A HISTORY

OF

WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE COLLEGE
DANBURY, CONNECTICUT
1903-1978

BY

CHARLOTTE H. ISHAM
Professor Emeritus
Western Connecticut State College

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FOREWORD

A Golden Anniversary generally sparks some special attention—no matter who or what is being honored. The 75th anniversary of the institution now known as Western Connecticut State College is definitely worthy of note. WestConn, as it is being called at present, has served the western part of our state of Connecticut (as well as many students from New York State) since 1903. Our college has earned a good reputation for all those years, from a Normal School to the present multi-purpose college.

Plans have already been developed which would make the conversion to a university simple.

In this one book it will be impossible to note all the changes and growths. It would be futile to try to include the names of all the people who have served the college—townspeople, congressmen, administrators, staff, and students.

An attempt will be made to place Western Connecticut State College, on its 75th anniversary, in historical perspective. It is hoped that students entering the college will be interested, as well as present students, staff, alumni, and all local and state friends who have watched the growth and will continue to recognize our college as an institution serving the needs of Western Connecticut.

Acknowledgments

This history has been written, in part, through the use of basic research compiled by Mr. Jack Friel, a former student and instructor at Western Connecticut State College.

Footnotes will be used sparingly. All tapes, classbooks, catalogs, pictures and other sources used will be listed in the appendix, and will be placed on file in the archives of the college. Thus, those who wish more detail on specific topics mentioned in the history will be able to pursue their study further.

The author is grateful to all those who gave of their time for personal interviews, as well as the use of various printed materials.

Charlotte H. Isham
Dedication

This brief history is dedicated to

Dr. Ruth A. Haas

in recognition of her devotion as an educator, and of the many contributions to the college during her forty-four years of service to education in Danbury, Connecticut.

Dr. Haas was Dean of the college from 1931 to 1946, when she was appointed President. She was the first woman in the United States to serve as president of a four-year State college.

“Back of the job — the dreamer
Who’s making the dream come true.”
Berton Bradley (1882-1966)
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"Whatever is best administer'd is best."\(^1\)

"Our purpose is to cultivate in the largest possible number of our future citizens an appreciation of both the responsibilities and the benefits which come to them because they are Americans and are free."\(^2\)

\(^1\) Alexander Pope — An Essay on Man, early 1700's
\(^2\) James Bryant Conant — from Annual Report to the Board of Trustees, Harvard University, Jan. 11, 1943

Old Hitching Post by The Normal
CHAPTER I

“WestConn” 1978

“Ideally located in historic and picturesque Fairfield County, the present Western campus is near the business center of Danbury and within commuting distances of the major population centers of Western Connecticut—Stamford, Bridgeport, New Haven, Waterbury, and Torrington. New York City, with its centers of graphic and performing arts, is only a little over an hour away.”

Western Connecticut State College, in the eyes of many, is still a small college. A news release from the Office of Public Affairs, dated October 11, 1977 gives the story briefly:

Enrollment continues to grow at Western Connecticut State College. Figures released today (Oct. 11) indicate the college is servicing more than 6,000 students for the first time in its 75-year history.

Total enrollment in all programs offered at the 25-acre campus is 6,016.

Full time students number 2,835, a one per cent increase over last year. Part-time students, up six per cent this year, total 2,179.

An additional 383 students are enrolled at WestConn in programs given in co-operation with the University of Connecticut, Bridgeport Engineering Institute, and Southern Connecticut State College.

The new WestConn Division of Extended Programs and the Career Development Center show an enrollment of 219 students to the fall (1977) semester date. Enrollment in this division will be fluid throughout the year as new workshops, seminars and courses are added.

To accommodate the increasing number of students in present facilities, the college schedules classes from 8 A.M. to 10 P.M. daily.

Checking enrollment in April 1978 we find Bridgeport School of Engineering as 20; and UConn Master of Business Administration, 363.

No figures can be up-to-date as new students keep registering, and students leave the college for transfer and other reasons.

The numbers tell the story of the continued growth of the college. When Danbury Normal School recorded its first year figure, it read “1904-05 41”.

As enrollment was recorded yearly we find breakdowns, beginning in the school year 1948-49.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Full time</th>
<th>Part-time Day Undergraduate and Evening and Extension</th>
<th>Graduate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960-61</td>
<td>698</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>234</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1,324</td>
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<tr>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>2,811</td>
<td>1,432</td>
<td>1,171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5,414</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adding:

Bridgeport School of Engineering ....... 20
UConn Master of Business Administration .......... 363

Makes a grand total at the date of this writing (April, 1978) .... 5,797

The Western Alumnus—Winter 1978 headlined an article “Enrollments over 6,000.”

Quoted from the article:

Western Connecticut State College enters its 75th anniversary year with an all-time high enrollment figure of 6,016.

Fall registration figures released break down into the following categories: 2,835 full-time students; 2,579 part-time students, 383 enrolled in programs given in cooperation with the University of Connecticut and the Bridgeport Engineering Institute; and 219 enrolled in the new Division of Extended Programs and the Career Development Center. (See Enrollment by Years in Appendix G.)

So, we notice a discrepancy in the enrollment figures and in the acreage—but both keep changing and as in the words of Connecticut deeds for generations, we might say, “25 acres, more or less!”

The important facts about WestConn are not necessarily the enrollment figures. We like to report that our college, from its beginning as a Normal School in 1903, has had as its goal—Service to students and the community.
It is interesting to note some of the changes in the **Statement of Purpose** from the first Normal School Catalogs to the recent catalogs:

1904  
"to train teachers in the art of instructing and governing in the public schools of the State."

1939–1940  
"The Board believes . . . purpose of supplying the state with an adequate number of thoroughly trained teachers—also to utilize these institutions to serve the wider needs of youth in ways consistent with the primary function of the institution."

1952–1953  
"The principal purpose of DSTC is to train elementary teachers and music teachers for service in the public schools of Connecticut.

1957–1958  
"The principal purpose of DSTC is to prepare elementary teachers, junior high school teachers, and music teachers . . . ."

1963–1964 **Purpose** is not a heading as such—Beginning with this catalog the word **Objectives** appears.  
"DSC seeks to provide an environment in which the student can develop . . . ."

1971–1972  
"WCSC has a concern for its 2,600 undergraduate students . . . (Text refers to expansion from straight teacher training program to varied graduate and under-graduate curricula).

1975–1976 Catalog contains a statement of "Mission". (The statement was officially adopted by the Board of Trustees for State Colleges in 1970.) WCSC is basically a teaching college with liberal arts and professional programs at baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate levels.

1977–1978 (Quoted from catalog—**Mission**)  
Western Connecticut State College, functioning within the structure of public higher education, offers liberal arts and professional programs at both the baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate levels. The college is committed:

1. To serve qualified or qualifiable students at both undergraduate and graduate levels in professional, pre-professional, semi-professional, para-professional and liberal arts degree programs, regardless of the heterogeneity of the groups to which they belong.

2. To prepare students qualified both to lead and to function effectively in a rapidly changing and expanding society.

3. To provide a campus climate (physical, social, philosophical and intellectual) conducive to high quality learning and to the development of human values and social responsibility and to the development of a personal philosophy.

4. To provide the academic community with the optimum resources necessary for high quality teaching, experimentation and research appropriate to the educational role of the College.

5. To provide leadership and service to public education in the region.

6. To cooperate in community endeavors for the welfare of the public good within the limitations of available college resources and purposes.

7. To cooperate in academic consortia wherever appropriate with other public institutions of higher education.

Still quoting from the 1977–1978 catalog—"The present campus, comprising ten college buildings, will be dramatically expanded with the development of the 250-acre westside campus authorized by the General Assembly."2

Danbury Normal School operated from 1903 to 1926 with Old Main as the only building. The catalog of 1925–26, under "Living Arrangements," referred to the little brown house thus: "Near the school but not a part of its organization is a "dormitory" accommodating twenty students . . . ." Fairfield Hall, a dormitory for women, was opened in 1927.

The catalog of the Normal for 1904–1905 listed seven teachers, including the principal. The 1977–1978 WestConn catalog lists 213 Faculty Members (includes 3 part-time). Also listed are 33 Faculty Emeriti.

The telephone directory, including faculty, secretaries, custodians and other personnel makes the total up to approximately 375 employees. In 1904 there was a janitor. No secretary was listed in the catalog.

The Course of Study (1904–1905) is listed completely on an uncrowded page in the catalog (5½" x 8½") and includes subjects given for the two years of normal school training.

The most recent catalog of WestConn, like the latest cars, seems to be inoculated with "multi-functional additives" so that the undergraduate listing shows forty-one subject areas, with baccalaureate degrees attainable in many of the listed areas. Graduate listing adds to the many and varied offerings of the College.
In the back of 1904 catalog there are the names of the 41 graduates. Headlines referring to the 1978 WestConn graduation in January read, “WestConn to Graduate 296,” and in May, 525 students graduated—381 undergraduates (22 Associate degrees, 359 Bachelor degrees) and 144 graduate students (135 Master degrees and 9 sixth year).

The writer of this brief history of Western Connecticut State College is well aware that many topics concerning the growth and activities of the college have not even been mentioned. Emphasis on the academic growth and service to the community has been stressed as the perpetual purpose/mission of the college.

Our college is destined to continue to fulfill a significant service to its students and the greater WestConn community. It has been said that the college has the largest inventory of academic programs of any state college, and new services will be added as needs arise.

Reasons why people attend college vary greatly, and some students need to try several disciplines before finding themselves. When the Normal School first opened its doors there were comparatively few opportunities for young women to receive an education. There were questions in the minds of many about the need or value of education. In an essay by Finley Peter Dunne (1902) called Observations by Mr. Dooley, the sentiment is expressed thus:

“If ye had a boy wud ye sind him to colleged?” asked Mr. Hennessy.

“Well,” said Mr. Dooley, “at th’age whin a boy is fit to be in colleged I wudden’t have him around th’ house.”

As we recognize our 75th anniversary we are anxiously awaiting the actual construction of buildings on the expanded campus. With more room for the necessary classroom and dormitory rooms, Western Connecticut State College will be even better equipped to help students to take advantage of the many opportunities available. We will continue our mission of serving all of WestConn.
It was a bitter battle. The Waterbury Republican wrote: "They beat us, but it was by the worst sort of trickery." The Norwich Bulletin suggested that Danbury issue a special hat in honor of its triumph. Danbury did have a special parade from the railroad station to the Groveland Hotel to express its thanks to those who worked in the interest of the Normal School.

Before the normal school could be opened, certain preliminaries needed attention. There must be a contract between the town of Danbury and the state. The town would need to commit itself to provide practice schools in which the normal school students could learn how to teach. Another important step was to have authorization by a town meeting, held August 11, 1903, to accept land generously donated by Alexander M. White, and to deed it to the state as the site on which to erect the school building. Plans had been drawn. Contracts were soon to be let for construction.

A temporary building for the school was needed next, and of course a teaching staff provided—one which would attract students to the school. This proved to be no problem: The High School on Main Street was not crowded and could easily accommodate the expected thirty normal school students on its third floor. John Perkins, who had come to Danbury in 1889 to be principal of the high school, welcomed the opportunity to become normal school principal, and to organize its staff of teachers. Mr. Perkins' good friend, Charles D. Hine, a long-time secretary of the State Board of Education, would assist him in arranging for necessary furniture and library facilities. Both men worked diligently toward attracting as many qualified students as possible to enroll for training to become teachers.

Mr. Hine publicized the prospective opening of the school. The announcement confirmed the sole purpose of the school: "to train teachers in the art of instructing and governing in the public schools of the state."72

Admission requirements were spelled out: Candidates must be at least seventeen years old; testimonials of character and attainments must be presented from a teacher and from a school visitor of the candidate's home town. There must be evidence of preparation for normal school training, preferably by having been graduated from a high school offering a course of study at least three years in length. All applicants must certify, in writing, their desire and intention to teach in the public schools of Connecticut. Any candidates who met the requirements could count on being accepted for training. The training would lead to an assured future.
At that time the demand for good teachers was about twice as great as the supply.

The Danbury News Times reported that the thirty-seven students who registered on the opening day, September 6, 1904, were a larger number than the seating provisions originally made. This meant that it would be necessary for the students to occupy a larger portion of the third floor assembly than had been planned. Two small offices on that floor were available for other uses. Mr. Perkins would use one as an office; the other, as a library, "which will contain all the latest and best books which an up-to-date normal school will need."  

The first teachers were: Jane Maud Burbank and Sara M. Armstrong. Miss Burbank, from Saco, Maine, a Wellesley graduate, would teach literature. Miss Armstrong, a graduate of Tufts College, and a Bostonian, would teach mathematics. Still to be employed were teachers of drawing and music, as well as a librarian. Harry Houston, of the New Haven Public Schools, had agreed to come to Danbury once a week to teach penmanship, and Mr. Perkins would teach science.

In its first year the student body grew to forty-four. All were young women. Their average age was seventeen, although one would not reach sixteen until November. Another was a mature twenty-two. Most students lived in Danbury or near-by Bethel. A few came from as far away as Norwalk. Parents were from many occupations, but "hatter" led the list. One student had attended Boston University for two years; another had been graduated after two years in New Milford High School, but most had attended a high school for three years. One student had already spent four years in teaching.

The great majority of students confirmed on the entrance questionnaire that they could sing, could play (presumably the piano) and were church members. For the first year, all were listed in the catalog as students. Future catalogs would distinguish between students as seniors and juniors.

The school calendar was three terms: September-December; January-March; and April-June. (This was probably to encourage students for whom year-round attendance would be difficult.)

At the end of the first year, Mr. Perkins reported to the Board of Education that "on the whole, the year was successful." Emmeline A. Dunn and Marion Tweedy had been appointed to teach drawing and music. Maria W. Bishop came from the Courtland Normal School as teacher of methods. In June, Lothrop D. Higgins was appointed as teacher of science. Ella Brush was named librarian, and also filled the position as clerk. (As in many early schools, several teachers assumed multiple responsibilities.)

At the end of the year Miss Armstrong added geography and gymnastics to her original mathematics assignment, and Miss Burbank taught history as well as English. The library consisted of 1500 "carefully selected books". Students were regularly trained in their use.

On September 5, 1905 the school began classes in its own building on White Street: "At the ringing of the signal bell at nine o'clock the entire school assembled in the assembly hall, where Principal Perkins made a short address and gave the pupils directions for their work. Immediately afterward they went to their various classrooms and commenced the work of the term and the year. Thus began a tradition of regular assembly of the entire school, including a period of prayer and devotion, which lasted for many years."

The school building we know today as "Old Main" was a source of pride for faculty and students. Mr. Perkins wrote: "It is considered one of the finest in New England and is admired by all who have visited it."  

All but two of the forty-four students who had enrolled during the school's first year had returned as Seniors. During the first year they had had the opportunity to observe teaching in the Danbury elementary Schools. "Every pupil visited some room at least once a week." Now there would be practice teaching in the modern eight-room Locust Avenue School and in the one-room school at King Street, "about four miles in the country." Practice teaching in the rural schools was very important as most trained teachers would be assigned country schools for their first employment. Other schools in Danbury were soon added as practice facilities for the normal school students, including New Street, Beaver Brook, and Miry Brook.

From all reports, the school was a busy, happy place. A memoir written by Mr. Perkins' daughter tells of frequent parties for the faculty to which out-of-town students were invited if they were staying in Danbury for the week-end. Mr. Perkins was an avid outdoorsman and took special pride in his bird dogs—"Mac" and "Teddy", named in honor of the turn-of-the-century presidents. "Dan" (Webster) took a blue ribbon as best pointer at the Danbury Fair Dog Show. The Perkins' two-cylinder Model A was among the first in Danbury, followed by a long succession of Model T's. With the automobile laid up for the winter, Mr. Perkins enjoyed walking to school from his home at 345 Main Street (after 1907, Deer Hill Avenue). In inclement weather he rode the trolley which, with one transfer to the White Street line, let him off directly in front of 'The Normal'.

Mr. Perkins had great ambitions for his school and his students. From the start, he wanted the school to become a four-year teachers college, granting the bachelor's degree in education. He wanted his 'girls' to have the same advantages they would have enjoyed at a private college—
dormitory life, lasting school friendships, girlish 'gabfests', and collegiate tradition. Meanwhile, his objective would be to raise a "biennial crop of good teachers."

The memoir describes Mr. Perkins' specifications for the 'good teacher':

"As others were born with a gift for music or art, he believed the good teacher was born with a 'gift for teaching'. The teacher must have a dedication comparable to that of the missionary—'when not teaching, engaged in planning or worrying about her charges.' The good teacher would have an affection for her pupils, enthusiasm for the subjects being taught, and a sense of humor. She must be subtle in the all-important task of developing her students' reasoning powers, but, 'since memorizing is necessary, make memorizing exciting!' Limited as opportunities might be, the teacher must never go stale, must maintain a fresh viewpoint—get outdoors, travel wherever possible, enjoy cultural activities, do advanced study."

Mr. Perkins used his annual reports to the State Board of Education to clarify and press for his goals, as well as record the years accomplishments. Among the latter, in 1906, was the initiation of correspondence courses so that teachers who had not attended normal school could prepare for examination for the state teaching certificate, or for entering normal school with advanced credit. Thus came into being the new category of 'nonresident students', soon to outnumber the resident student body.

Perhaps no single program initiated by Mr. Perkins brought the Danbury Normal School more distinction than the summer school. It was intended originally for "teachers of a deficient education and of limited experience." The first session (1908) attracted more than 200 students. The summer school became a permanent institution of far-reaching importance, and in 1912, Charles D. Hine, a dedicated educator like his predecessor, Henry Barnard, reported: "No other gathering in the interest of education has been more important to the schools of Connecticut." The objective of the summer session was "to show teachers how to teach". The greatest attraction for the 325 participants was the demonstration sessions in the rural model schools, every day "crowded by teachers seeking information". Not surprising to Mr. Hine was the fact that the "84 children who attended the school seemed to enjoy the work as children usually do under the right sort of teaching". In this, he supported Mr. Perkins' conviction that "while children ought not be overworked, it is also true that they will learn a great deal without injury."10

By the end of the year 1908 the library contained "3,017 books besides 923 textbooks and 2,297 volumes used in the training schools", and books were sent to all correspondence students who requested them."11

Annual reports lent themselves to crusades for bettering the school and the teaching profession. The "general prosperity" of 1906 simply aggravated the problem of attracting qualified students—"Only those who love to teach will enter a normal school and spend two years time and then get no larger salary than had they graduated from the business course of a high school". The prevailing wage of teachers should exceed wages of other occupations so "the teaching profession might select the best and reject those that are less worthy."12

The legislature finally adopted a plan, supported by Mr. Perkins, under which towns having a small grand list were entitled to have at all times a student attending normal school. The state would pay the living expenses of each student "at a cost not to exceed $160 per year," and provide free round trip transportation three times a year. The student, in return, must agree to teach for at least two years following the graduation, either in her hometown, or "some other town in the same class", at a reasonable salary. The town must commit itself to pay the new teacher $300 per year—"the controlling factor in this plan would be the price which the state would be willing to pay in excess of the $300. Eventually the plan would assure that every beginner was a trained teacher, and the standard of education in Connecticut would be raised accordingly. The best young people of the state must be attracted to teaching."13

To accomplish the above, education must be made attractive—"a normal school should have the buildings, equipment, and instructors on a par with the smaller colleges with which it competes for students." There should be a dormitory. In 1910 Mr. Perkins wrote "This school needs more than any one thing a dormitory." The principal of the Willimantic Normal (Mr. Burr) was voicing the same concern. In the reports one can read: "Although some landladies were interested in the welfare of the young ladies, others assume no responsibility whatever." Indeed, some students reported young men roaming or boarding in the same house. Mr. Perkins went on to say, "While the relation between the students and these young men is doubtless, in every case innocent, the situation is altogether undesirable."14

Mr. Perkins felt that beyond economics and more considerations, there was a cultural value a dormitory could provide—"their manner of talking, their table manners—In a dormitory students would become accustomed to a mode of life which would be very helpful." For community respect and prestige, the trained teacher must also be a model of the social graces."15
The dormitory campaign involved all the normal schools. In 1917, the legislature appropriated $15,000 for purchase of a dormitory site in Danbury. Although the property was quickly acquired, a building committee was not appointed until 1923, and it was four more years before Fairfield Hall was opened.

Before Fairfield Hall the only dormitory, as such, was a small brown shingled house across from Old Main. Twenty girls were accommodated and with Miss May Sherwood in charge, the “dorm” was operated on a “co-op” basis.

Room and board were furnished at the rate of $8.75 per week for rooms on the second floor, and $8.28 for rooms on the third floor (two students per room). “A reduction of 20c is given for each meal for which one is absent if proper notification is given.”

Students received sheets of mimeographed information with details concerning the dormitory. The following paragraphs give details as an example of the rules and regulations:

Students are wholly responsible for the neatness and order of their rooms which are subject to inspection at any time; they are also responsible for injury to furniture other than that which comes from ordinary wear.

In each room there is a closet for clothes and the following furniture—two couches, two mattresses, a table, a dresser, chairs, shades and lights. The students furnish all else: each student must furnish at least three sheets, a pillow and covers for it, all bed covers, a mattress cover, a drinking glass, table napkins and an inexpensive napkin holder; if they wish they may furnish, also, curtains for the windows, covers for the dresser and table, a day cover for the couch and rugs but please understand that these are purely optional; usually it is best to see the room and consult your room-mate before furnishing the latter things. It is by far preferable that your curtains cover the entire window rather than being the “Dutch” variety.

The mattress is 72” x 30” x 4”; the most satisfactory size of sheet has been found to be 92” x 50”.

One sheet is laundered weekly free of charge; it is collected on Thursday morning; be sure your sheets are distinctly marked with your NAME; the most accessible place for the name on the sheet is on the wrong side at one end of the wide hem. It is wise to mark your table napkins, too.

On account of lack of storage space, it is by far preferable if you bring no trunk; it is well to send bedding a few days previous to the opening of school by parcel post; address the packages—Miss . . . . . . , State Normal School DORMITORY, 190 White Street, Danbury, Conn. Bring or send clothing in suitcases.

Bring enough bed coverings when you come for nights in September are likely to be cool. Bring your umbrella and overshoes, too. Remember your hangers and paper to line your dresser drawers. It is advisable that you bring your own remedies and your hot water bag; it is well that each student or her room-mate have a clock. If you wish to hang a few pictures, please ask Miss Miller for hangers; under NO circumstances, drive nails or tacks into the walls without permission.

There were many more regulations for dormitory living; some are fun to read, such as:

- Please take baths at night and NOT in the morning NOR during study hour.
- Please wash the tub clean after using.
- Please draw only the amount of hot water which you are going to need; drawing a tub of hot water and then running half of it off to temper it, deprives someone else of hot water.
- Please allow no refuse to get into the bowls or the bath-tubs.
- Please, under no circumstances, do any laundry in the bathrooms; do all laundry in the tubs in the basement.
- It has been found necessary on account of the nearness to the street to insist that all shades are lowered to the sill always when the lights are lighted.

Students took turns as waitresses.

Specific instruction was given beyond general rules—“Arrange light bulbs so your shadow does not fall on the shade,” or “Wear either a dress, kimona or a bathrobe at all times and under all circumstances.”

A special bulletin was issued concerning non-dormitory students who lived in other homes—

To Those having Students in their Homes

For your guidance and help the faculty of the normal school makes the following suggestions as to details of conduct which we feel should be observed by young women students who are living away from home and which we should be glad to have you enforce.

1. Students are expected to conduct themselves with consideration for those with whom they live—to be quiet in demeanor, neat and orderly in their habits, and careful of the rooms and furnishings.

2. It is expected that each student will complete her work by 9:30 in the evening and be in her room at ten and quiet thereafter.

3. Excepting for normal school purposes, no student should be out in the evening unless accompanied by a woman specifically approved by you.

4. Students are not to be in the company of men at any time except with full knowledge and written consent of their parents. This consent should be specific.
It is expected that you will report to the principal or to the dean of the school any continued failure on the part of a student to comply fully with these regulations.

Lothrop D. Higgins

The Class of 1910 formed a Students Association and invited alumnae to its first reception on January 7. This class also formed a debating society. Their first debate was won by the affirmative side. “Resolved: problems involving reasoning should not be given below the eighth grade.”

In 1916 a kindergarten was started in a first floor corner of the normal school building. One kindergarten alumnus (now a retired physician) recalls his introduction to science under his beloved teacher, Marguerite Wheeler—“the trip upstairs to see the bee hive,” put together by John Perkins. He also remembers the lecture on the use of the toothbrush. The school grounds provided ample space, and the normal school students helped with such events as lawn parties, a Maypole dance, and even a ‘graduation’ featuring “vanilla-banana layer cake, and lemon soda-pop, courtesy Baker and Malaspina, Bottlers.”

Dr. Haas remembers hearing that the beautiful old oak tree standing near the western entrance of Old Main was planted by Miss Wheeler’s kindergarten class.

World War I brought a substantial decline in enrollment at all of the normal schools. In comparison with a statewide enrollment of 799 students at the four normal schools in 1913, there were in 1918, only 441 students. Very high wages were being paid in war-related industries—there was withdrawal from teaching to participate in war, and teaching jobs seemed less permanent.

- Danbury’s enrollment in the Normal School dropped from 213 to 140 students in 1917-18. Mr. Perkins urged the Board of Education to provide more buildings, more playground space, and other facilities. At the same time he preached that physical facilities alone would not attract students. The quality of teaching in the normal school should be raised. He urged that “Teachers in the normal school should be of the same grade as those who teach in college.” It was then, also, that Mr. Perkins urged that normal schools should expand from their role of training teachers only for the elementary grades. Their scope should include the training of every public school teacher and superintendent. This would involve taking over the work now done by private colleges in training high school teachers and school administrators. “At least one of the normal schools should give a four-year course and confer degrees”, he stated.

Mr. Perkins ran a constant campaign for improved instruction, and for ways to attract the best men and women to the profession.

In an annual report of 1920 he wrote: “The teaching profession will never be on the proper basis until at least one third of the teachers are men—and the best men and women will not be attracted to a profession where wages are inferior to those paid to many unionized trades.” To add strength to his report he concluded: “The amount of money spent in support of schools is pitifully small when compared with the amount spent for amusements, tobacco, and liquor.”

Enrollments continued to decline. In 1919 there were 86 students; 73 in 1920; and 66 in 1921. The faculty numbered eleven. Students received individual attention, and from all reports enjoyed the close relations with faculty and classmates. Martha L. Cowan left her post as director of training to marry Mr. Perkins following the death of his first wife.

Twenty-three ‘model teachers’ supervised practice teaching of the normal school students. The students were in the schools at Balmforth Avenue, Locust Avenue, Miss Wheeler’s kindergarten, and at the Miry Brook School in the country.

A few years before the 1920’s a young graduate of the Danbury Normal School—May Sherwood—had been engaged to teach first grade at Balmforth Avenue School. She became a legend as the future director of practice teaching. Another who became legendary was Howard C. Durgy, employed since 1905 as school janitor. Mr. Durgy was more than a janitor—he made himself advisor, prophet, critic, confidante of administrators, teachers and students. Even after his retirement, Mr. Durgy came back to the Normal School to check up on people and give advice to all. It was reported that Mr. Durgy held a record as Connecticut’s longest-service employee.

In keeping with Mr. Perkins’ concern for improved instruction, standards for admission were raised. This, of course, made for even greater decline in enrollment. If a student were to enter without examination from a four-year high school, he must show an average grade of 75%. Other students must pass an entrance examination, and must have had a prescribed minimum of academic courses. All candidates must as in the past, certify their intention to teach in the state’s public schools upon graduation. The catalog warned, “If, in the case of any pupils, the earnestness of this purpose is negatived by unfaithfulness, or if unfitness for this calling is disclosed, such pupils will not be allowed to remain in the school.”

For some years some effort had been made to organize the school’s alumnae. As the result of “extra effort” put forth by the Normal School Faculty and the model teachers, graduates of the school met at Hotel Green at noon on June 12, 1920 for the First Annual Alumnae Association Meeting.
Classes were represented for all the years—from 1906 to 1920. Mr. Perkins addressed the group. There was singing and cheering, and at the business meeting, Miss Annetta Munro of the Class of 1910, was elected as the association's first president. In the fall of 1978, the Alumni Association numbers 9,182 (8,248 undergraduates, 934 graduates). There are undoubtedly more alumni but many addresses are unknown.

As Mr. Perkins came to the end of his important years at the Normal School he reported "that teachers salaries had risen to $700 for beginning teachers." Indeed, the Board of Education survey of 1922 revealed "that the average monthly salary for women teachers had risen to $147.11, and for men, $208.01." Jobs were less certain for the graduates though. The catalog, when mentioning future opportunities for graduates, stated, "The school cannot guarantee employment to its graduates."

The annual report of the Board of Education for 1923 was as follows:

On May 14, 1923 Mr. John R. Perkins, principal of the State Normal School at Danbury, died at his home after a short illness. Mr. Perkins was graduated from Dartmouth College with the class of 1889, and in 1892 was given the degree of M.A. by his alma mater. After a period of private secondary teaching, Mr. Perkins became principal in 1899 of the Danbury High School, and upon the establishment of the state normal school became its first principal.

Mr. Perkins was an excellent teacher, and in his conduct of the school he had the affection of the faculty and the pupils, who found in him a wise counsellor and a true friend. The board hereby records its appreciation of the long and effective service rendered by Mr. Perkins to the state as the guide and friend of many teachers who have come under his influence.

A small plaque in Old Main recalls Mr. Perkins loving service to the school. The only reminder of it is the John Perkins Memorial Fund, maintained by the Alumni Association to provide short-term loans to students. There is little formality about the loan procedure. Loans may be needed for rent, to buy books, or to finance a trip back home for a homesick student. But every loan eases a student's problem, and helps keep him in school, and this, one surmises, John Perkins would especially have liked.

Above left: First graduating class from The Normal
Above right: Class of 1912
Right: Class of 1922
Lothrop D. Higgins, Principal 1923-1935

Lothrop D. Higgins was appointed principal of Danbury Normal School on July 1, 1923. He was obviously the person best acquainted with the school's operation and needs. He had been employed by Mr. Perkins as instructor in science toward the end of the school's first year. He had an excellent reputation as a wise and witty teacher, and as an innovator. He had enjoyed a close personal friendship and professional relationship with Mr. Perkins, and in all but title, had been considered vice-principal. Normal school students referred to him as the teacher who brought science to life in the classroom.

In personality and mannerisms, Mr. Higgins was almost a complete opposite from his predecessor, Mr. Perkins. We have pictured Mr. Perkins as a fun-loving, informal, outdoorsman. Mr. Higgins was always in a neatly pressed formal suit, high starched collar, and conservative tie. Mr. Perkins was comfortable with students and children. Mr. Higgins was not at ease with children. On one unannounced and apparently anonymous visit to a model school classroom, one young child reportedly responded to the question, "Do you know who this is?" with, "I know, he's an undertaker."

Mr. Higgins' desk was a model of order, and thumb-tacks on the floor indicated the proper placement of chairs in his office. He was a disciplinarian and a perfectionist. One of his teachers recalled, "If word came that Mr. Higgins wanted to see me, I just suffered," but she added, "he was a fine, good man."

Mr. Higgins was good for the school. In fact, he was probably just the right person for the replacement of Mr. Perkins. The school was weathering the depression years, and the first major threat to its continued existence.

Mr. Higgins enlarged the curriculum and the faculty. Although the school still lacked its long-needed dormitory, a building committee was appointed by the legislature in 1923 to see that the building was eventually erected. There was to be unforeseen temporary growth in enrollment, because Bridgeport had decided to close its normal school, and students enrolled there would be sent to Danbury. As far back as 1893 Bridgeport had declined to accept a state appropriation of $100,000 for a normal school to be operated as a part of the state system. The advantages of a private school were not enough to outweigh the financial burdens for Bridgeport. Their closing meant problems in numbers, as well as the problems presented by students being in various stages of training and the curriculum.

The solution of the State Board of Education was to designate Danbury as the Normal School at which any student already enrolled in Bridgeport could receive continued training until graduation without loss of credit. Many Bridgeport students had begun their training in the winter term. Thus, some would contemplate graduation in January rather than at Danbury's standard June graduation. So in 1924 and 1925 there were two graduations each year; some were graduated in January, but the majority in June. After 1925 graduations were held only in June until the year 1972, when January graduations were instituted again.

Mr. Higgins and his staff still had the problem which had been prevalent since the founding of the normal school: They had little basis for questioning the quality of candidates who presented themselves for enrollment. Although admission requirements had been raised from time to time, it still did not assure a reasonably high or uniform quality of students. Those with holders of state elementary certificates were automatically eligible for admission. They needed to present no evidence of prior academic education. Teachers who had somehow managed to put together two years teaching experience without a certificate, and graduates with suitable grades from high school business curricula, consisting largely of such subjects as penmanship, typing, stenography and bookkeeping, were also being admitted. Such unevenness of preparation naturally resulted in many problems, and the proportion of failures was unduly high.

The admission of students from Bridgeport Normal School had mixed blessings. In Mr. Higgins' first annual report, he wrote: "Although the Danbury student body had risen to the need of assimilating this large outside group, the latter have not wholly caught our attitude of service to the state, having come from the atmosphere of a city normal school whose graduates expect to teach at home as a matter of course." Mr. Higgins continued, "For the first time in the history of the Danbury Normal School, we face the disappointment of having quite a percentage of the class failing to secure positions before graduation."

Bridgeport voters decided to re-open their own normal school in September, 1924.

The Danbury Normal yearbook of the class of 1924 had a separate section devoted to the January 1924 graduates from Bridgeport. The yearbook was entitled Anchor. It memorialized the late John Perkins as "father and teacher," and welcomed Lothrop D. Higgins as his replacement. (That was the first yearbook to contain photographs of class members.)

The Anchor did not hold—the next yearbook was published in 1935 and was called The Penningian.
The temporary confusion from the 1923 influx of Bridgeport students was more than matched in September 1924 with the adoption of 'differentiated curricula' for senior normal school students. Until 1924 all students had followed the same courses of study during their two years. Variations might occur in the practice teaching periods, for example, if a student showed marked preference for future teaching in the kindergarten-primary levels. In effect, all students were prepared for teaching in all grades from kindergarten through grade eight. For those students who entered the school in 1923, the final year of study would remain the same as before. Students enrolling in 1924, however, would undergo common studies only during the first (or 'Junior') year. The second year would be devoted to the so called 'differentiated curricula'—one for future kindergarten-primary teachers, the other for those preparing to teach in the intermediate and upper grades. This specialization would further the decline of the one-room school. In 1922, 647 of Connecticut's 1,297 schools were still of the one-room school type. By 1935 the number had been reduced to 245.

As the need for more and more education for teachers seemed obvious, certification requirements also began to be raised. Courses were revamped, course titles became more sophisticated, and the question of Degrees in Education was very much before the Board of Education. Other questions confronting administrators were: Should separate schools prepare teachers for elementary and secondary teaching? Should there be Business Education at Danbury Normal School?

In 1930 New Haven Normal School adopted a three-year curriculum. The three year course was soon to be extended to the other state normal schools. Enrollments were limited because there was then a surplus of teachers in Connecticut. Danbury's quota was 100. That year the summer session enrollments set a new record.

The following year (1931) New Britain adopted the three-year curriculum, and Danbury had a new three-year program for teachers of commerce. The Board of Education predicted that four years training was likely to become a minimum standard in a short time. There was also discussion suggesting that the four normal schools be merged into one college of education.

1933. New Britain became "Teachers College of Connecticut." All students entering normal school in September 1933 would be starting a four-year course. The last two-year graduates were the class of 1933; the last class of three-year graduates was in June 1935. From then on only students who had four years training would be graduated.

All the state colleges except New Britain were limited to training students for grades below seven. New Haven, however, had special classes to train for teachers of the atypical, and Danbury had the commercial subjects.

The title of president instead of principal began to be used in New Britain. Since New Britain was called Teachers College of Connecticut, work done at the other normal schools was 'cleared for degree purposes' with them.

In 1933 all students at all the normal schools were young women.

By introducing courses for junior and senior high school, fifty men were brought to the institution.

In 1935 the legislature approved the four teachers colleges, but Governor Cross vetoed the bill. This was sad news for those who had worked so hard to see the four year colleges a reality. The other sad news was the death of Lothrop D. Higgins.
CHAPTER IV

Dr. Ralph C. Jenkins, Administrator
(Term: 1935-1946)

There were many firsts during the comparatively short term of Dr. Jenkins. Two years after his arrival as principal of the Danbury Normal School, Dr. Jenkins became the first president of Danbury State Teachers College. Dr. Jenkins was the first head of the school with a doctorate in education. (The degree was conferred after his arrival at Danbury). Another first was that Dr. Jenkins came to the school from outside of the college. It was also during his administration that the college had a growing number of male students enter as full-time students.

Dr. Jenkins was a native of Vermont. He was born in Springfield, Vermont, and was graduated from Dartmouth College about the time of the first World War. His masters degrees were from Middlebury College and the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He stepped over the line to receive his doctorate from New York University.

We learn from a school paper (The Inkling, October, 1946) that Dr. Jenkins worked in the field of education for almost thirty years, serving as teacher and administrator in various Vermont schools, including the Johnson Normal School. He also served in the public schools of Putnam and Terryville, in Connecticut, and then eleven years in Danbury.

This man was one of many and varied interests. He was active in many community affairs, including Rotary Club and church organizations. Science and music were two areas where Dr. Jenkins had strong interests, also. Agriculture was likewise a major interest. Dr. Jenkins was fascinated with the development of species and the cultivation of a wide variety of both vegetables and flowers, and their nurture from the standpoint of experimental chemistry. He always made sure that he had space for a garden.

Dr. Jenkins’ interest in music was not merely as a listener. He was director of music in the United Church in Johnson, Vermont, and sang in church choirs and musical productions such as operettas and minstrel shows. He was often a leader of group singing. This interest quite naturally carried over into the college and the grammar schools, where Dr. Jenkins felt the development of music ability and appreciation was most important.

The year 1935 was the year that the Special Third Year Students received diplomas. This group, many of whom were victims of few teaching positions upon graduation, was encouraged to return to Normal School for the ‘special’ third year. Some people believed that one year more beyond the two-year diploma would certainly be adequate training. However, the author of this story, like about thirty-five others in the group, soon learned that three years were not enough, so some of us have a two-year diploma and a special third-year diploma from Danbury Normal School, and finally a Bachelor of Education from the Danbury State Teachers College.

Dr. Jenkins was a good organizer. He worked with the faculty to enlarge the curriculum, to expand the library, and to encourage the physical growth of the campus, including the completion of the outdoor theatre. A direct quote from the Inkling (mentioned above) gives us an idea of Dr. Jenkins’ philosophy and sincere interest in the college:

In the less tangible realm of ideas, he showed no fear of changes, always keeping in mind the essential values to be preserved. Some of his contributions in this area have been the furtherance of freer social life among the students, the development of tolerance through understandings between inter-cultural groups, and the emphasis upon the constant need for religion, each according to his own expression.

Dr. Jenkins will be remembered by students and faculty alike for his objectivity and fairness in all human relations.

The 1940 Yearbook had a message from the president which read:

The accrediting of our college by the American Teachers College Association, the adoption of a program of general education by the State Board of Education, and the publication of this yearbook by the Seniors made history for 1940. May this venture prove to be another one of those things that are pushing the Danbury State Teachers College out in front as a pace-setting, educational institution.
During the administration of Dr. Jenkins, efforts were made to close the school. This was not the first time, nor the last. Each time, a movement has been started through the united efforts of administration, faculty, students, townspeople and members of the legislature to fight the idea, and the college has continued to exist, and to grow in service to the area.

Dr. Jenkins died of a heart attack on October 3, 1946. He had worked hard during his eleven years at Danbury. His interest in science and music were high on his priority list, hoping that adequate facilities would be provided. It was four years more before Higgins Hall, the science building, was completed and Berkshire Auditorium was not opened until 1954.

The period which Dr. Jenkins spent at Danbury was rather short, especially when compared to the terms of the first principal and the recently retired president. However, Dr. Jenkins is given just credit for helping the school to grow into a college and in strengthening its name as an influential force in the education of students in Western Connecticut.
Do-Day

Do you dig do-day?

After a busy Do-Day — Hot Dogs!

Do-Day around a Quanset Hut

What did you say?

Just what is he shovelling?
CHAPTER V

Dr. Ruth A. Haas, President
(1946-1975)

A period of rapid growth, extended services, expanded curricula, and many frustrations.

When Dr. Haas was appointed President to succeed Dr. Jenkins (1946) she became our fourth chief administrator and the first woman in the United States to serve as president of a four-year state college. (Dr. Haas in 1931 had agreed to stay in Danbury two years!)

During her tenure as president the “teachers” were taken from the title, and the new name, Danbury State College, assured students that they would be able to receive an education in areas other than teaching. We were Danbury State College from 1959 to 1967 only, however, and were re-labeled. We became Western Connecticut State College, and our nickname became Wesconn. That, too, has changed and we are known as WestConn, suggesting that our college serves much of Western Connecticut, as well as several towns in neighboring New York State. (It is no wonder the book store must have many sales—they must replace T-shirts, book jackets, writing paper and other items having the old names!)

In 1945 David McCord, well-known contemporary poet of New England, wrote:

“The decent docent doesn’t doze.
He teaches standing on his toes.
His students don’t doze and does,
And that’s what teaching is and was.”

Dr. Haas was on her toes and kept the faculty and students on their toes as well. The energy shown by this remarkable lady was a constant topic of conversation and question: How did she do it? How could she accomplish so much? How could she remember so many of the students and graduates by name? How could she keep up-to-date with all the jobs of the administration—large and small? How could she know the legislators so well? Answer: Dr. Haas likes people and understands their problems. She was always at her desk very early in the morning. People knew they could stop in to see her for a friendly chat or a personal concern. She would be at her desk, seemingly waiting for you. She would look up from her writing—a note of condolence to a student or a faculty member who had lost a loved one, a word of congratulations to an honor student, recognition to a faculty member honored for special research, a published document, an advanced degree, or other personal accomplishments. Later in the day she would be on her way to Hartford.

Dr. Haas was a history major and taught that subject before becoming dean of the college. The first edition of the yearbook, titled “Pahquioque,” seemed to forecast a period of rich harvest for our college as Dr. Haas became the new president, and our college continued its history of growth and of service to an ever-expanding area of Western Connecticut.

Volume II of the Pahquioque was printed in 1946. The title survived until 1960 when the yearbook became Danbury State College Yearbook. The front page of the 1957 edition defined Pahquioque as “open fields, something which is beautiful and filled with potential value.” The editor added, “As we enter this school, we are the flower of youth and filled with “potential value”. (Pahquioque was the Indian name for Danbury. The word was sometimes written as Paquig.)

1950’s yearbook had a note concerning the 1946 entering freshman class (p. 38), “We were the largest (entering) class ever, and the first class to have more men than women.” Many of those men were returning World War II veterans.

1950 was also the year that Higgins Hall, the science building, was opened. The college had grown from Old Main to Fairfield Hall to Higgins Hall. (The “little brown dorm” went out of use in 1927.)

As the college grew in numbers and in service to the community and the state, the campus had another building added. That was Berkshire Hall. The building contained much-needed classroom space and an auditorium (1954). But preparation for its foundation revealed swampy subsoil and foreshadowed building problems to come on the campus.

Another important step in the history—the same year—was when the college was accredited by the New England Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges. More land was purchased that year, also.

As early as the summer of 1955 there was mention in the college catalog of a Masters Program for Elementary Teachers. Then the following year a full-time Director of Graduate Studies was appointed. In the same year, students enrolled in the Intensive Program for College Graduates (IPCG) were allowed to complete requirements for graduate or undergraduate credit.

The number of courses given for graduate credit had been small, so it was a big step when, in the 1957-58 catalog, a separate bulletin listing graduate courses was available.

Course offerings grew steadily as teachers were in need of credits to complete a fifth year to meet new certification requirements.

There were thirty courses listed in the 1958-59 catalog, including offerings in Art, Education, English, Music, Science, and Social Science. The following year a concentration in Music Education was added.
On March 9th, 1972, Dr. Ruth Haas marked her 25th anniversary as president of Western Connecticut State College at a reception given in her honor by more than 400 trustees, faculty, staff, alumni, and students.

When she took office as President in 1947 there were only 265 undergraduates. Today there are more than 2600 full time undergraduates. The News-Times Editorial of March 9th, 1972, summed up the 25 year presidency of Dr. Haas with one word — Growth.

"Growth not just in physical plant but in enrollment, faculty, course offerings, service to the community and the state. None of this came easily."

Dr. Haas' contribution to the future of thousands of young people has been great and will long be remembered by those she has served and continues to serve.
In 1958 the first graduate degrees—all Master of Science—were awarded to sixteen teachers. The next year saw the smallest group—only five. In the 1977-78 academic year, the combined totals from the January and May commencements were: Master of Science, 215; Master of Arts, 29; Sixth Year Diploma, 10.

Figures show rapid growth: in 1958-59, 60 courses were listed; in 1959-60, the list was increased to 77; and by 1963-64 the catalog showed 118 courses. At this writing the graduate catalog (Fall 1978) lists 229 graduate courses at the 500 level and 10 at the 600 level.

An addition to Fairfield Hall was completed in 1957, and the following year a gymnasium was added to Berkshire Hall. The "open space" was being swallowed up by buildings, and more land on White Street was purchased.

The name of the college was changed from Danbury State Teachers College to Danbury State College in 1959 (as mentioned above).

Until 1960 students had little to call their own (except for a Quonset Hut), so the Student Union Building, known as Memorial Hall, was a welcome addition to the campus. A new heating plant was put into operation the same year, raising its beautiful blue tower for all to see.

Our college was no longer the little Normal School and really became a busier-than-ever institution when, in 1961, the four-year Liberal Arts Program, granting Bachelor of Arts Degrees, was introduced. A four-year secondary Education degree (Bachelor of Science), was introduced the same year. The initial liberal arts and secondary education fields were history/social studies, English, science, and mathematics. The liberal arts majors have been developed over the years and now include Graphic Communications (Art), Biology, Chemistry, Earth Science, Spanish, English, History, Anthropology/Sociology, Economics, Political Science, Mathematics, Psychology, Speech and Theatre, and Music.

To go back a few years, before degrees were granted, we would note that in the 40's there was a great teacher shortage. Our college cooperated with the other state institutions by providing an emergency program, known as IPCG (Intensive Program for College Graduates). Graduates of colleges with liberal arts degrees worked through the summer toward certification to teach in the elementary grades. They completed certification requirements after that first summer while teaching in Connecticut public schools. The program filled the need at the time—quite adequately—and existed until 1961 when the shortage became less acute.

Many liberal arts college graduates who wanted to prepare for teaching preferred a full certification program prior to teaching. This demand led to the creation of the Cooperative Teacher Education program. Students studied part-time over a two and a half year period, earned the M.S. degree, and received a Connecticut teachers certificate.

When Dr. Haas first came to "Western" one of her very first actions was the establishment of a Curriculum Committee which included both faculty and students. Dr. Florence Stratemeyer of Teachers College, Columbia, was brought to the college as a consultant to work with the administration and faculty in the area of curriculum development. As a result of great effort by all concerned, our college developed some very unique programs and became known far and wide for its innovative programs and curriculum development. We were "Pioneers."

Included among the programs over the years were:

The Interim Program, initiated in 1947 when students spent time during a semester break in a learning situation away from the college. The purpose was to broaden experiences.

In 1958 another innovative program was introduced. Labeled "Moments of Culture," it integrated history, literature, art and science for freshmen and sophomores.

Later a unique interdisciplinary program was introduced called "The Nature of Man Sequence." Over the four college years students would earn eighteen credits in the Humanistic Studies.

The needs of the region were constantly assessed. Community demands became more insistent in three areas: health sciences, business and law enforcement.
The health science needs were addressed first. In 1965 a baccalaureate Nursing program was started. The Medical Technology program was fully developed in 1964 and Health Education was introduced in 1972.

The Bachelor of Business Administration program started in 1969 and was made available as a degree program to both full time day students and part time evening students. Concentrations in accounting, personnel, management and marketing have been developed. Today more than one third of the entering students pursue this program.

The B.S. in Criminal Justice was instituted in 1975. Western is the only public college in Connecticut which offers the program. It attracts freshmen, transfer students from the many two year law enforcement programs, and many part time students who are employed in criminal justice agencies.

A Basic Studies Program, for students not fully ready for a four-year college program, was introduced in the summer of 1971. Students were given much help with their particular needs—to strengthen learning skills. Many students thus "found themselves". They realized that they could do more than they had thought possible and went on not only to Associate Science degree completion but to complete a wide variety of baccalaureate programs.

"More dormitory room needed" seemed to be a perpetual cry (and still is!). Litchfield Hall, another dorm for women, was completed in 1964.

With an enrollment of over 1,200 day students it was not surprising that an addition to Memorial Hall was desperately needed. It was completed in 1967.

And 1967 saw our name changed to Western Connecticut State College. The Old Danbury High School Building became state property and was re-named White Hall.

That same year was important also as full-time master's degree candidates were accepted in 1967.

Even though the physical growth of the college never did seem to be fast enough, history records additional buildings in rapid succession. In 1969 the Ruth A. Haas Library was opened, and another dormitory for women, Newbury Hall, was completed.

In 1970 the renovation of White Hall was completed. The following year, 1971, the second addition to Higgins Hall was finished.

Dr. Haas retired in 1975.

The list of buildings might suggest that the physical plant seems of greatest importance. Not so.

If the many and varied programs for undergraduate and graduate students had not kept pace with the needs of the college and the regional community the buildings wouldn't have been needed. As the college continues to grow in numbers and in service, the need for the new campus looms larger and larger. Faculty members helped to plan for the new campus and specific plans were introduced as Plan I in November, 1970 (See map p. 36).

Dr. Haas has been hopeful to the end—Her dream will come true—Many will be watching and waiting for the new campus to really bel Langston Hughes said it best for us when he wrote:

*Dreams*

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field,
Frozen with snow.¹

¹From “Don't You Turn Back”—collection of poems by Langston Hughes. (Selected by Lee Bennett Hopkins)

(Woodcuts by Ann Grifalconi—Alfred A. Knopf, N.Y. c 1967)
Dr. Bersi becomes President
CHAPTER VI

Dr. Robert M. Bersi, President
(1975-

On July 1, 1975, Dr. Robert M. Bersi, associate vice-president of California State University in Dominguez Hill, California, was named as the fifth president of Western Connecticut State College.

His appointment was announced at the college during a press conference and marked the end of more than a year’s search for a successor to Dr. Ruth A. Haas.

Dr. Bersi came to the college as a proven administrator. He had participated fully in programs of curriculum development and in building programs of national repute.

Degrees earned by Dr. Bersi include a Bachelor’s Degree from the University of the Pacific, and both a Master’s Degree and a Ph.D. from Stanford University.

New England wasn’t unknown to Dr. Bersi as he had done consultant work in the area. He and his wife Ann like country living. They like their new home in Bethel where they can walk, ride horseback, and generally enjoy the outdoors. They feel that their little daughter, Marnie, has a good school situation in the Rockwell School in Bethel.

Dr. Bersi is a conservative dresser—in fact one often sees him in his shirtsleeves and vest—ready for work. He is a good listener, has a twinkle in his eyes, and has a fetching smile. He shows his personal preference in office furnishings by exhibiting his grandfather’s big old roll-top desk and a set of longhorns mounted to hang.

The challenge of the building program for Western Connecticut State College was one of the reasons Dr. Bersi wanted to come to Connecticut. He has stated that our college is the only comprehensive senior regional college in the western corridor of the state which offers bachelors and masters degree programs. He feels that we have a special responsibility to our students and to the area in which the college is located. There is a steady growth of the typical college age group, but also a large adult clientele.

In an article written about Dr. Bersi in April 1977, he was quoted: “Western Connecticut State College now has the largest inventory of academic programs of any state college in Connecticut, and with the initiation of new schools, we must be recognized as a mature college destined to fulfill a significant service.” 1 WestConn is now organized into three schools: Arts and Sciences, Business and Public Administration, and Professional Studies.

The Danbury News-Times (March 26, 1978) gives a detailed description of the newly established Career Development Center. One can see by the matrix shown above just how the program will aid students in planning study and careers, by capitalizing on their special interests and abilities. Some non-credit courses in high interest subjects are offered by professionals who actually work in the areas taught. Real estate men teach real estate; lawyers teach law; and engineers teach the basics of solar energy.

In addition to the new Career Development Center our college now offers a new degree, Master of Science in Administration, offering concentrations in accounting, finance, management and marketing.

The graduate school has recently added master programs in Oceanography and Limnology (M.A.) and Guidance and Counseling (M.S.).

In the fall of ’77 the School of Arts & Sciences introduced an art major, Graphic Communications. In ’78 the School of Professional Studies launched a degree program, Technological Media for the Arts—television, film, photography and graphics.

Dr. Bersi has been pleased with his reception at Western Connecticut State College. He has said that Dr. Haas left “a legacy of good will” which is bound to be of great help to him.

The building program, already delayed at least eight years, is on the “Top Priority” list of Dr. Bersi’s goals for our college. It appears that the very first buildings on the new campus will be a major classroom building and a dorm.

The new Charles Ives Performing Arts Center is to have a place on the campus as a private enterprise. This exciting development will be a boon to the college, Danbury, and Connecticut.

With Dr. Bersi’s commitment of service to the college and the community, his perception of the needs, and his concentrated efforts toward the completion of the new campus, the logo “WestConn” will continue to point toward growth and stature as a “big” little college, as a symbol of “our” college, WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE COLLEGE.

“You see how it is?”
"Yes, this was the desk my granddaddy used in his candy store."

The president points out our growth — and our needs.
"I'm not sure — I’d like to think about that."
Appendix A

Taped interviews by Jack Friel with former and present college administrators, faculty members and students, legislators, members of the community and friends of the college, are on file in the archives of the Ruth A. Haas Library:

Arconti, Gino
Braun, Gertrude
Brunell, Gloria
Collins, Francis J.
Collins, Stephen
Cook, F. Burton
Deegan, John
Donnelly, Alice I.
Dyer, Jim
Esposito, William J.
Friel, Sister Mary
Fusco, Sharon
Goergen, William P. (M.D.)
Greenwald, H. Jonathan
Groff, Donald
Haas, Ruth A.

Hull, T. Clark
Isham, Charlotte H.
Kohl, Ruth J.
McGrory, M. Kathleen
McKee, William G.
Murphy, Gertrude M.
O'Connell, Corinne D.
Ratchford, William R.
Rudner, M. Jack
Shearon, Sheila (Hayes)
Tufts, John M.
Vacha, Kathryn
Wagner, Neil E.
Warner, Minnie (Benham)
Warner, Truman A.
Whitcomb, Mervin W.

Appendix B

Head Administrators — 1903-1978
1903—1923  John R. Perkins, Principal
1923—1935  Lothrop D. Higgins, Principal
1935—1946  Ralph C. Jenkins, Principal/President
1946—1975  Ruth A. Haas, President
1975—      Robert M. Bersi, President

Appendix C

From Normal School to College:
Chronological Sequence
1903—1965  Governed by the State Board of Education
June 12, 1903  Danbury Normal School Founded
September 5, 1904  First Classes Held
1904—1937  Danbury Normal School
1937—1959  Danbury State Teachers College
1959—1967  Danbury State College
July 30, 1965  Governance was transferred from the State Board of Education to the newly created Board of Trustees for the State Colleges
1967—1978  Western Connecticut State College
Appendix D

Historical Highlights 1903-1978

1903—Danbury State Normal School established by act of legislature
   —Three acres of property on White Street donated by Alexander M. White

1904—First classes held at Danbury State Normal School (Sept. 6), 41 students enrolled
   —John R. Perkins, Principal

1917—Fourteen and one-half acres of adjacent land purchased

1923—Lothrop D. Higgins became principal

1925—Extension courses offered

1927—Fairfield Hall, dormitory for women, opened

1931—Commercial Department for training business education teachers (until 1935)
   —Dr. Ruth Haas replaced Miss Edith Spencer as Dean

1932—All courses extended to three years

1935—Dr. Ralph C. Jenkins, Principal
   —A "special third year" offered
   —Male students encouraged to enroll
   —Men's basketball team formed

1937—Danbury State Normal School became Danbury State Teachers College
   —Legislature granted authority to grant the degree of Bachelor of Science
   —Dr. Jenkins became President

1941—College accredited by American Association of Teachers Colleges
   —A two-year course for which a degree of Associate in Science offered

1946—Dr. Ruth A. Haas elected President

1947—Interim Program introduced

1948—Curley Hall and quonset huts became first recreation center

1949—Emergency Training Program (Intensive Program for College Graduates—IPCG) began

1950—Higgins Hall, science building, opened

1951—“Do-Day” instituted

1954—Berkshire Hall, new college classroom-auditorium building opened
   —College accredited by New England Association of Secondary Schools and colleges, National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, and American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education
   —Purchase of additional land

1955—New certification requirements (effective Sept. 1955) teachers must work toward a Master's Degree

1957—Addition to Fairfield Hall completed

1958—The first graduate degrees—all Master of Science—awarded to 16 teachers
   —Gymnasium addition to Berkshire Hall opened
   —More land on White Street purchased
   —Humanities Program introduced—called “Monuments of Culture”

1959—Name changed to Danbury State College

1960—Memorial Hall, Student Union and Food Service Building, completed
   —New heating plant put into operation

1961—Four-year Liberal Arts (Bachelor of Arts degree) program introduced in all four state colleges
   —Four-year secondary education (Bachelor of Science degree) program introduced

1964—Litchfield Hall, dormitory for women, opened
   —Medical Technology (B.A.) introduced

1965—Four-year Nursing (Bachelor of Science degree) program introduced
   —Addition to Memorial Hall completed
   —Enrollment reached over 1200 day students

1967—College renamed Western Connecticut State College
   —Old Danbury High School building renamed White Hall
   —First full-time master’s degree students accepted
   —Medical Technology (B.S.)

1968—Six-year program offered (Reading Consultant)

1969—Ruth A. Haas Library opened
   —Charles Ives Auditorium in White Hall completed
   —Newbury Hall, dormitory for women, opened
   —M.A. in English introduced
   —Bachelor of Business Administration introduced

1970—White Hall renovation completed
   —B.S. in Health Education introduced
   —M.A. in Mathematics introduced
   —6th year Program in Elementary Education
   —Bachelor of Music

1971—Second addition to Higgins Hall completed
   —First football game at WestConn

1972—M.A. in History
   —B.S. in Health Education

1973—Basic Studies Program introduced
   —College accredited by National League for Nursing

1974—Dorm housed male students
   —Criminal Justice Program approved
   —A campus "streaker"

1975—Dr. Ruth A. Haas retired
   —Dr. Robert M. Bersi appointed president
   —Radio Station enlarged
   —Elaborate weather tool received by the college
   —Instructional Media Center (PERC) installed in Ruth A. Haas Library
   —Associate in Science in Criminal Justice and B.S. in Criminal Justice Administration

1976—Trend noted by Board of Trustees—less than 50% of undergraduate degrees in 1976 were in Education—emphasis now to be in the service sector: urban and regional studies, environmental controls, health sciences, law enforcement studies, and business administration

1977—Oceanography and Limnology offered—M.A.
   —Guidance and Counseling—M.S.
   —Graphic Communication—B.A.

1978—Technological Media for the Arts (B.S.) introduced
Appendix E
Addendum

In such a brief history it seems impractical to mention names of faculty members or students, lest too many would be omitted. Neither could we hope to include the many developments in the various departments as we grew. The list which follows will stir memories for some and be meaningless to others. Likewise, someone else would include still different topics or events. Here then, are some traditions, some firsts, and perhaps a few facts unknown to the majority of graduates:

One of the very first graduates of Danbury Normal School received $425 for her first year of teaching (about $2.36 per day.) A few years ago that person was required to pay $40 a day for a practical nurse!

In the first thirty years of the normal school there were only five male students.

Training in the one room rural schools in Danbury would make a whole story of its own. Waiting “for the assignment” was agony for some students. The name of May Sherwood as Director of Student Teaching stirs many memories. You not only were required to do a good job with children; you must know how to balance a check register if you were to satisfy Miss Sherwood. Many students can recall a note after an observation, such as, “Your quiet, unobtrusive manner will be an asset to you.” Miss Sherwood’s handwriting meant much to many! Her signature was simply “M.S.”

Some graduates will also remember following a recipe to make the duplicating solution so worksheets could be made for the children while student teaching:

N.Y. N.H. & H.R.R. Co. Duplicograph Mixture
(winter) 600 gms. gelatine (summer) 620
1800 c.c. glycerine 1800
900 c.c. hot water 1000
3 c.c. phenol 3

Cut up gelatine and add water. Cover the dishes tightly and place on hot bath four hours, stirring occasionally. Pour glycerine into gelatine and add carbolic acid. Pour into pans and brush off the bubbles.

“Do-Day,” introduced in the late 40’s and early 50’s, became a tradition at the college. Faculty and students worked together for the day. Classes were not! Hedges were trimmed, cement walks and steps were made, rooms were painted, and trees were planted. The day served as a way to get things done fast, faculty and students became better acquainted, and a big evening picnic and skit program at night made Do-Day a Fun-Day as well.

The growth of the library from one room in Old Main, to rooms on the second and third floors, on to the new facilities in the Ruth A. Haas Library has been a focal point at the college.

The class of 1935 called itself a class of firsts. There was the new three-year system; business courses were introduced; and there were the special seniors who had come back for one year.

Classbooks and yearbooks have come and gone—a volume could be written about them.

Mr. Higgins’ Science Kits were well-known in and around the Normal School. Mr. Higgins was concerned about the lack of practical science applications and developed “boxes” which could be taken to the practice schools by the students.

Early in the life of the Normal School there was a kindergarten in Old Main. One of the tapes on file tells of a local physician who attended the kindergarten “on the main floor of Old Main.”

Education students will recall the emphasis placed on being able to write and print on the blackboard to satisfy critic teachers.

Gym classes in Normal School found the girls in long black stockings, navy (baggy) bloomers, and white middies. (No wonder they used the tunnel to get from Fairfield Hall to Old Main!)

Mrs. O’Reilly was the cook in Fairfield Hall. Many students often returned to Fairfield Hall after a year or two of teaching to get a “Hello Darling” and a big hug from Mrs. O’Reilly. And could she cook!

Another “fixture” at the Normal School was Mr. Durgy. Nowadays he might be called a custodian or an engineer. But to all at that time he was the janitor. Many sought advice from him. Many received advice without seeking it. Many were sure that to Mr. Durgy, it was “his” school.

Spring week-ends were a tradition for many years. A queen would be chosen, there would be beautiful floats, and at night there would be skits and competition among classes in Sing.

Many students, in the early days of the Normal School, commuted to Danbury by train from Norwalk, New Milford, and other towns and cities.

Correspondence courses and summer school sessions were early innovations at the Normal.

As Dr. Haas retired the Board of Trustees (aided by a large committee from the college) approved the appointment of Dr. Robert Bersi, a California educator, to become the new college president.

It will be Dr. Bersi’s privilege and pleasure to dedicate the new campus—a dream of Dr. Haas and many faculty members, students, and alumni.

With the new campus our college will be able to perpetuate its record of providing a good education for students in and around Western Connecticut.
F. Sources of Information

I. Selected Books for Background Reading

II. Taped Interviews
Thirty four tapes (Most are on both sides) Separate listing, Appendix A (on file in Ruth A. Haas Library, Western Connecticut State College)

III. Yearbooks and Classbooks from 1910.
(Danbury Normal School, Danbury State Teachers College, Danbury State College, and Western Connecticut State College) Annotated list with materials used for history. Books in Ruth A. Haas Library.

IV. Normal School and College Catalogs of Programs, Admissions, etc.
On file in Ruth A. Haas Library.

V. Annual Reports of Principals and Presidents.
Files — Ruth A. Haas Library.


VII. Scrapbook notes from graduates.

VIII. Pictures. Ruth A. Haas Library; Collection of Raymond Trimpert, et al.
Appendix G

Enrollment By Years
1904 thru 1978

Note: Obtained from Office of Institutional Research and Planning.

1904-05 41
1905-06 84
1906-07 58
1908-09 106
1909-10 164
1910-11 196
1911-12 258
1912-13 362
1913-14 299
1914-15 318
1915-16 356
1916-17 333
1917-18 217
1918-19 86
1919-20 73
1920-21 66
1921-22 189
1923-24 169
1924-25 143
1925-26 140
1926-27 192
1927-28 194
1928-29 174
1929-30 176
1930-31 169
1931-32 162
1932-33 173
1933-34 186
1934-35 162
1935-36 125
1936-37 146
1937-38 199
1938-39 212
1939-40 198
1940-41 212
1942-43 210
1943-44 157
1945-46 172
1946-47 290
1947-48 304
1948-49 362
1949-50 384
1954-55 420
1955-56 481
1956-57 427
1957-58 494
1958-59 593
1959-60 638
1960-61 698
1961-62 754
1962-63 845
1963-64 904
1964-65 986
1965-66 1234
1966-67 1423
1967-68 1710
1968-69 1796
1969-70 2151
1970-71 2479
1971-72 2691
1972-73 2650
1973-74 2718
1974-75 2808
1975-76 2824
1976-77 2791
1977-78 2811

Full Time, Part-time Day, Undergraduate and Evening & Extension
460 Total 822
511 Total 895
563 Total 983
536 Total 1017
506 Total 933
551 Total 1045
590 Total 1183
328 Total 966
392 Total 1324
493 Total 1504
407 Total 1535
380 Total 1610
419 Total 1833
496 Total 2195
401 Total 2338
383 Total 2818
401 Total 3027
463 Total 3605
582 Total 4093
580 Total 4351
624 Total 4529
664 Total 4649
963 Total 5123
1071 Total 5248
1219 Total 5237
1432 Total 5414
Appendix H

Footnotes

Chapter I
1. WCSC Undergraduate Catalog for 1977-78, p. 3.
2. Ibid. p. 4.

Chapter II
5. Ibid. p. 240.
6. Ibid. p. 240.
7. Normalities (yearbook) 1906.
12. Ibid. p. 240.
15. Ibid.
18. Ibid. p. 11.

Chapter III-VI None
WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE COLLEGE
Founded 1903

DANBURY STATE COLLEGE
Founded in 1903