



Report on Findings from Institutional Identity Focus Groups (Spring 2008)

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University Mission

Central Connecticut State University is a community of learners dedicated to teaching and to scholarship. We encourage the development and application of knowledge and ideas through research and outreach activities. We prepare students to be thoughtful, responsible and successful citizens.

Fulfilling the Mission

Central Connecticut State University is, above all else, about teaching students at the baccalaureate, master and doctoral levels consistent with our historical mission. Our research endeavors improve us as teachers and expose our students to methods of inquiry. The public service expected of all members of our community benefits our society—local and global—and builds our sense of citizenship.

We value the development of knowledge and its application in an environment of intellectual integrity and open discourse. We expect that members of the university will engage in activities ranging from basic research and the creation of original works, to helping individuals and organizations achieve success in purely practical endeavors. All these activities enrich our community of learners.

As a public university, we receive support from the state of Connecticut. We have three designated Centers of Excellence and many nationally accredited programs. We take very seriously our commitment to provide access to higher education for all citizens in this state who can benefit from our offerings. Our high expectations for ourselves contribute to the fine quality and continuous improvement of our undergraduate and graduate programs. We believe that quality and access are compatible and simultaneously achievable; our objective is to provide the support needed for our students to reach their full potential.

We also believe that higher education should promote the personal and social growth of our students, as well as their intellectual achievement and professional competence. We provide various opportunities for students to engage in activities or to join organizations and clubs where they develop leadership and other social skills. We foster a welcoming environment in which all members of our diverse community receive encouragement, feel safe, and acquire self-confidence.

Vision

Central Connecticut State University aspires to:

- be the premier public comprehensive university in Connecticut, with teaching as its primary focus, enhanced by the dynamic scholarship of its faculty;
- be highly regarded by its many constituents;
- be a significant resource contributing to the cultural and economic development of Connecticut;
- be global in its perspective and outreach; and
- be widely respected as a university dedicated to innovative, activity-based, life-long, and learner-centered higher education.

The CCSU World Wide Web Home Page is: <http://www.ccsu.edu>

The CCSU Office of Institutional Research and Assessment World Wide Web Home Page is: <http://www.ccsu.edu/planning>

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Executive Summary

This report presents the major findings from six focus groups composed of 38 individuals conducted in February and March 2008 to explore and develop ideas about the institutional identity of Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) both within the Connecticut State University System (CSUS) and in the State of Connecticut. Focus group participants included students, alumni, full-time and part-time AAUP faculty, SUOAF administrative faculty, full-time Administrative and Residual (clerical) staff, and employees classified as Management or Confidential.

It is important to recognize that focus group research is qualitative in nature. Material presented in this study should be considered suggestive and exploratory rather than definitive and representative. Major findings from the focus groups include:

Aspects to Highlight in Institutional Identity

- Most frequently emphasized aspects of CCSU that embody its institutional identity:
 - Community connection/engagement/involvement
 - Learning & student success
 - Affordability & accessibility
 - Diversity of students, especially inclusion of various socio-economic groups
- Additional aspects related to institutional identity included Workforce Integration/Applied Learning, Global and International Learning Experiences, Teacher Education, Future-Oriented Learning, and Technology

Areas in Which CCSU Excels

- Participants most often indicated that CCSU excelled and was known for:
 - Quality educational programs and excellent teaching
 - Workforce development and unique, career-oriented programs
- Additional areas in which respondents reported CCSU excelled included accessibility, community engagement and partnerships, and athletics.

Areas That CCSU Should Develop to Become a Leader in the State

- Aspects for CCSU to develop to become a leader in the state most often referenced:
 - Career-oriented programs aimed at workforce development and job placement, with special mentions for:
 - Applied learning and internships in every program
 - Business, especially an MBA
 - Engineering & technology
 - Graduate programs, including doctoral programs
 - Nursing
 - Teacher Education

- Other areas for development to become leaders in the state included the variety and quality of services to students, community engagement, facilities (especially, additional housing), diversity among students and employees, global and international education, promotional efforts, faculty and student quality, and athletics.

Points of Pride about CCSU

- Participants offered a wide range of items that they considered to be points of pride about their association with CCSU. Among the few clusters of items were:
 - Affordability and access, especially for students whose parents did not attend or did not complete college.
 - Alumni accomplishments and the number of alumni CCSU has
 - Faculty quality and innovative teaching
 - Quality education and student success
 - Dedication and loyalty of faculty and staff
- Additional points of pride included athletics, service to students, diversity and inclusivity, teacher education programs, faculty research and the internal funding of research, and involvement with the community.

Best Kept Secrets about CCSU – “Our Humble Pockets of Brilliance”

- Participants also offered a wide range of responses when asked about the best kept secrets at CCSU. Most frequently mentioned were:
 - Specific programs and centers, including the Honors Program, the Center for International Education, the Center for Public Policy and Social Research, teacher education programs, and the sciences
 - Quality of education and faculty teaching
 - CCSU’s role in providing cultural resources to the region
- One participant poignantly characterized these various programs, services and aspects as “our humble pockets of brilliance.”

Aspects of CCSU to Preserve as the University Advances into the Next Decade

- Participants reported that as CCSU advances into the next decade a variety of aspects about the University should be preserved:
 - Continued accessibility to a broad spectrum of students and affordable tuition
 - Ongoing quality of programs, faculty, and students
 - Sustained development and upkeep of facilities
 - Maintaining high contact with faculty, including small class sizes and quality teaching
 - Preserving engagement with and service to the community
 - Sustained role as a contributor to workforce development in Connecticut
 - Ongoing commitment to student success.

Context for the Research

The Connecticut State University System mission statement outlines specific attributes of each of the four universities in the System. These attributes are:

Central Connecticut State University

- is Connecticut's premier learner centered public university with teaching as its focus
- applies knowledge to better the human condition
- provides access and quality for students to reach their full potential

Eastern Connecticut State University

- is Connecticut's public liberal arts university
- provides an intellectual ambiance which develops analytic thinkers, innovative problem solvers and creative learners

Southern Connecticut State University

- is a preeminent metropolitan university
- offers a learning community that is grounded in a liberal education
- is the lead institution for advanced study in CSU

Western Connecticut State University

- aspires to be the state's public university of choice for programs of excellence in the liberal arts and the professions
- builds all programs around a strong liberal arts foundation
- stresses critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills for the new millennium.

(Connecticut State University System Board of Trustees, 2000)

This research project is intended to gather ideas from a broad spectrum of CCSU constituencies about the University's institutional identity to modify and solidify the above descriptors for CCSU. Ideally, this research will serve as the basis for an "identity phrase" that should express the University's primary mission, encompass the entire campus, and avoid overstatement or misrepresentation.

The University Planning and Budget Committee was tasked by the University administration to begin this exploration, and an *ad hoc* subcommittee was formed to conduct this research.

Methodology

A total of 38 participants were recruited to participate in one of six focus groups. Focus groups were composed of homogenous populations according to participants' relationship to CCSU: students, alumni, full-time and part-time AAUP faculty, SUOAF administrative faculty, full-time Administrative and Residual (clerical) staff, and employees classified as Management or Confidential. Union leadership was asked to identify volunteers for the AAUP, SUOAF, and Administrative and Residual groups. The Director of Human Resources identified participants for the Management/Confidential group, and the Director of Alumni Affairs identified participants for the alumni group. Participants who attended regularly scheduled focus groups were provided refreshments, but no compensation or reward was provided for participation.

The Student Government Association was asked to identify students to participate in a focus group, but no students attended at the scheduled time. As a substitute, a focus group was run in an English 202 class.

Demographic Distribution of Participants

Focus Group	Men	Women	Total	Minority
Students	2	13	15	3
AAUP	3	2	5	1
SUOAF	2	5	7	0
A&R	0	4	4	0
Alumni	3	0	3	0
Mgt/Conf	3	1	4	0
Total	13	25	38	4

All demographic data presented in this table were collected solely by observation of participants or knowledge of how these individuals have reported their gender or ethnicity in other instances; because observation of demographic characteristics can be inaccurate, these distributions are at best suggestive. "Minority" includes African American or Black, American Indian or Native Alaskan, Asian or Pacific Islander, and Hispanic.

Focus groups were conducted by three and sometimes two discussion leaders. One leader was always dedicated to taking notes. All participants were informed of the purposes of the research and informed that their participation was anonymous.

Participants were asked to identify four major areas and discuss them.

1. Areas in which Central does well and has received recognition;
2. Areas in which Central should develop or advance to become a leader in the state;
3. Aspects of Central that should be preserved as the University advances into the next decade;
4. Aspects about Central that should be highlighted in an identify phrase.

The full script for facilitators appears as the Appendix of this report. These discussions were facilitated with some writing activities on note cards and then structured discussion. Salient points made by participants were recorded on paper flip charts. Sessions were not recorded nor transcribed.

SUOAF-ASCME Administrative Faculty Focus Group Findings

Elements to Highlight in Institutional Identity

Diversity
Gateway to Global Education
Business & Technology

Workforce
Citizens
Exceptional Faculty

International
Opportunity
Diversity

High-Tech, High-Touch
Real-World Experiences
Future-Oriented

What Central Does Well

Accessibility
Faculty Quality
Location

Workforce Development
Improving Facilities
Responsive to Community

Unique Career Oriented Programs

- Teacher Education
- Construction Mgt.
- Biomolecular Sci.
- Engineering

What Central Should Develop

Unique Career-
Oriented Programs

Workforce Programs

International &
Global Education

Experiential Learning in
Every Program

Location

Responsive to Community

Teacher Education

Facilities

Points of Pride

Athletics Programs

Quality of Faculty

Successful Alumni

Dedicated Employees

Internal funding for faculty
research

Affordability

Flexible Degree Options

Diverse Student Body

Central's Best Kept Secret

Honors Program

Faculty Research

Quality Service to
Students

Day Care Center

Alumni Achievements

What Should Not Change as Central Advances into Next Decade

Accessibility & Affordability

Quality of Faculty

Focus on Workforce Development

Focus on International Ed.

AAUP Full-Time and Part-Time Instructional Faculty Focus Group Findings

Elements to Highlight in Institutional Identity

Location
Community Connection
Learning, Science, Life & Ethics

Outreach
Community Engagement
Social Capital Builder

Quality
Comprehensive

Affordability
Appropriate, Responsive
Education

What Central Does Well

Teaching	Community Outreach
Preparing Students for work in CT	Access for all socio- economic groups
Affordable Education	Promotes venues for dialogue
Campus Aesthetics	
Cultural Experiences and Events	

What Central Should Develop

Advising	Maintain high standards
Graduates as ethical professionals	Diversity of students, faculty & staff
Global/International curriculum	Articulate courses with CT CC and other CSUs
Graduate programs	Stronger alumni network
Better promotion of faculty expertise	More personalized educational experience

Points of Pride

Quality of faculty	Inviting atmosphere
Quality education for first- generation students	Social capital as historical institution
Stimulating academic community	Dedicated faculty
Contributions to community	Successful alumni

Central's Best Kept Secret

Quality of teaching	High quality education at an affordable price
Personalized to student needs	Quality faculty

What Should Not Change as Central Advances into Next Decade

Focus on teaching	Accessibility	Quality faculty
Contributions to community	Facilities upkeep & development	Open exchange of new ideas
Outreach	Experiential education	

Alumni and Donors Focus Group Findings

Elements to Highlight in Institutional Identity

We educate the educators

Diverse

Affordable

Accessible

Quality education for diverse students and diverse interests

What Central Does Well

Changes lives

Relatively inexpensive

Diversity of subjects

Creates self-esteem

Education for the
working class

Development of student
athletes

Excellent teachers

Athletics & recreation

What Central Should Develop

Housing

Recreation facilities

Alumni connections

Graduate/Doctoral Progs.

Reputation

Better faculty credentials

Advance no-smoking
policy on campus

Promotion of academic
strength

Higher standards/expectations for students

Points of Pride

Meeting other grads
around the world

High profile alumni

Athletics

First-time college
success stories

Outstanding educators

Campus renovations

Unsung excellence

Working-class
institution

Central's Best Kept Secret

Quality of teacher
education program

Lectures, conferences &
cultural events

Students will get jobs
if they do the work

Good food!

Students have a team
behind them

What Should Not Change as Central Advances into Next Decade

Teacher education programs

Student access

Size of campus footprint

Administrative and Residual Employees

Focus Group Findings

Elements to Highlight in Institutional Identity

Centralized Campus Community
Connects Students, Faculty & Staff Culturally &
Economically with Local Community

Learning
Community Involvement
Personal & Professional Growth

Education
Diversity
Accessibility

What Central Does Well

Incredible Teachers	Good Education
Attractive Campus	Open Door Service
Teacher Education	Athletics
Academic Excellence	Word of Mouth Recruiting
Keeping Up With Technology	Interacts with Community Economy

What Central Should Develop

More non-traditional students	Online Courses and Degree Programs
Housing	School of Business
Community Engagement	School of Engineering & Technology
Nursing	Doctoral Programs
Weekend Courses	Campus Safety/Security
Student Services with "One-Stop-Shop: Approach	

Points of Pride

Number and Variety of Academic Programs	Inclusion of All People's Opinions
Costs/Affordability	Location
Serving Students	Diversity of Students
Longevity & Loyalty of Faculty & Staff	Learning/ Prof. Development

Central's Best Kept Secret

College Education is Possible and Affordable

Fine Arts

Sciences

What Should Not Change as Central Advances into Next Decade

High Standards for Students and Faculty
Keeping Students in Connecticut

Service to Students & Employees
Historical Place in CT Higher Ed.

Facilities Upkeep
Community Service

Management / Confidential Employees

Focus Group Findings

Elements to Highlight in Institutional Identity

Community Engagement
Commitment to Student Success
Campus. Community. World.

Workforce Development
Community Service
Global

Campus
Community
State
Universe

What Central Does Well

Educate	Teaching
Service	Reach out to Community
Athletics	Honors Program
Technology	Teacher Preparation
Undergraduate	Workforce / Career
Research	Preparation
Cooperative Education	

What Central Should Develop

Community Engagement	Service Learning / Community Outreach
Gov't, Public Policy Resource	Engineering & Technology
Teacher Education	MBA
Nursing Education	International Education
School partnerships	Workforce Development
Reciprocal partnerships with community, business, and CCSU to solve regional problems	

Points of Pride

Commitment to Student Success	High Quality Education
University Administration	Alumni
Innovative Teaching	Affordability
Research	Teacher Education
Quality of Service	Employees
Work Ethic of Graduates	Reality of Motto
Partnership & Centers	Community Eng.

Central's Best Kept Secret

Cultural Resource for Region	Tax Supported
Tuition & Fee Portion of Operating Budget	Humble Pockets of Brilliance
Honors Program	Jamaica Program
Institutes & Centers	Undergraduate Research

What Should Not Change as Central Advances into Next Decade

Commitment to Student Success	Affordability	Access
Commitment to Shared Governance & Mutual Respect	Create Futures for All Kinds of Students	

Undergraduate Students

Focus Group Findings

Elements to Highlight in Institutional Identity

Liberal Ideas / Critical Thinking
Progressive, Forward Thinking,
New Ideas for Tomorrow

Multicultural
Teacher Education

Commuter's University
Work Ethic of Students

What Central Does Well

Small Classes Easy access to Pipeline
Dedicated Professors Positive Environment
Quality Education for the Cost Variety of Community, Cultural Activities
Providing Advising Outside Speakers in Class
Career Fairs Variety of Teaching Styles
Clean, Attractive Facilities

What Central Should Develop

Athletic Achievements Housing
Internships Job placement
Pipeline, Universal Use of Vista, Online Svcs. Mentor Programs, incl. Alumni
Community Involvement Greek Life
Sense of Campus Closed campus with defined boundaries
Community Food services
Diversity Arts facilities
Classroom size

Points of Pride

Athletics University (not Comm. College)
Academic Reputation Teacher Ed Program
Clubs Friendly Peers
Graduating Debt-Free Theater Department
Variety of Cultures & Ethnicities

Central's Best Kept Secret

Study Lounge in Library, 4th Floor Co-ops
Resources in Copernicus Solid education here (depending on Dept.)
Some faculty & staff can help you "beyond the books"

What Should Not Change as Central Advances into Next Decade

Contact with Faculty
Centers & Resources
Quality of Teacher Education Programs

Tuition/Cost
Centralized Classes & Facilities
Attractive Campus

Small Class Size
Quality of Education
Continue Advising

Works Cited

Connecticut State University System Board of Trustees. (2000, October 5). *Resolution Revising the Mission Statement of the Connecticut State University System*. Retrieved March 8, 2008, from http://w3.sysoff.ctstateu.edu/web/CSUweb_Trustees.nsf/9d6f805b5811a41c85256a140049c36d/c595e25564bdd8d485256aa00060eeca?OpenDocument