviewed regularly by the administration, and strategies are employed to strengthen areas of stability and address areas of decline. The budget development is careful to take into account the College's strategic planning goals, State initiatives, and departmental needs.

Charter Oak faces some financial challenges. State funding for FY2005 declined to 37 percent, well below the 60 percent which the College set as one of its performance indicators. Fortunately, higher-than-normal revenues from programs and partnerships have minimized the impact of this shortfall during this fiscal year. However, the College is facing a loss of revenue due to a phase-out of one of its major partnerships in FY2007. Charter Oak also faces a reduction in State contributions to the Foundation's endowment fund. The State used to contribute \$1 for every \$2 raised by the Foundation. The amount will now be only approximately \$0.50 for every \$2 raised. Finally, because the State's debt level is so high, the State bond funds, upon which the College depends for some projects, are not made available until late in the fiscal year. This delays equipment upgrades and facility projects. The funding for the site study for the facility also has been delayed.

Implementation of a new SIS, the transition to additional leased space, and subsequent acquisition of a new building are expected to create additional challenges for the institution over the next several years. The cost of the SIS system was offset by bond funding and institutional reserves in year one. The College was fortunate to receive an appropriation of \$212,000 from State surplus funds to support Year Two. The third year and subsequent year costs of the system will have to be absorbed by institutional resources. Aside from the cost associated with the additional leased space near the CTDLC, a new building to house Charter Oak and the CTDLC will likely involve additional costs. These developments will be monitored closely over the next several years.

On the positive side, the new SIS will make the processing of student billing and payment of bills more efficient in addition to improving the institution's capability to process student information. Web-enabled features will simplify bill generation and bill payments. Students will have access to e-commerce features that provide a 24/7 service for registration and bill payment.

### ***Projection***

A new SIS and space to support expanding operations will be the dominant expenditures over the next several years. In addition, collective bargaining increases, higher utility costs, and normal inflation in the costs of goods and services will have an impact on the budget. Careful financial assessment, monitoring, planning, and management will be required to successfully implement these projects and other strategic planning initiatives while maintaining a balance between revenues to expenditures. The College's Fee Committee will meet regularly to review the fees charged to students to determine if the amounts assessed are sufficient to cover the costs of operations and student services.

The budget process will ensure that expenditures are consistent with the goals of the Strategic Plan and match the available resources. Once the budget is finalized, monthly revenue and expenditure reports will be developed and the administration will monitor the institution's fiscal condition.

The College has a plan to improve the conversion rate of applicants and to increase the retention rate of students. Partnerships are being initiated or strengthened to increase enrollments. Distance learning course offerings continue to increase, and the combination of program enrollment, student retention, program development, partnerships and course growth are expected to minimize the impact of a phased-out partnership. New degree program concentrations, noncredit programming, and the development of a master's degree program will also contribute to the vitality of the institution.

The fiscal woes of the State are abating, and the State had a surplus in FY2006. If this trend continues, it is expected that the higher education sector and Charter Oak in particular will benefit from the receipt of slightly higher appropriations and timely awarding of bond funds.

The combination of effective financial stewardship, regular process and program analysis, and productive program development strategies will continue to provide the College with adequate fiscal resources to continue its mission.

### ***Institutional Effectiveness***

Procedures are in place to ensure sound financial management. The President, Chief Financial and Administrative Officer, Director of Finance, and the executive staff review monthly updates on revenue and expenditure data. This review is on the macro level as well as on the program or project level. In addition, the Board reviews the budget summary reports as part of the normal Board agenda during each of its six annual meetings. The Charter Oak Foundation's guidelines also ensure the maintenance of fiscal stability. The College forwards quarterly revenue and expense reports to the Department of Higher Education. These reports are reviewed for compliance to annual budget plans. Fiscal transactions are periodically reviewed by the State Comptroller for adherence to State processing guidelines. Integrity issues, among others, are reviewed every two years during the State audit. Faster extraction and financial summaries are expected with the implementation of the new SIS system.

## STANDARD TEN: Public Disclosure

### *Description*

Charter Oak State College communicates to the public, prospective students, matriculated students, and graduates through its advertisements, Web site, print material, and e-mail. The College continually strives to portray itself accurately.

### **Print Materials**

The College's major print materials are the *Official Catalog*, usually updated every two years; the *Student Handbook*; *Faculty Handbook*; and the *Information Bulletin*, which is used in recruitment. The last three publications are updated annually. In addition, course schedule bulletins, containing course listings, course descriptions, and distance learning policies are printed each term. A *Portfolio Assessment Handbook* and an *Annual Guide to Connecticut Credit Assessment Program (CCAP) Course Reviews* are updated annually.

*Update*, a newsletter for students containing academic information, announcements and important schedule information, is distributed by e-mail three times a year. *Update* informs students about academic and process changes. The College alumni newsletter, *Connections*, is published twice a year and distributed to students, alumni, donors, faculty, legislators, and corporate and community leaders. *Connections* provides these audiences with information about new activities, the success of Charter Oak graduates, and an overview of fundraising efforts. Information about the College's accreditation status is included in the *Information Bulletin*, on the Web site, in program brochures and advertising, and in the *Official Catalog*.

The Vice President for Academic Affairs has major responsibility for academic publications – the *Official Catalog*, student and faculty handbooks, and *Update*. The Vice President also oversees the preparation of the CCAP guide and distance learning course schedule bulletins. The *Information Bulletin* and various recruitment brochures are the responsibility of the Director of Admissions or the Dean of Development, Marketing and Enrollment Services. The Senior Associate for Marketing and Communications coordinates the production of all publications. Text is reviewed for accuracy by appropriate staff.

The College's accreditation, mission, objectives, and student outcomes for programs and concentrations are published in the *Official Catalog* and online. The *Official Catalog* and Web site also contain information about admissions, advisement services, transfer credit, student fees, refund policies, the Student Code of Conduct, student leave policies, concentration requirements, courses, student financial aid, portfolio review, testing, credit for non-collegiate instruction, military credit, the review of credit from international institutions, contract learning and overall degree requirements. Members of the College's Core Consulting Faculty and Distance Learning Teaching Faculty are listed in the *Official Catalog*, along with their academic credentials and academic or business affiliations. The catalog also lists the membership of the Academic Committees and includes a description of online courses offered at the time of its publication.

The College annually prepares a Fact Sheet describing the size and characteristics of the student body and its graduates. This is shared with the Board, legislators, and other constituencies. The pertinent information in the Fact Sheet is included on the College's Web site (**Evidence: FactSheets**). Every two years, an extensive Fact Book is prepared for the State Legislature. The *Information Bulletin* is used for recruitment and contains information about the nature of the Charter Oak program and academic and student services. It also contains fee information and

stresses that student costs depend upon the number of credits required, how the credits are earned, and the length of time it takes to complete the degree program. Student Financial Aid information is available in the *Official Catalog*, on the Web site and in other print material.

Information about the College's performance, including retention and graduation rates, is provided to the Connecticut Department of Higher Education and published annually. The Charter Oak section is available on the College's Web site, [www.charteroak.edu](http://www.charteroak.edu). This information is required by State statute and is shared with legislators (**Evidence: Accountability Reports**). Some of the information for this Accountability Report is gathered from annual surveys of recent graduates and alumni. Survey responses are analyzed for statements regarding student satisfaction, success in employment, and success in gaining entry to graduate school. These statements appear in many publications and on the Web site.

The College also provides information to the public through the federal Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and various publications, such as *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, *Peterson's Guide*, and those of the College Board. Press releases are sent to various newspapers and other publications regarding new Board and staff appointments, student awards, college events and program changes.

Advertising is the responsibility of the Senior Associate for Marketing and Communication. All ad copy is reviewed by appropriate staff for accuracy and clarity of message.

### **College Web Site**

The College's Web site serves as a major marketing and information tool. The College strives for content consistency in both Web-based and print material. The Web site serves as an efficient means for providing up-to-date information. It is accessible to students with disabilities in accordance with World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) standard for Web site accessibility. In addition, the Web site is "Bobby Approved," a program that determines the level of ADA accessibility.

A Technology Committee, chaired by the Chief Information Officer with representation from all departments, oversees the College's Web presence. The College plans for major revision of the Web site every two years, but regular upgrading keeps information current. The goals of the 2003 revision were to have a site which would be easy to navigate, would be comprehensive and clear, and would encourage first-time visitors to come back to the site to learn more about the College and apply. In preparation for the revision, the Technology Committee evaluated other Web sites. In addition, a group of Central Connecticut State University students undertook the project of comparing the Charter Oak State College Web site with those of identified competitors (**Evidence: Document Room**). Once the new site was in the "testing" stage, key staff met to review each page to ensure that the goals of the revision were met.

The College completed Phase One of a complete upgrade in March 2006. The new site supports the previously described goals but the home page and navigation process were reconfigured to strengthen the site's role as a marketing tool. The focus of Phase Two is on current Charter Oak students. Content will be designed to provide extensive information to assist students as they pursue degree completion.

### **Partnerships**

Whenever the College enters into a partnership – whether it is an enrollment partnership like Bridgepoint Education or a program development partnership such as the noncredit Nurse



Refresher Course developed in conjunction with the Connecticut League for Nursing – Charter Oak reserves the right of approval of all print and Web site content and the use of its logo. College staff periodically check Web sites and conduct Web searches in an attempt to guard against misuse of the Charter Oak name and to ensure that the College and its role in any partnership is accurately described.

### ***Appraisal***

In presenting the College to the public, Charter Oak seeks to convey its mission as well as three specific aspects of its program: acceptance of prior credit, credit-earning options, and the opportunity to complete the degree more quickly than through traditional programs. Responses to student surveys submitted at the time of graduation indicate that the College is presenting itself accurately. Even those who withdraw appear to understand the Charter Oak mission. According to surveys of withdrawing students, financial or personal reasons (family, health, or work changes), rather than a misunderstanding of the Charter Oak program, caused them to leave the College (**Evidence: Graduate Surveys/GS1:GS6**).

A member of the Work Group for Standard Ten reviewed the College's major publications and concluded that Charter Oak's image is conveyed consistently across the publications. Although the message may be consistent and understood by those who become Charter Oak students, there continues to be a concern among staff that the message about the College's mission and program is not clear to all those who could benefit.

Another area in which Charter Oak has difficulty telling its story is in national surveys of college and universities, such as The College Board Annual Survey of Colleges, Barron's Survey of American Colleges, and Peterson's Survey of Undergraduate Institutions. These surveys are designed for traditional institutions, and Charter Oak has to force its numbers and information into forms that do not accurately describe the College.

As mentioned previously, the responsibility for print publications is decentralized. As the need for marketing increases, so do the demands on staff because of the growth in the institution's programs and services. The College needs to reconsider how it assigns responsibility for its publications.

Managing the Web site has proven to be a challenge. The College has tried various ways to assign responsibility for updating the site. Currently, the President's Office has the responsibility of ensuring that the public information section of the site is current. This section includes information or links to information on fees, statistical data on student financial aid, State-required accountability and performance measures (retention and graduation rates and student satisfaction data) and the College's most recent audit report. A half-time staff member has been hired to assist in Web marketing and design.

A major site revision, planned for Fall 2005, was postponed because the College lacked staff with sufficient expertise in Web site development. The goal of the revision was to ensure that the site was both an effective marketing tool for prospective students and a source of accurate information for current students. The site revision did occur in Spring 2006 after an appropriate staff person was hired. New software has since been purchased to gather information about site page visits.

### ***Projections***

Annual audits of the Web site will be conducted each winter by the designated committee. If it is found that information on the site is not current, the process for updating will be revised. Students will be asked to assess the value of the Web site's content.

The Senior Staff Associate for Internet Marketing will continue to monitor the Internet to see how the College is described on other Web sites. If inaccurate information is posted by a College partner, the Vice President for Academic Affairs will inform the partner that it must remove the information or jeopardize the partnership.

The College will formalize a process for the review of print material during the 2006-2007 academic year and will conduct a communications audit biannually thereafter.

### ***Institutional Effectiveness***

The *Official Catalog* is revised at least every two years. In the event of major program revisions, it will be reprinted annually. Many staff members review the document for content accuracy. The Vice President for Academic Affairs has the responsibility for the final review of the catalog as well as the *Information Bulletin* and various handbooks which are revised and reprinted each summer. All of these documents are available in print and online to ensure easy accessibility. Although no major inconsistencies have been reported in information provided to prospective or enrolled students, the College will formalize the process for conducting audits of print and Web site information.

The College sent notice of the pending NEASC evaluation visit to newspapers throughout Connecticut and posted the announcement on the College Web site (**Evidence: Publications/PU4**).

## STANDARD ELEVEN: Integrity

### *Description*

The Board for State Academic Award (BSAA) receives its authority from the Connecticut General statutes. It is guided in its operations by State laws governing Connecticut public higher education. In addition, the Board and, subsequently Charter Oak State College, must meet the specific standards of the Board of Governors of Higher Education and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

The Board for State Academic Awards expects that the stated principles, goals and objectives of the College are reflected in its actions as well as in its interactions with students, faculty, staff, and the public. In this regard, the College strives to assure that all of its print literature, its Web site, and its advertising provide accurate information about all aspects of its program.

The Board expects integrity and ethical behavior from its staff and has adopted an Ethics Policy. It is part of the *Employee Handbook* and is available online (**Evidence: Human Resources: Document Room**). The College requires that all managers complete annual reports to the State Ethics Commission. The College abides by the State's guidelines on ethics and is required to give all interviewed candidates a copy of the State's Ethics Statement. The Executive Director of the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium serves as the Board for State Academic Awards Ethics Liaison Officer. When questions arise in grey areas such as the President accepting a seat at a corporate-sponsored table for a statewide event, the Ethics Commission is consulted.

College staff are educated regarding their responsibilities under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). All requests for information about students are directed to the Registrar. A statement on FERPA is included in the *Official Catalog* and online, and is published yearly in *Update*. Staff are instructed on how to handle calls from a parent or a spouse asking for information about a student.

The Board has also approved a Statement on Academic Honesty and a Student Code of Conduct. The Academic Council and the Board of the Student Association were consulted when the Statement on Academic Honesty and the Code of Conduct were revised in 2004. These are published in the College's *Official Catalog*, the *Faculty Handbook* and the *Student Handbook* and can be found on the College's Web site. The Statement and Code set the framework for expected student behavior. The College has worked with its faculty to ensure that students understand the importance of academic honesty and the consequences of not abiding by the student Code of Conduct.

Information about academic honesty and what constitutes plagiarism is included in paper and online versions of course syllabi and in the materials on portfolio assessment. Students understand that faculty may use software to detect plagiarism for work submitted as part of a Charter Oak distance learning course. When any disciplinary action is necessary, the Student Code of Conduct provides for a hearing process for students that protects their procedural and substantive rights by allowing for appeals to a faculty-appointed committee with a final appeal to the President. In addition, there is a process for final course grade appeals.

Students are given complete information about fees and refund policies in the *Information Bulletin*, *Official Catalog*, and on the Web site. Students may submit an appeal for a fee refund in writing to the President.

The institution adheres to non-discrimination policies and practices as outlined in its Affirmative Action Plan which is audited annually by the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (**Evidence: Human Resources: Document Room**). The Affirmative Action Policy statement is distributed annually to all employees, along with information about plan goals. This plan covers all phases of employment including the search process, hiring, evaluation, and advancement. The Chief Financial and Administrative Officer serves as the College's Affirmative Action Officer and is available to discuss issues with employees. When the Affirmative Action Officer detects a problem or possible pattern of discrimination, the Officer discusses it with senior management, and action is taken. The plan also contains grievance procedures for complaints related to equal opportunity or affirmative action.

The College strives to maintain a diverse staff and to create a climate that respects and supports people of diverse characteristics and backgrounds. All employees are required to participate in diversity training, and new employees are sent to such training during their first year of employment. Managers have participated in additional training to improve their ability to lead a diverse staff.

The College values pluralism and diversity and these principles are stated in the *Official Catalog* in the section on policies and regulations. The College participates in the Connecticut College Access and Success (ConnCAS) program to promote racial and ethnic diversity in its student body. As part of the State ConnCAS planning process, the College sets goals that reflect the state population of those over 25 with some college credit but no degree (**Evidence: Student Services/SS1**). The current goal is toward the recruitment of Latino students. The College strives to reach these goals through advertising in minority publications, outreach efforts in the minority community, and support once students are enrolled. Monthly reports to senior staff and regular reports to the Board include information on minority enrollment.

The College also has a policy regarding students with disabilities. Accommodations are made for students who self-identify and provide documentation concerning their disability. Additional detail on these services is provided in Standard Six.

Staff are party to collective bargaining. The Collective Bargaining Contract provides the framework for dealing with personnel matters for all employees with the exception of managers and confidential employees. The contract contains a grievance procedure to resolve disagreements. There is a comprehensive set of Personnel Policies for managers and confidential employees, which was adopted by the Board after consultation with and advice from the employees concerned. The policies are periodically updated using the same consultative process (**Evidence: Human Resources/HR2, HR3**).

The College complies with the policies and standards of both the New England Association of Schools and Colleges and the Connecticut Board of Governors for Higher Education and with all requests for information. In addition, the College responds to requests from the federal government and state agencies. As an agency of the State of Connecticut, Charter Oak complies with the State's Freedom of Information Statute and, as such, makes available all requests for information not privileged as a matter of law. Meetings are open to the public.

One measure of integrity is how well the institution achieves its stated mission and thus its commitment to its students. Adherence to its mission is an overall strength of Charter Oak. There is a strong match between why students select Charter Oak and the College's stated mission: to offer coherent, college-level curricula and degree programs which incorporate transfer credit,

examinations, and other methods of credit and competency validation. The top three reasons graduates give for coming to Charter Oak are flexibility of the program, acceptance of credit already earned, and types of concentrations available.

Another test of whether or not students believe that the College was honest with them regarding all aspects of the program is information from the students themselves. A survey completed by every student at the time of graduation has consistently shown a very high rate of satisfaction with all aspects of academic and student services. The overall rating of "satisfied" or "very satisfied" has exceeded 96 percent over the past five years. The lack of negative comment is evidence that students believe that the College has provided the program and services expected when they matriculated. Periodically, the College also surveys students who have dropped out. The last survey was conducted by telephone. Although some students drop out because they find they are not ready for independent learning or another institution has a program that fits better with their career goals, most students leave for financial, health or family reasons. It is not because they were dissatisfied with the Charter Oak program (**Evidence: Graduate Surveys**).

The College has not had a need for an institutional research policy until recently. There have been faculty and students interested in doing research as part of their course work. In those instances, the research proposals were reviewed by Core Consulting Faculty. The College is in the process of developing a policy.

### ***Appraisal***

The Charter Oak Board, staff and faculty place a high value on providing its students accurate information about its program, requirements, and expectations. As discussed under Standard Ten, this is accomplished through its many publications and its Web site. Efforts are made to assure that the information is accurate and consistent. On occasions, when the College substantiates that, at the time of matriculation, a student has not clearly understood the Charter Oak program due to information provided by Charter Oak staff, the student is afforded either additional time to complete the degree, without an additional fee, or in some cases is allowed to withdraw with a refund of the matriculation fee. However, there are only two or three such cases a year.

College advertisements both in print and on the Web also are reviewed for accuracy. In any collaborative activity with another organization or institution, Charter Oak requires review and approval of language used to describe the collaboration. The College regularly conducts a search of the Web to see if there is inaccurate information being portrayed about the College and quickly asks for it to be corrected or removed. At times, this is difficult to monitor and control. To avoid misrepresentation of the College program, the College has learned that it needs to closely guard who may speak for Charter Oak. In the past, there have been problems in some collaborative arrangements. A College priority is to ensure that this will not happen in the future.

The Charter Oak community takes seriously comments and suggestions from students and graduates about the College. There is a complete review of graduate surveys as they are submitted. Individual calls are made to graduates who are dissatisfied with a program or service. If there are numerous comments about the same issue, changes are made. For example, the College's fee structure was confusing, so fees have been consolidated and described more carefully so students understand the services a particular fee covers. Another change was the implementation of a process enabling an applicant to receive an official evaluation of his or her

transcripts prior to making a decision about matriculation. The College also changed book vendors because students complained about service and the cost of books.

The importance of academic integrity is clearly communicated to Charter Oak students through many publications, including the *Official Catalog*, online course schedules, issues of *Update*, and through individual online course syllabi. Because the College is concerned about academic integrity, the College subscribes to Turnitin, a plagiarism detection service, and encourages all distance learning faculty to use it in their courses. Students are informed on the distance learning application that this service is used. Overall, the College helps students to understand what constitutes plagiarism and the ramifications for plagiarizing.

As Charter Oak moved into offering more of its own courses, the Student Code of Conduct was updated. The Student Code of Conduct provides definitions of areas of misconduct and also provides the student with a process to appeal decisions they feel are unjustified. Students had a role in commenting on the Code of Conduct when it was originally developed and during the last revision. As of January 2006, there have been 22 cases where the Student Code of Conduct has been used; all cases of plagiarism during the past three years. Only two cases resulted in a hearing. There were no appeals to the President. In addition, there have been ten grades appeals, resulting in one hearing.

Charter Oak faculty are expected to treat all students fairly. The first step to ensure that this happens is by helping faculty to understand the Charter Oak mission through faculty orientation sessions and presentation of materials. One way to ensure fair and equitable treatment is to maintain consistency in how faculty review student work, including portfolios, concentration plans of study, and academic autobiographies. Faculty developed rubrics and procedures and continuous faculty training are instrumental in ensuring fairness. However, there is no specific code of conduct for faculty.

Integrity is also important in staff interactions. The College believes it has a fair and nondiscriminatory workplace. There are grievance procedures in both the Union contract and the Affirmative Action Plan if staff members believe they have not been given an adequate hearing or redress. The College always works to resolve issues as soon as they are identified so a grievance does not need to be filed. The College community is proud that it has an outstanding record in this regard. No issues in the past ten years have gone through the formal grievance procedure.

The union president attends meetings of the Board's Personnel Committee and attends Board meetings. The union president is invited to comment at these meetings regarding agenda items and may request to speak on a specific issue. The union president meets regularly with the College president. These relationships have helped to settle problems before they have become major issues.

During the past ten years, the Board's Affirmative Action Plan has been approved eight times by the State. In June of 2006, the plan was conditionally approved. This was based on technical issues. In three cases the plan did not have adequate documentation regarding why white male candidates were not selected from the pool of applicants. As of June 1, 2006, the College's workforce (employees working 20 hours a week or more) consisted of 13 white males (22 percent), 43 white females (65 percent), four black males (6 percent), three black females (5 percent), two Hispanic females (3 percent), and one other female (2 percent).

## ***Projection***

As discussed above, there are specific ethics policies for students and staff. The Board must comply with applicable State ethics laws. However, there are no ethics policies for Board members or faculty. Development of an ethics policy is important and the President will work with the Board to develop a policy to be adopted by early 2007. This policy will become part of the orientation information for new Board members.

The Vice President for Academic Affairs will work with a Committee appointed by the Dean of the Faculty on development of a Faculty Ethics Statement to be approved by the Academic Council by early 2007. The faculty statement will be incorporated into the *Faculty Advising Handbook* and the *Distance Learning Faculty Handbook* and will be shared with new faculty at the annual orientation meeting and sent to all Distance Learning Teaching Faculty.

The College's hiring process has already been modified to gather the necessary data to track each step. This will ensure the necessary data for the submission of Affirmative Action plans to the State. Efforts will continue to be made to meet the goals of the Affirmative Action Plan, and managers will be accountable for the results.

## ***Institutional Effectiveness***

To ensure institutional integrity, the College monitors data including findings in surveys of dropouts, recent graduates and alumni; diversity numbers (application and matriculation information and graduation rates); grievances; and the results of violations of the Student Code of Conduct.

The College is pleased with the results of its efforts to treat students and employees fairly. Staff complaints have been resolved internally. Only one student complaint related to discrimination has been taken to the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, and it was dismissed by the Commission.

Student plagiarism problems have grown, but it is believed that this is due to the fact that software is available to faculty to identify plagiarism. Every student who takes a Charter Oak course is aware that this software will be used. The process to address this problem distinguishes between students who do not understand how to properly cite sources and those who intentionally copy another's work. The College offers instruction in appropriate research and writing skills.

Student complaints are investigated whether they are made by an active student or are submitted as part of the Graduate Survey.

The College will continue to pursue institutional integrity by auditing its publications, evaluating affirmative action data, responding to complaints from staff and students, and reviewing surveys from alumni and former students.

**ADDENDUM: Charter Oak Partnership with Bridgepoint Education**



## **ADDENDUM: Charter Oak Partnership with Bridgepoint Education**

In 2001, Charter Oak established a formal relationship with Charter Learning, located in Phoenix Arizona, a for-profit provider of courses which had been evaluated by the American Council on Education (ACE) and carried ACE credit evaluation recommendations for several years. In 2004, Charter Learning became Bridgepoint Education and relocated in Poway, California.

In May 2002, Charter Oak received permission from NEASC to allow students to earn up to fifty percent (60 credits) of their Charter Oak degree from Bridgepoint Education (then Charter Learning) under a contractual agreement. This would allow students matriculated at Charter Oak taking Bridgepoint Education courses to be eligible for financial aid.

Under Bridgepoint Education, the program grew considerably and, as a result, NEASC requested that Charter Oak file a Notice to the Commission for Substantive Change. The Substantive Change Report was submitted in February 2005. In Fall 2005, the College submitted a progress report with an emphasis on contract termination. The Commission accepted Charter Oak's response to the Commission's concerns regarding the teach-out of students admitted and then directed Charter Oak to address the partnership in its self study with special attention to standards related to Programs and Instruction, Faculty, and Student Services.

Between May 2004 and July 31, 2005, under a formal contract between Bridgepoint Education, Charter Oak accepted 948 students recruited by Bridgepoint Education. Seven hundred and twenty-three students (723) matriculated at Charter Oak with the following characteristics: average age 37; 73 percent female; and an average of 102.54 credits upon entry. The characteristics of non-partnership students admitted during the same time period: average age 38; 54 percent female; and an average of 80.45 credits upon entry.

<b>Accepted Applicants by Race/Ethnicity</b>		<b>Accepted Applicants by U.S. State *</b>	
American Indian	2%	Arizona	19%
Asian	2%	California	17%
Black, non-Hispanic	11%	Texas	6%
Hispanic	10%	Florida	5%
Unknown	9%	* All states are represented, including Puerto Rico	
White, non-Hispanic	66%		

### **Standard Four--The Academic Program as it Relates to the Bridgepoint Education Partnership**

#### ***Description***

The partnership with Bridgepoint Education provided an opportunity for students across the country with more than 60 credits to earn a bachelor's degree at Charter Oak State College. The program is consistent with the mission and purpose of the College, which is to serve adult students through a degree completion program. The complete description of Charter Oak's degree completion program is outlined in Standard Four.

Although Charter Oak has a nine-credit requirement for admission, students recruited through the partnership were required to have a minimum of 60 credits. This was done because most of the courses that Bridgepoint Education offers carry upper level credit. In actuality, most students recruited by Bridgepoint Education earned 30 or fewer Bridgepoint Education credits.

Bridgepoint Education's courses were five weeks in length. The courses were offered year round with only a short winter break.

Bridgepoint Education offered five courses that were related to education, ten related to management leadership and a few general education courses. The education-related courses were designed for a three-way articulation agreement with Bridgepoint Education, Charter Oak and Rio Salado College in Arizona. Rio Salado is a two-year public college accredited by North Central and is approved by the State of Arizona to offer teacher certification to students who have a bachelor's degree.

Bridgepoint Education courses were designed for working adults. Therefore, the courses were developed by faculty with both degrees and expertise in the content area. Each of the Bridgepoint Education courses had clearly stated student learning outcomes that were listed in the course syllabi and included in its catalog within the course descriptions. Each Bridgepoint Education teaching faculty member was required to follow a standard syllabus for a given course, thus helping to ensure consistency in content. The model is similar to the one used by the University of Phoenix and other colleges that rely primarily on adjunct faculty to teach their courses **(Evidence: Course Syllabi: Document Room)**.

All Bridgepoint Education courses had been reviewed and recommended for credit by the American Council on Education (ACE). Under the ACE process, a team of at least three faculty with expertise in the content area visits the site to evaluate the courses and educational facilities. The team's review includes content and rigor, course level, learning outcomes, credentials of instructors, length of course, and evaluation methods used. The original ACE review was for classroom-based courses. When Bridgepoint Education started offering its courses online, the courses had to be reviewed again by ACE because of the change in delivery format.

ACE's process is quite extensive and its credit recommendations are accepted by hundreds of regionally accredited institutions. A complete list is available on the ACE Web site [http://www.acenet.edu/AM/Template.cfm?Section=College\\_Services&CONTENTID=13680&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm](http://www.acenet.edu/AM/Template.cfm?Section=College_Services&CONTENTID=13680&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm)

Charter Oak contacted its peer institutions (Excelsior College and Thomas Edison State College) and a number of other institutions to see how ACE credit recommendations are accepted. They all stated that they accept the credit recommendations of ACE, provided that they fit into a degree program. They do not conduct another evaluation. This process is similar to the acceptance of transfer credits.

Charter Oak's Academic Council accepts the credit recommendations of ACE, with a few exceptions. Those exceptions are primarily in the business management area and relate to the level of instruction. The same policy was applied to Bridgepoint Education's courses. ACE recommended three credits for each of the Bridgepoint Education courses, with the exception of four credits for its business statistics course. Bridgepoint Education decided to offer all of the courses for three credits. At the beginning of the partnership, Charter Oak Core Consulting Faculty reviewed Bridgepoint Education's MGT/LDR 330 course because Bridgepoint Education wanted Charter Oak to award it upper level credit as ACE had recommended. Qualified faculty reviewed it and concurred that it would be at the lower level, the same level as the College awards to all first-semester management courses whether they are offered at a community college or at a four-year institution.

The Bridgepoint Education courses were not sufficient in most cases for a complete program or concentration at Charter Oak. Therefore, students often combined the Bridgepoint Education courses with courses from other institutions to develop an individualized studies concentration or subject area concentration or used them as electives or to meet general education requirements.

Bridgepoint Education required most of its students to take their Adult Development course which helped students assess their learning styles, plan their academic goals, and gave them experience with online learning. The only students who did not take this course were those who only needed a few credits to graduate and therefore could not use it toward their graduation requirements. Students also received an online orientation to Blackboard and to using Proquest databases, Bridgepoint Education's online "library" resource.

### **Integrity of Partnership**

Since Bridgepoint Education was not an accredited institution, only a provider of courses, it did not offer a degree. The students earned their degrees from Charter Oak. To assure that students understood this relationship, Charter Oak and Bridgepoint Education developed forms for Bridgepoint Education partnership students to sign indicating that they understood the difference between the two entities. The agreement between Charter Oak and Bridgepoint Education required Bridgepoint Education to have Charter Oak approval before releasing any marketing material on the agreement. The forms and marketing materials were to make it clear that the degree would be offered by Charter Oak and that the degree was the general studies degree earned by all Charter Oak students (**Evidence: BridgepointEducation/BP3**).

Bridgepoint Education partnership students meet the same requirements for their degree as all other Charter Oak students (described in Standard Four), including requirements for general education, the concentration, liberal arts, upper and lower level credits, credits from beyond a two-year college, the Concentration Plan of Study and Academic Autobiography. Bridgepoint Education partnership students received an *Official Catalog* and a *Student Handbook* outlining Charter Oak's policies and information on how to access the same information on Charter Oak's Web site. In addition, to ensure the integrity of the degree, Charter Oak required all Bridgepoint Education partnership students to submit their Concentration Plan of Study at the end of their first four courses. This was done because of the fast-paced nature of five-week courses and to ensure that courses being scheduled would fit into the chosen concentration.

To ensure the quality of the instruction, Charter Oak's Vice President for Academic Affairs had the final say over the hiring of Bridgepoint Education's faculty. Charter Oak faculty reviewed Bridgepoint Education's online courses for content and pedagogy and reviewed the actual teaching by "visiting" online courses even though Charter Oak's policy is to accept ACE credit recommendations. Faculty found that the courses were well organized and that the outcomes were clearly stated and measurable.

As with all Charter Oak students, Core Consulting Faculty approve the student's Concentration Plan of Study and, at that time, have a chance to comment on courses selected for the concentration and the student's writing ability. The faculty approve the Academic Autobiography and score it based on writing ability and the ability to describe the cohesiveness of the academic program, which is a graduation requirement. Core Consulting Faculty also conduct the final audit on transcripts before they are submitted to the Board for degree conferral

Charter Oak academic counselors have the main responsibility for retaining the students and consulting with Bridgepoint Education advisors when problems develop. Charter Oak provides

updated status reports for Bridgepoint Education partnership students whenever a new transcript is received. This is available online and sent electronically to the students. If students do not have e-mail access, the status report is sent by postal mail. If students in the Bridgepoint Education partnership want to earn credit for experiential learning, they use the same process that all Charter Oak students utilize. Students can also transfer credits earned from any regionally accredited institution. Bridgepoint Education students are bound by Charter Oak's Student Code of Conduct and Bridgepoint Education's academic policies.

### **Assessment of Student Learning**

Students recruited by Bridgepoint Education are subject to the same assessment process as all Charter Oak students: Graduate Survey, Alumni Survey, Concentration Plan of Study, and Academic Autobiography.

Charter Oak surveys its alumni to determine if the education that Charter Oak students are receiving has adequately prepared them for further study and employment. Data on Charter Oak students indicates this is true. Charter Oak does not have sufficient data on Bridgepoint Education students at this time since these are sent a year after the students earn their degrees. However, a number of Bridgepoint Education students have stated on their Graduate Surveys that they have been accepted into graduate school or that they received a promotion or new job as a result of their degree (**Evidence: Bridgepoint Education/BP3**).

Charter Oak will be interested in learning if the Bridgepoint Education partnership students do as well after they graduate as other Charter Oak students. The Alumni Survey will provide us with some information. Charter Oak also plans to analyze the pass rate data from the CPS and AA and grade point averages (GPAs) to see if there is any difference. To date, data indicate that about fourteen percent of the Bridgepoint Education students had to rewrite their CPS, compared to eight percent of the non-Bridgepoint Education students, and eleven percent of the Bridgepoint Education students had to rewrite their AA, compared to five percent of the non-Bridgepoint Education students. Two Bridgepoint Education students did not successfully pass the AA and therefore their graduation was delayed. One of those students subsequently graduated after retaking a writing course and then resubmitting her AA. The other is still pending.

### ***Appraisal***

As shown earlier, the students recruited by Bridgepoint Education fit the profile of the Charter Oak student: average age 37, and at least 60 credits earned from more than one institution.

The partnership with Bridgepoint Education was developed in accordance with Charter Oak's mission. Bridgepoint Education courses were recommended for credit by ACE and as such were acceptable in transfer to Charter Oak. In addition, Charter Oak had already approved the acceptance of many of the courses since they had been previously offered by Charter Learning, except for the educationally related courses which were new. Therefore acceptance of the Bridgepoint Education courses did not constitute a change in policy or practice. The only change in Charter Oak's policy was Charter Oak's requirement that all Bridgepoint Education students have a minimum of 60 credits earned before being accepted at Charter Oak. This requirement was established because the partnership was a degree completion program.

The Bridgepoint Education program is evaluated at the time of graduation by students who have come to Charter Oak through the partnership. The students evaluate the services provided by both Bridgepoint Education and Charter Oak and they do a self assessment of how well they

mastered their general education outcomes. Students also must meet the Concentration Plan of Study and Academic Autobiography requirements required of all students. Evidence to date shows that the Bridgepoint Education students are successfully passing the Academic Autobiography, although 11 percent had to resubmit. Charter Oak has also looked at the graduation rate as compared to the non-Bridgepoint Education partnership students admitted over the same time period (5/16/2004-12/31/2005), which is 18 percent for non-Bridgepoint Education students and 19 percent for Bridgepoint Education students. The grade point averages of the two groups are similar: 3.08 for non-Bridgepoint Education students compared to 3.13 for Bridgepoint Education students. Bridgepoint Education partnership students will also be surveyed as part of the alumni survey.

The data show that for most of the students, there were no problems in their earning a degree as promised. However, some students found the relationship confusing and that there were unanticipated delays in receiving transcripts, CPS and AA approval, and financial aid.

The Bridgepoint Education partnership substantially increased the demand for services on Charter Oak. To meet the demands, Charter Oak increased staff, added a number of reports to monitor student progress, increased services that were delivered electronically, and outsourced financial aid because of the staffing demands of non-term financial aid. However, Charter Oak did not increase staff as quickly as Bridgepoint Education did, which created delays in admitting and processing students.

In the initial months of the partnership under the new contract, there were a number of growing pains related to communication issues and the need for the exchange of more information electronically. The College and Bridgepoint Education staff met weekly via phone conferencing to discuss program and student concerns. Because the decision was made to dissolve the partnership the planned student information system that would have solved a number of problems was not implemented, making it difficult to track student progress.

Bridgepoint Education conducted preliminary evaluations of student transcripts. Charter Oak conducted the final evaluations. Initially, students were allowed to begin classes before their final transcript evaluations by Charter Oak staff were completed, allowing students time to complete the process and be accepted before starting a third class. This was done with the understanding that if students were placed in Bridgepoint Education courses they did not need, Bridgepoint Education would not charge the students for the courses. This was problematic because of eligibility for student financial aid and concerns about appropriate advisement. Therefore, the process was changed in November 2004. After that, no one was permitted to begin Bridgepoint Education classes until all transcripts were received at Charter Oak and Charter Oak authorized the start of a class. Students who had between 75 and 100 credits, as evaluated by the Charter Oak admissions office, were permitted to take one course before the official evaluation of transcripts was completed, but could not take additional courses until an evaluation was done and the student's first twelve proposed Bridgepoint Education credits had been approved by Charter Oak. Those students with less than 75 or more than 100 credits could not take any courses until their evaluations were completed and their first twelve proposed credits approved.

For students in the Bridgepoint Education program, Charter Oak contracted with a third party administrator, ACS, to implement a non-term financial aid process. ACS packaged students for financial aid, but Charter Oak disbursed the funds. The disbursement of financial aid also underwent difficulties. Before aid could be disbursed the following had to occur: first, Charter

Oak had to make sure that the student had at least 60 acceptable credits; second, Charter Oak needed to approve the student's first twelve credits; third, an invoice for courses matching those on the course approval form needed to be on file; fourth, evidence the student is a candidate for matriculation; and fifth, evidence that the student had "attended" the first class. Often, Charter Oak did not have the required information or information was inconsistent. Therefore, aid could not be disbursed. Although, Charter Oak, Bridgepoint Education, and ACS worked to develop a better system and made progress, the problems were not totally eliminated.

Problems with the disbursement and tracking of financial aid have persisted. Bridgepoint Education failed to develop a system that correlated payment with specific courses. Bridgepoint Education also failed to notify Charter Oak of changes in students' course schedules, thus requiring Charter Oak to spend time in rectifying bills with transcripts and with course approval forms. This was compounded because the planned student information system was not developed.

### **Program Termination**

With the termination agreement of the Bridgepoint Education program, both Charter Oak and Bridgepoint Education have assured the students they will be able to complete their degrees. As Bridgepoint Education phased out its courses, Charter Oak agreed to allow students to take courses from Ashford University (purchased by Bridgepoint Education and regionally accredited by North Central). This allowed students to continue to take courses in the five-week term format and did not have a negative impact on their financial aid. In addition, they could take courses from Charter Oak, or take courses from other regionally accredited institutions or other options accepted by Charter Oak's Core Consulting Faculty. Charter Oak worked with the students on non-term financial aid to transition them to term financial aid. Charter Oak's Board also approved a policy to extend a student's matriculation period if a student was prevented from taking a course because of the rules governing the transition from non-term to term financial aid.

Charter Oak has extended matriculation periods, given Charter Oak aid, allowed students to enroll free of charge in its courses, and has paid for courses at Bridgepoint Education when errors had been made that prevented the student from receiving financial aid or from graduating on time. Charter Oak also encouraged Bridgepoint Education to offer free courses to students when Bridgepoint Education was in error.

### **Standard Five—Faculty as it Relates to the Bridgepoint Education Partnership**

#### ***Description***

Bridgepoint Education faculty are not Charter Oak faculty. They were recruited by Bridgepoint Education and hired by Bridgepoint Education following Charter Oak approval. Because Bridgepoint Education courses were recommended for credit by ACE, the faculty were required to meet the ACE standards of having a degree one level higher than the courses being taught and relevant teaching and work experience. Charter Oak required Bridgepoint Education to hire instructors with master's or doctorates and with relevant teaching and work experience.

The Charter Oak partnership with Bridgepoint Education required that Charter Oak's Vice President have final approval of the Bridgepoint Education faculty. This was done to ensure that the faculty met the standards Charter Oak requires of its own distance learning teaching faculty. Bridgepoint Education recruited the faculty and then sent copies of their resumés and transcripts, along with the list of courses they propose to teach to Charter Oak's Vice President. The Vice

President approved or disapproved and sent the decision back to Bridgepoint Education. The Vice President reviewed the applications and transcripts of 146 potential instructors, of which 110 were approved, 15 were not approved, and 21 were approved to teach only some of the courses listed on the application (**Evidence: Faculty Resumés/Document Room**).

Bridgepoint Education had a two-week training program for its faculty conducted by an instructional specialist. The training presented and explained Bridgepoint Education's instructional model and delivery modality, gave the instructors practice using the interactive functions of Blackboard, and required them to demonstrate effectiveness in technologically based communication. An instructional specialist, with a master's or doctorate who had broad online teaching experience, supervised up to twenty instructors and was available to provide ongoing assistance as needed. Each week the instructional specialist sent a performance report to the instructor based on the observation of each course, with a summary to the Bridgepoint Education administration (**Evidence: BridgepointEducation/BP7**).

Bridgepoint Education had a system in place for evaluating its faculty. In addition to the monitoring conducted by the instructional specialist, students evaluated the courses. Faculty were provided with a summary of the evaluation data, including the student comments. The summary profile of their instructors' performance consistently showed an average score of 3.0 on a scale of 5.0. The Bridgepoint Education instructional specialist monitored instructor performance and was available to assist the instructor upon request. Charter Oak and Bridgepoint Education were to use the same course evaluation system. However, this was not developed because Charter Oak could not make the needed changes to the system it currently uses, the CTDLC's student evaluation instrument. A new student evaluation system was scheduled to be developed as the new SIS was developed.

Bridgepoint Education hired academic advisors who were to do preliminary advising, explain the partnership, and assist the students while they were taking Bridgepoint Education courses. This advising was conducted primarily on line and via the phone which was compatible with the online nature of the program. However, after matriculation, most advising was conducted by Charter Oak academic counselors through the course approval process and by Charter Oak faculty through the concentration approval process.

### ***Appraisal***

Charter Oak had no direct responsibility for the Bridgepoint Education faculty, except for the initial approval by the Vice President for Academic Affairs at time of hiring. Charter Oak believes that the oversight it has provided in the selection process coupled with the oversight already provided by ACE have ensured that the faculty are qualified. In addition, Charter Oak and ACE have reviewed Bridgepoint Education's faculty training program. The College has received very few complaints about Bridgepoint Education faculty and when they have, Bridgepoint Education's Vice President of Academic Affairs has quickly dealt with the problem. As a result of this partnership and as Charter Oak's online program has grown, the College has changed its policy for reviewing the credentials of its distance learning teaching faculty. All Charter Oak course developers/instructors resumés are reviewed by faculty with expertise in that area as part of the course proposal review process. This would have also been true of Bridgepoint Education courses had the relationship continued.

## **Standard Six—Students as it Relates to the Bridgepoint Education Partnership**

### ***Description***

Bridgepoint Education provided some student services. In addition, the students could access all of the services provided by Charter Oak.

### **Orientation**

Bridgepoint Education's Adult Development course served as an orientation to the Bridgepoint Education program. Charter Oak sent each student a welcome packet that included the *Official Catalog*, *Student Handbook*, course schedule bulletins, an individualized student status report, information on the CPS and AA process, and information on how to access this information online.

### **Academic Support Services**

Because of Charter Oak's emphasis on writing skills, Bridgepoint Education developed a developmental English composition course for students who were identified through testing as needing extra assistance with their writing skills. Bridgepoint Education found that this course was not effective so they changed to an assessment and writing-center model. Bridgepoint Education also offered tutoring. Bridgepoint Education partnership students could also participate in Charter Oak's free tutoring program.

### **Retention and Graduation**

Bridgepoint Education partnership students fall under the same rules and policies and success measures as all other Charter Oak students. Data to date indicate that the students recruited through the Bridgepoint Education partnership have done as well as the non-partnership students. Grade point averages (GPAs) are similar and pass rates on the Concentration Plan of Study and Academic Autobiography are similar, even though the Bridgepoint Education students have had to do more rewrites. Only two Bridgepoint Education students did not successfully complete the AA process.

### **Other Student Services**

Bridgepoint Education partnership students can access their own student information electronically at any time. All forms such as financial aid forms, graduation forms, and transcript forms are available online. Students can access iCONN, Charter Oak's online library. Charter Oak also has a staffed help desk available until 10 p.m. In addition, Charter Oak holds electronic chat sessions on the CPS and AA monthly at hours that accommodate students across all U.S. time zones and Web casts most on-ground workshops held for student so they can attend virtually, if they cannot come to the campus. Other workshops are taped and then put on the College's Web site.

Since the Bridgepoint Education courses were five weeks in length, the partnership required that Charter Oak provide non-term financial aid. Since Charter Oak did not have either the staff or the experience to manage non-term aid, a contract was signed with ACS, located in Phoenix, Arizona, to administer financial aid for this program. ACS administers aid in this fashion for other non-traditional colleges and universities including Western Governors University. When students completed either their Bridgepoint Education courses or were not able to complete their degree by the end of December 2006, they were moved to term financial aid offered by Charter Oak.



Charter Oak has a student association and has attempted to involve out-of state students in that association, including students recruited through the Bridgepoint Education partnership. As indicated earlier, the College makes most activities available virtually. The College's Web site also has a "student lounge" where students can chat with other students. Charter Oak has a Student Code of Conduct that applies to all students. It is in the *Student Handbook* and available online. Bridgepoint Education partnership students received a copy of the Handbook since they fall under these same guidelines. Charter Oak's guidelines regarding information applies to all students, including the Bridgepoint Education partnership students. In order for Charter Oak to share student information with Bridgepoint Education, students had to sign a release of information form.

### **Staffing**

Bridgepoint Education developed a senior management team with experience in for-profit and not-for-profit sectors of higher education. The three individuals (two full-time and one consultant) who comprised Bridgepoint Education's academic leadership team have doctoral degrees; each had served at the dean's level in regionally accredited institutions prior to joining Bridgepoint Education. Bridgepoint Education created a Student Services Trainer to train their recruiters and advisors. The Student Services Trainer had a master's degree and had worked in educational institutions. He spent four days at Charter Oak in order to gain an understanding of Charter Oak policies and procedures. Within weeks of the contract being signed, Bridgepoint Education had a staff of over 40 individuals, including recruiters/counselors and staff in the registrar and business offices. Bridgepoint Education maintained sufficient staff and faculty until the decision was made to terminate the contract. At that point, Bridgepoint Education reduced their staff significantly making it difficult to receive transcripts and other information in a timely manner (**Evidence: BridgepointEducation/BP10**).

Additional Charter Oak staff were required to serve Bridgepoint Education students (admissions, academic counseling, registrar's office, business office and financial aid). Charter Oak staff, responsible for student services, had the appropriate degrees and experience (see Standard Six). Staff members were added primarily during evening hours (5 p.m.–10 p.m.). This was of particular importance since most of the Bridgepoint Education students were in other time zones. Charter Oak's coordinator for the Bridgepoint Education program worked from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and regular daytime hours on Friday to connect with the regular Charter Oak staff and to be available to supervise the evening staff. A plan was in place to add staff as the number of students grew due to the Bridgepoint Education contract. Now that the program is winding down, the College has reduced the number of staff dedicated solely to the Bridgepoint Education program and has assigned students to other Charter Oak academic counselors.

### ***Appraisal***

The contract provided Charter Oak funding to hire the initial staff. These staff persons had the same academic backgrounds and experience as other Charter Oak staff. The initial funding allowed Charter Oak to hire a person in the registrar's office to handle articulation agreements without taking time from other staff and to hire one academic counselor. Bridgepoint Education was able to recruit students at a more rapid pace than Charter Oak was able to hire and train staff which put a strain on other Charter Oak staff. Problems were magnified because of the lack of staff with experience with non-term financial aid. The College's student information system was also strained.

When the College was serving the highest number of students through the Bridgepoint Education program, the College had the following staff for the program: one full-time coordinator; four part-time academic counselors; additional staff in each of the following offices—Admissions (1½ FT), Financial Aid (one FT and one PT financial aid disbursement), Registrar's office (one FT), and Business Office (one PT); and part-time clerical support for Academic Affairs. This staff size would have been adequate had the hires taken place more quickly and had the lead person been from the ranks of Charter Oak's academic counselors.

The students recruited by Bridgepoint Education fit the profile of the Charter Oak student. Based on current data, the Bridgepoint Education partnership students have been successful in meeting their educational goals. The graduate surveys show that students have been satisfied with the services and education they have been provided by Bridgepoint Education and Charter Oak. Based on comments on the Graduate Survey, many Bridgepoint Education students are going on to graduate school or have received promotions because they have completed their degrees. Additional data will not be available until the Alumni Survey is conducted.

Charter Oak has often served as a liaison for the students to Bridgepoint Education while Bridgepoint Education rectified issues including errors in transcripts and payment of obligations for courses taken, prior to their eligibility for student financial aid or failure to bill for courses taken. In a couple of instances, students lost their financial aid because of ACS, Charter Oak, or Bridgepoint Education errors. In all cases, the errors were corrected so the students were not penalized. Charter Oak also extended matriculation expiration dates in cases where Bridgepoint Education or Charter Oak errors prevented students from graduating within their matriculation time periods.

Because of the large volume of CPS proposals received at the peak time of new acceptances, some Concentration Plans of Study were buried in electronic files, thus delaying the processing of financial aid for some students. Although it was done for quality control, linking the CPS process to financial aid created problems because Charter Oak did not have a system in place to efficiently monitor the process. This was compounded by Bridgepoint Education not restricting students from taking additional courses beyond the initial block of four, until their CPS was approved. It has continued to be hard to manage. Charter Oak, with data from ACS and Bridgepoint Education, developed a system for managing the CPS and financial aid process. However, the process was manual.

The phase out of the program has had challenges. Moving from non-term to term financial aid was not easy. In some cases it resulted in students having a gap in attendance. Therefore Charter Oak, with its Board's approval, extended the matriculation expiration date equal to the "gap", thus avoiding additional fees for the students.

### ***Institutional Effectiveness of the Partnership and Lessons Learned***

As the data indicate, students have been meeting their goals. Initial data also indicate that the students have benefited from the program. However, the initial analysis of the partnership by the College has led to the following conclusions:

1. Charter Oak did not hire staff quickly enough. The coordinator should have been a current staff member with knowledge of the policies and procedures of Charter Oak. The College will be sure not to repeat this problem when it initiates other program changes or new programs by more carefully predicting growth and staffing.

2. The College knew that its current SIS could not handle the demands of the Bridgepoint Education program, so the College built money into the budget to develop a new SIS. Since it was quickly evident that this program was not going to continue, the SIS as initially configured was not developed. However, the College will be installing a new system over the next 18 months that will accommodate additional growth (see Standard Eight).
3. Since Charter Oak students earn credit at different institutions, Charter Oak had been discussing alternatives to its current term-based financial aid system prior to the Bridgepoint Education partnership. The College was interested in experiencing non-term financial aid to determine if it would be a better system for all of its students. The College found that non-term financial aid is very difficult to manage and would increase staffing requirements. However, because of this experience, Charter Oak will be taking other steps to streamline how it administers financial aid including the development of standardized budgets.
4. The College learned the power of expansive internet marketing coupled with quick follow-up. As a result, Charter Oak has increased its marketing budget, marketing staff, and admissions staff to follow up on leads.
5. The three-way partnership with Bridgepoint Education, Rio Salado College and Charter Oak did not work well. Although approved by Rio Salado College, Charter Oak has found that the courses offered by Bridgepoint Education did not fit well into the education curriculum. Charter Oak will continue to have an articulation agreement with Rio Salado and has worked with Rio Salado to revise the articulation agreement.
6. Charter Oak developed a number of articulation agreements with colleges that the College will continue to maintain and nurture. The partnership underscored the importance of not only having articulation agreements, but also the importance of maintaining connections with transfer staff.
7. The need for a better SIS resulted in a process analysis which led to Charter Oak selecting Jenzabar as its SIS to a process for addressing specific recommendations.
8. The addition of evening staff was successful and confirmed the need to have staff available for all students after 5 p.m.

# Appendices

**See Appendices Folder**

