

**Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students
of
Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania
Bloomsburg, PA 17815**

By

**An Evaluation Team representing the
Middle States Commission on Higher Education**

**Prepared after study of the institution's self-study report
and a visit to the campus on April 5-8, 2009**

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This report represents the views of the evaluation team as interpreted by the Chair, and it goes directly to the institution before being considered by the Commission.

It is a confidential document prepared as an educational service for the benefit of the institution. All comments in the report are made in good faith, in an effort to assist Bloomsburg University. This report is based solely on an educational evaluation of the institution and of the manner in which it appears to be carrying out its educational objectives.

AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

President/CEO:

Dr. David L. Soltz

Chief Academic Officer

Dr. James Mackin
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Chair of the Board of Trustees

Mr. Steven B. Barth
Senior Vice President and Loan Officer
Community Bank, Milton, PA 17847

I. Content and Nature of the Visit

Institutional Overview

Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania is a public university, one of the 14 universities that make up the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education. The University is located in a rural setting in central Pennsylvania, and the nearest major population center is the Wilkes-Barre Scranton area, approximately 50 miles to the north. The University is listed in the *Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education* in the Master's-Large Programs category. The University has approximately 8,850 undergraduate and graduate students with undergraduates making up approximately 91 percent of the student body.

Bloomsburg University offers a broad array of undergraduate degrees in liberal arts, education, business, science, and technology. The university has 32 academic departments that currently offer 99 undergraduate degrees/tracks, 45 undergraduate minors, 5 undergraduate concentrations, 17 graduate programs leading to a master's degree, a clinical doctoral degree, as well as 2 supervisory certificate programs for professional educators. Over 93% of undergraduates are full-time students, with most from Pennsylvania. The student body is composed of mid level students (regular admit freshman, mean SAT 1,057) with many from families with no previous post secondary graduates. Approximately 78% of the undergraduate students receive some form of financial assistance to help meet educational costs.

Bloomsburg University embraces a general liberal arts mission with strong development in the education area, in business, and in the sciences. The university also supports focused development in certain health care disciplines. In addition, the university strongly endorses the access mission of the State System of Higher Education and provides opportunity through its Act 101/EOP and summer freshman programs to students who might not otherwise be admitted to the University. Bloomsburg also provides the student development and support necessary to ensure that this access is not simply a revolving door.

Scope of the Institution

Bloomsburg University is a unit of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE). It is a Carnegie Classification, Master's – Larger Programs public university authorized by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to issue Certificate, Associate's, Bachelor's, and Master's degrees as well as a Doctoral Degree in Audiology.

The University is located at 400 E. Second Street, Bloomsburg, PA and has no branch campuses or additional locations. The University currently offers three (3) programs where a student can complete 50% or more of their coursework via distance learning. Those programs are: Instructional Technology, MS – Education Track; Nursing, MSN (Blended Program); and Radiologist Assistant, MS (Blended program). In an effort to

assist the regional community, the University also periodically offers selected classes off campus at several school districts, Luzerne County Community College, Lehigh Carbon Community College, Geisinger Medical Center, and Bucknell University.

Self-Study Process and Report

Bloomsburg University elected to complete a comprehensive self-study. The self-study was organized by groups of standards and adequately addressed all fourteen standards for accreditation. The report, which consisted of eight chapters plus an executive summary, included an accompanying CD which contained detailed documentation to support the information presented in the report.

II. Affirmation of Continued Compliance with Eligibility Requirements

Based on a review of the self-study, interviews, the certification statement supplied by Bloomsburg University and other institutional documents, the team affirms that the institution continues to meet the eligibility requirements in Middle States Commission on Higher Education's Characteristics of Excellence.

III. Compliance with Federal Requirements; Issues Relative to State Regulatory or Other Accrediting Agency Requirements

The team relied upon the Certification Statement: Compliance with MSCHE Eligibility Requirements and Federal Title IV Requirements, signed by the Chief Executive Officer and Chair of the Board of Trustees on November 4, 2008 to verify compliance with federal requirements.

The team reviewed one issue relative to other accrediting agency requirements. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) announced on November 12, 2008 that 22 initial teacher certification programs currently available at Bloomsburg University have successfully completed the reaccreditation process and have received reaccreditation through 2011. However, NCATE also notified the institution that the advanced teacher certification programs (programs leading to master's degrees and advanced certificates for individuals who already have their first license to teach) do not meet the requirements of NCATE Standard 4 (Diversity).

The specific deficiencies noted by NCATE under Standard 4 are:

- The unit does not systematically use disaggregated data on candidates' abilities to address the needs of learners from diverse populations for program evaluation and improvement.
- The unit's collection of assessment data on candidates' abilities to address the needs of learners from diverse populations is limited and varies across programs.

- The unit does not ensure that all candidates interact with peers from diverse ethnic and racial groups.
- The unit does not ensure that all candidates interact with P-12 students from diverse ethnic and racial groups.
- The unit does not ensure that all candidates interact with faculty from diverse ethnic and racial groups.

As a result of these deficiencies, the NCATE accreditation for advanced teacher certification programs at the University will be terminated at the conclusion of the spring 2009 semester.

Assessment tools are currently being developed to address the deficiencies cited by NCATE. The assessment activities are being led by the Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, who has been named the Unit Head for all teacher education programs. Although the University is not required to apply for reaccreditation until the year 2011, University officials plan to request an earlier accreditation visit from NCATE.

IV. Evaluation Overview

The team was impressed with the amount of work and detail provided by Bloomsburg University in its report. Moreover, the campus community was fully open and ready to engage the team and we felt that all of our questions were answered satisfactorily. The team unanimously found that the university certainly meets the eligibility requirements in Characteristics of Excellence.

Noteworthy is the fact that Bloomsburg is in a state of transition with its president on the job now for only 15 months and some major administrative positions open or pending to be filled. Noteworthy, too, is the fate that Bloomsburg shares with so many other state institutions everywhere – declining state support, coupled with having no control over the majority of its expenses or revenue. Nonetheless, the campus esprit is excellent and the team fully believes that Bloomsburg is ready to take the next steps necessary to go “from good to great” (with thanks to the book by Jim Collins).

We certainly commend the following among the many strengths of Bloomsburg University:

- *Improvements to and the general state of the physical plant.
- *A positive retention rate.
- *The interaction between Admissions staff and a variety of offices including the Registrar and Residence Life.
- *The Vice President for University and Student Affairs and his staff are to be commended for their vision.
- *Students speak highly of the commitment of staff and faculty to their well being and find the campus environment safe, supportive, and encouraging.

- *An academically very well credentialed and committed faculty is one of the university's strongest assets.
- *The university is rated very well in comparison with its PASSHE colleagues.
- *There is active participation by faculty, staff and students in all phases of governance and committee work.

V. Compliance with Accreditation Standards

The standards are reviewed in the order in which they appear in Bloomsburg University's Self-Study Report.

CHAPTER TWO

MISSION, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Standard 1: Mission and Goals

The institution meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

The current Bloomsburg Mission statement was approved by PASSHE in July, 1987. It is by design closely aligned with the PASSHE Mission statement and not dissimilar from other similar PASSHE institutions. The Institutional Strategic Plan identifies 10 university goals for the current academic year in a highly detailed format laying out objectives and outcomes for virtually every unit in the University. Indeed, each academic department and each college has its own, concise mission statement as a reflection of the University Mission. The document, Vision 2010, begun with a thorough campus involvement and discussion in 2004, provides an overarching guide in 7 major areas, with the stated intention that the university would become known for accomplishments in these areas by 2010. Other supplements to the University Planning process include the Technology Plan, the Facilities Master Plan and the Enrollment Management Plan. There is a Planning and Budget Committee comprised of 19 faculty, staff and students and a Planning and Resource Allocation Process. PASSHE also requires a yearly report for the System Accountability Plan (SAP).

In sum, the current Mission and goals and all associated fundamental elements are clearly presented, tied in with outcomes and resource allocations and involve the collaborative participation of an extensive number of faculty staff and students. The stated goals in the Mission, 2008-09 Strategic Plan and Vision 2010, and the accompanying aspects of the periodic planning processes are certainly consistent with the Mission itself as well as being well articulated, coordinated and reviewed periodically.

Support of faculty research activities and scholarship is well documented in Exhibit 37, Faculty Professional Development Support Services. An impressive variety of funding sources and support services is listed, even including a dollar amount for travel assigned to each tenured faculty. Assessment of Student learning (Standard 14, Chapter 5) is conducted in part by the University Outcomes Committee, coordinated by the Associate Dean of Liberal Arts who reports directly to the Provost in assessment matters. Such tests as the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress Test (MAPP) measure outcomes related to the basic skills and general disciplinary areas of General Education. In addition, each academic department and student life program undergoes a PASSHE mandated five year review dealing with its individual strategic plan.

In August of 2007, the University engaged a company to survey an extensive cross section of the university's constituencies in order to clarify the perception of Bloomsburg. The survey indicated that there was extensive agreement that the Mission gave a clear sense of its purpose. But too many local leaders and residents did not understand the University's Mission. This is in spite of the fact that the Mission clearly states the institutional purposes of being a resource and serving a broad range of community needs.

Because of the survey results and the length of time since the last Mission review and revision, a recommended action is that such a thorough and participatory process take place in the next planning cycle in order to create a new or revised Mission statement.

Suggestion:

That members of the non university community be included, as appropriate, in the Mission review. This will educate those so involved and bring other benefits as well.

Recommendation:

That the institution revise the mission statement to be more specific and focused and yields strategic objectives that are clearly measurable.

CHAPTER THREE

PLANNING, RESOURCE ALLOCATION AND INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW, AND INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

The institution meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty and administrators, the Team developed the following conclusions relative to the standard:

Goals and objectives and strategies, including institution-wide, by college, and at the individual department and program level, are clearly stated and in a larger context are linked to the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education strategic plan and “critical areas” listed (9 “strategic planning points”). The University-level plan is reviewed every August, while colleges and departments review their plans in the September/October timeframe. The plans include a column for anticipated outcomes.

Action plans are linked to the strategic plan by spreadsheet tabs. Other links include the University Strategic Plan, Division and Departmental plans, as well as outcomes assessment plans. Action plans are included, documenting “critical area” as well as strategic goals, the objective and action plan. Resource requirements are included as well as a suggested source of funds. Subsequent columns in the strategic plan document actual outcomes and changes over the past year.

The University Strategic Plan and related documents go through a multi-layer approval process. Departmental and divisional plans are first approved by their respective departments and divisions and then at the vice presidential level. Ultimately, these are reviewed and approved by the Planning and Budgeting Committee. Other areas that the Planning and Budget Committee oversees include Budget Service, Enrollment Management, and Space and Facilities.

While goals, objectives, and strategies are included in the strategic plans, as well as assignment of accountability and anticipated outcomes, these are not prioritized. Priorities are assigned at the action plan level. This is also where funds are requested and may or may not be provided, in full or in part. Funds come from different sources, from a “strategic plan” fund, departmental budgets, and so forth. There appears to be no publicly shared criteria for awarding dollars.

Therefore, while goals and objectives and strategies, both institution-wide and for individual units are clearly stated and are linked to the mission and goal achievement process, the process of creating action plans, requesting and allocating funds, documenting results of actions and “feeding” these results back into the strategic plans for the following year is not as clearly documented. Furthermore it was commented that what was once strategic had now become operational and that funds were being requested and awarded for small, day-to-day tasks, using this process.

Some strategy statements in the strategic plan appear to be broad, such as “develop and administer an outcomes assessment plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the Learning Community Program” with the same being true for anticipated outcomes: “Results from

the outcomes assessment plan will be used to evaluate the program.” This approach does not result in measurable outcomes that can then be used to shape planning further.

Communication of planning and improvements processes: While planning processes appear to be widely communicated, it is not clear whether the same is true of the allocation of funds, the assessment of results or the methods by which results of assessments are incorporated into the planning and renewal process.

Therefore, while there are well defined decision-making processes and authority that facilitate planning, this seems less true for assignment of dollars, and documentation and use of the results of assessment for renewal. This seems likewise true for recording and tracking improvements and assurance of accountability. And, while the Strategic Plan is periodically (annually) assessed and renewed, it is not clear whether there is periodic assessment of the effectiveness of planning, resource allocation, and institutional renewal processes.

Recommendation:

That the University review its entire strategic planning process, examining the way strategies are expressed so progress can be measured and not just be accounted for by a “yes” and “no” response. Priorities should be assigned at the strategic, rather than operational, level, and dollars correspondingly assigned. Furthermore, the entire method of assigning money to activities should be systematized to mirror priorities assigned them in the Strategic Plan. The degree to which each is achieved and the manner in which it is cycled back into the subsequent year’s strategic plan should be more clearly documented and tracked.

Standard 3: Institutional Resources

The institution meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings

The Self Study report presents the University as being financially strong and a review of the supporting documents, including the latest annual financial report, supports their claim. The University ended the 2007-2008 academic year with an unrestricted fund balance, net of compensated absences and post retirement benefit obligations, of \$48 million. While substantial, the number is deceiving when one considers that all but \$3.4 million is in either plant funds or otherwise committed. The self study also recognizes a pending funding deficit. The operating budget for the 2008-2009 academic year was balanced, but not without the utilization of a \$2.9 million carry forward from prior year reserves. There was also a mid year budget reversion of \$1.6 million that was covered with salary savings.

Preliminary operating budget projections for the 2009-2010 academic year, submitted to the PASSHE in September, 2008, projected a deficit of \$7.4 million. A meeting with the Vice President for Administration and Finance revealed that the shortfall expectation has been reduced since the September estimate, in part due to additional revenue from a planned 10% increase in the fall, 2009 incoming class. Senior administrators at the University performed a feasibility study in the fall of 2008 to determine if the campus could accommodate this increase over the planned growth and concluded that the campus could ultimately accommodate 10,000 students. As yet, the amount of the state appropriation and the tuition rate have not been established and may not be known until as late as July, 2009. It should be noted that the University is in the unenviable position of having no control over the majority of its revenue or expenses. The State Legislature and the PASSHE Board of Governors determine the appropriation and tuition respectively and collective bargaining agreements, negotiated by PASSHE, dictate approximately 75% of the expenses.

While the University has weathered the economic climate for several years thanks to its utilization of unrestricted net assets, it cannot continue doing this indefinitely.

There are two funding streams that are outside of and budgeted separately from the operating budget. Both are student fee funded and support technology, and classroom and scientific equipment. The Academic Enhancement Fee and the Technology Fee annually generate \$4.5 million and \$1.6 million respectively. These funding streams allow for scheduled upgrading of student computer labs, staff and faculty computers, classroom presentation systems, and network infrastructure, to name some. This dedicated funding stream allows the University to provide current technology to students, faculty and staff.

Another bright spot is the Capital Funding that the University has received from the state. Between FY 2004 and FY 2007 the University has completed \$21 million in renovations and is currently in the midst of a \$15.5 million renovation to the Field House. In addition, an outside firm engaged by the PASSHE to benchmark facility related issues at all 14 system schools reported that the general condition of the facilities was good. However, a deficiency noted by Facilities staff during an interview was the lack of a funding stream to provide for repair and replacement of the physical plant.

Finally, the Bloomsburg University Foundation, Inc. exists to raise outside funds in support of the University. The development office is a separate university office whose fund raising monies are deposited in and managed by the Foundation. Over the past five years the financial support provided to the University has ranged from \$1.2 million to \$1.75 million, but little, if any, was in the form of unrestricted financial support to the University. In fact, the University has been providing up to \$200,000 annually to the Foundation in the form of staffing and support. In the Vision 2010 Strategic Plan, several of the objectives under the goal of increasing external funding - for example, increasing the level of annual giving and increasing the number of private scholarships - are highlighted.

Since privately raised monies can provide a significant margin of excellence for institutions of public higher education in such areas as scholarships and research support, a revision in the current structure seems to be underway. A search for a Vice President for Advancement would bring a greater and more effective focus to this area. Included within this vice presidential area could be such areas as the University Foundation, the current office of the Annual Fund, as well as Alumni Affairs, all of which should operate synergistically in university advancement.

Institutional resources also include Andrus Library, which provides an adequate array of resources in support of both undergraduate and graduate programs through funding from its operating budget, a portion of technology fees, and designated academic excellence fees. Many resources and services are online and a tutorial is available. An interlibrary borrowing service supplements access to the physical and online resources. Resources to support new programs have been possible thus far, but the development of more programs will need additional funding in order not to diminish the support for existing programs.

While the Assistant Vice President for Technology has admirably assumed responsibility for library operations due to the vacancy of the Library Director position since August 2006, the Library is lacking permanent, full-time leadership. New initiatives of the Office of Technology, including further development of the University website, student information system, and learning management system, will demand more attention to planning and implementation by the Assistant Vice President.

The reorganization of Technology Services has resulted in a more efficient use of human and financial resources, including the relocation of the Instructional Media and Design Center to the Library.

Significant Accomplishments:

The University must be commended for improvements made to the physical plant. The campus is extremely attractive and well maintained. At an open forum for students, it was noted that many were attracted to the University because of the condition and appearance of the campus.

Suggestions:

That the University take steps to balance the annual operating budget. Nationally, funding for public higher education is on a downward trend which is unlikely to reverse itself in the near future. Budgetary discipline must be imposed in order for the University to remain viable for the long term.

That further collaboration continue between the Library and several units of the Office of Technology, including its Instructional Media and Design Center and Instructional Media

Services, to provide services to faculty to assist them in the development and delivery of courses in a variety of formats.

CHAPTER FOUR

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE, ADMINISTRATION, INTEGRITY, AND FACULTY

Standard 4: Leadership and Governance

The institution meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

Exhibit 19 summarizes governance at the University as “founded on the principle that academic concerns, guided by a curriculum developed by the faculty, are the basis of our institution and that the student is the focus of the resulting educational program. . . We recognize the propriety interests, rights, and responsibilities of the various university constituencies. Foremost, we are sensitive to the value of open communication in our university community.”

Accordingly, the institution operates within a governance model with clearly-defined bodies for policy development and decision-making. It includes the management team, as shown in the University’s current organizational chart, which also functions, in part, through three advisory groups to senior management: Executive Staff, Dean’s Council, and President’s Advisory Council (Self-Study Exhibit 21). University committees further shape governance, offering evidence of the institution’s inclination towards a participatory model. The Forum, a 70-member committee, and four principal standing committees—Bloomsburg University Curriculum Committee, Planning and Budget Committee, Student Life Committee, and General Administration Committee—function to this end, reporting information to and advising the institution’s executive management team. Roles and responsibilities of the University’s governing bodies are well-delineated; membership on governing committees is representative; the 70-person Forum is representative of all principal standing committees and campus constituencies; institution-wide discussion about curriculum takes place; and meetings of the various governing bodies are open to the entire campus community. The October 2007 discussion in The Forum about the body’s role in governance and perceived authority or lack thereof points to the potential impact of the institution’s participatory model, though conversations about authority at that time under the previous President did not appear to reach closure and still appears to be an issue.

Suggestion:

That the University continue to clarify the role of The Forum in the governance structure, to address unresolved concerns raised in the past so as to reach a *modus operandi* with the new academic administration.

Standard 5: Administration

The institution meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

The President, the chief executive officer of the University, has been in position for fifteen months. He came to Bloomsburg from Central Washington University where he served as Provost. The President's support staff include a Provost, a Vice President for Administration and Finance and a Vice President for University and Student Affairs, the latter being responsible for the Development role at the University. The President recently received a dispensation from a state mandated administrative hiring freeze to hire a Vice President for Advancement. In addition, the Deputy to the President for Equity, who is also currently functioning as Interim Director of Accommodative Services, reports directly to the President.

Each Vice President has a compliment of professionals to carry out the duties and responsibilities of their areas.

Individuals reporting directly to the Vice President for Administration and Finance include an Assistant Vice President for Facilities, and Directors of Finance and Business, Human Resources, Purchasing, Budget, University Police, and Financial Aid.

Individuals who report directly to the Vice President for University and Student Affairs include an Assistant Vice President for Student Life, Assistant Vice President for University Relations and Director of Development, and Directors of Residence Life, Admissions, Athletics, Student Standards, and Career Development.

Individuals reporting directly to the Provost include the Deans of Liberal Arts, Science and Technology, Business (interim), Professional Studies, Undergraduate Studies, the Assistant Vice President and Dean of Graduate Studies, the Assistant Vice President for Technology, the Directors of Institutional Research and Corporate and Continuing Education, and the Registrar.

While the administrative structure appears to follow the traditional Higher Education model, the lack of diversity among the administrative staff was very noticeable.

Suggestion:

That the University develop a structured plan and work aggressively to increase diversity within the administrative staff, particularly in mid and upper level administrative positions.

Standard 6: Integrity

The institution meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings

The University has an array of information about its policies, processes, and practices available for public consultation. The majority of the information is available online, and there is contact information provided for all University offices in case additional clarification is needed.

The Policies and Procedures website includes information about all University policies.

Human Resources routinely provides information about benefits, payroll, the Fair Labor Standards Act, and employment opportunities at the University. The office has developed online tutorials, FAQs, PowerPoint displays for employee self-service and benefits information, and it publishes a regular newsletter.

Intellectual property policy is addressed by APSCUF contract Article 39 online.

The catalog is available from 2004-2005 forward online with print copies available in Andrus Library for all previous years.

The Code of Conduct and Student Handbook adequately provide information and policies for students.

It appears that the University is in compliance with all ethical standards and guidelines.

BU Today is published online. It provides information about many types of events and resources for students, faculty, staff, and visitors and is a valuable public relations vehicle.

It was difficult to find some documents without diligently searching the website and knowing something about the structure of the University. Not all documents appeared to be updated on a regular basis. The website is the public face of the University. It is often the first contact with the University, whether for Admissions, Advancement, or academic matters, and attention should be paid to its design, currency of content, and ease of use.

Suggestions:

The website should be further developed to better organize information about the University, its structure and organization, its activities, and its policies, processes and practices.

Each unit should regularly review its websites and print documents for currency.

Standard 10: Faculty

The institution meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

The dedicated faculty at Bloomsburg University is arguably its strongest asset. In the ten years since the last Middle States reaccreditation visit, there has been considerable turnover of faculty, as many from the cohort hired during the “roaring 70s” have retired. Bloomsburg has made effective use of the openings generated by these retirements to enhance the academic credentials of its faculty so that 90% now possess terminal degrees in their disciplines. At the same time, the representation of women in the faculty ranks has increased from 39% to 42%, with the non-tenured tenure-track group (the newer hires) almost half women.

The faculty turnover appears to have been managed very smoothly, with use of adjunct faculty to cover courses and sections during the faculty search periods not being allowed to become a habit. The percent of non-tenure-track faculty, having risen to 15% in the interim, was restored to 7-8% by 2007, essentially the same as it had been in 2000. The faculty union contract limits PASSHE universities to 25% adjunct faculty, a percentage that is much higher than Bloomsburg currently employs. The reliance on full-time, committed faculty is clearly one of the key factors which bestow upon Bloomsburg its reputation for “the bond between teachers and students.” It will be a challenge to maintain this low adjunct ratio in the face of the anticipated 10% increase in the 2009 entering freshman class, but we believe that efforts to maintain minimal reliance on temporary faculty would be beneficial in maintaining one of Bloomsburg’s core strengths.

One slight downside to the faculty turnover, however, may be suggested by the data on faculty unfamiliarity with assessment efforts outside their individual departments, and their effects on academic planning. A significant gap between student and faculty perceptions of the General Education Program is also apparent in the Self-Study report and its exhibits. Faculty dissatisfaction about the achievement of some of the key General Education objectives has not yet been translated into assessment-driven improvements. There is a widespread program of campus governance which provides broad opportunities for faculty input into matters of key faculty concern (admissions, curriculum, General Education, etc.) The governance structure, which might strike some

outsiders as cumbersome, is the result of statewide agreements and mandates, and it appears to serve BU and its sister universities adequately. One tendency of large, representative groups which must be kept under control, however, is the tendency to produce broad all-encompassing statements, which, in their effort to include something for everyone, lack focus and provide little guidance for purposeful action. The BU Mission Statement and the General Education requirements (Self-Study Exhibits 46 and 50) seem to us to exemplify this regrettable trait. We also note that both documents are about 20 years old, and we share the widespread campus perception that they badly need to be updated.

Suggestion:

More should be done to keep new (and old) faculty apprised of ongoing assessment and planning efforts and the status of ongoing discussions which are expected to lead to reforms in the general education program.

CHAPTER FIVE

INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT AND ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

Standard 7: Institutional Assessment

The institution meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings

The evidence presented supports the institution's claim to have a commitment to a continuous culture of assessment throughout the campus. Guided by the overarching Vision 2010 Strategic Plan, each academic and administrative unit is required to develop and implement a strategic plan, which is assessed and reported upon annually. This may be somewhat of a challenge, as the mission statement is vague and many of the objectives are not written as measurable statements. Nonetheless, ongoing institutional plans are developed and include the System Accountability Plan (required as a part of PASSHE), the University Strategic Plan, and individual Unit Strategic Plans. Other plans supporting the mission and goals of the institution are a technology plan, facilities master plan, and an enrollment management plan. In addition to academic department and program strategic plans, assessments are performed through five-year reviews for all programs, discipline-specific reaccrediting activities, faculty reviews within the guidelines of the bargaining system, input from potential employers of students, and campus employee performance measures. The institution closes the loop on assessment activities by routinely presenting results at various campus assemblages. Additionally, assessment information is placed on a shared network drive accessible by the entire campus community.

Using instruments such as NSSE, the University's Common Data Set, a student satisfaction survey, a graduating senior exit survey, an alumni survey and various department-specific questionnaires, students are surveyed on a regular basis to ascertain satisfaction and engagement. The institution has demonstrated that data results from these assessments are often used to drive decisions to make improvements in teaching, learning, and curriculum. The institution's self-study report and site visit offer some examples of changes driven by assessment results. These include developing new and more progressive courses to enhance skills needed in the workplace, creation of a new concentration in Management, more focused attention on student writing skills and success in taking certification examinations.

Although a culture of assessment fully exists at the level of institutional review, it is not as well evolved at the level of student learning assessment. Among the colleges, both direct and indirect assessment activities are expected, with results reviewed annually by an Outcomes Assessment Committee. However, the results often are reported in a narrative form with little supporting quantitative data. Thus, the information is more anecdotal in nature. Although assessment plans are required and there appears to be a standard form for planning and reporting; a simplified template for all to follow may give more consistency to reporting and data collection. Further, the evidence shows that the existence of assessment activities, such as capstone experiences and portfolios, is inconsistent; not all academic departments or programs engage in assessment activities beyond classroom or course assignments. Also, in many courses, student learning outcomes are not linked to the course or learning objectives. The Teaching and Learning Enhancement Center (TALE) is addressing this issue through faculty development activities in assessment.

Despite the weakness in its structure and consistency, student learning assessment does connect to overall institutional assessment through unit strategic and action plans, which are reviewed annually by the Deans and the Provost and encouraged by performance incentives from PASSHE.

Recommendation:

That the institution proceed with self-study recommendations 4 and 5 to create an Office of Outcomes Assessment (or Institutional Effectiveness) and an elected Outcomes Assessment (or student learning assessment) Committee.

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

The institution meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

Assessment of student learning should demonstrate that, at graduation, or other appropriate points, the institution's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals.

At the course level the University has a required format for course syllabi. This format includes goals and/or objectives, which would indicate the aims of the course. Historically colleges and universities have defined and assessed student learning using course-embedded assessments of student learning such as tests, papers, projects, as well as standardized or "custom" qualitative and quantitative measures.

Each academic department was asked to self-report on the student assessment activities engaged in since 1999. In addition, individual department strategic plans for the past several years were reviewed to verify that there were planned assessment activities occurring. The University's self-study report identifies assessment methods documented by each college. In addition the library is responsible for its own student assessment activities. Through its online interactive tutorial on general library research the Library discovered general areas of weakness in students' library research skills and has accordingly revised its course-related library instruction. It also identified trends in students' information literacy needs in its online course, Introduction to Library Research. This led to incorporation of different assignments and learning tools into the course.

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education requires that institutions identify student learning goals for educational offerings that are appropriate to its higher education mission; that its offerings display appropriate academic content, rigor, and coherence; that its curricula are designed so that students demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, technological competence, and information literacy; and that assessment demonstrates that students at graduation have achieved appropriate higher education goals. The ways in which individual institutions carry out assessment activities and determine the extent to which their goals for student learning have been met is an institutional prerogative.

With the increasing use of alternative forms of delivery, including distance learning and asynchronous delivery, a focus on outcomes becomes even more essential. Student learning outcomes form a "common currency" with which one can judge the equivalence and value of various learning experiences.

Evidence demonstrates that assessment of student learning is occurring, albeit not as evolved as assessment of institutional effectiveness. As a part of unit strategic planning, departments and programs are required to include learning assessment. Results are reported annually (more qualitatively than quantitatively) and reviewed by the Deans and the Provost.

A report of a departmental assessment subcommittee with recommendations for assessment of student learning included the recommendation that assessment of student learning be supported by a University resource that is centrally located, and staffed with a Director of Assessment of Student Learning.

Recommendation (affirmed relative to commentary for Standard 7):

That the University appoint a Director of Assessment of Student Learning to centralize and consolidate these assessment activities.

CHAPTER SIX

STUDENT ADMISSIONS AND RETENTION, STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES, AND RELATED EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Standard 8: Student Admissions and Retention

The institution meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

Both institutional data and student interview responses indicate congruence between Bloomsburg University's admissions recruitment efforts and students' interests, abilities and needs. The University offers written materials that are professionally developed and provide a clear understanding of what a Bloomsburg University student should expect. Students indicate that the information and materials that they are provided prior to matriculation offer a true and comprehensive vision of the University including academic expectations, graduation requirements, transfer policies, and campus life. Students indicate that appropriate resources are available upon arrival at the University and that personnel continue to assist them in making informed decisions throughout their academic career. Further, students indicate that the Admissions staff is forthright and honest in highlighting the positive aspects of the University while helping students determine if the fit is right for them.

The admissions staff does a credible job of interpreting and articulating the mission of the University to prospective students. At times this articulation has been challenging because the mission statement is dated and in need of reaffirmation. The mission statement should provide an important foundation from which the staff is able to offer cogent and consistent messages to prospective students.

The University offers a comprehensive array of programs and services designed to provide students in need of academic enrichment with services necessary to support their academic success. Ranging from orientation programs that provide comprehensive

information to testing and assessment programs designed to place students in appropriate level courses, the admissions staff places a premium on service and offers a positive array of high tech and high touch approaches to the student recruitment process. Feedback from other areas of the University indicates that the leadership and the staff of the admissions operation are valued and respected.

The University should be proud of the approaches that the admissions and enrollment management teams have taken in recent years that have led to successes in recruitment and retention, particularly when compared to other PASSHE institutions. Dramatic demographic changes in projected student profiles are expected in the near future. Competition for traditional aged students, an area of strength for the University, will become more intense and may cause the University to consider new methods of recruitment, new programs (including new methods of program delivery), and new recruitment areas. Financial uncertainty across the country should result in the University developing detailed processes designed to closely monitor enrollment trends and demographics.

A review of institutional data and strategic planning initiatives indicates that the University understands the potential impact that the anticipated demographic shifts will have on recruitment and retention initiatives. It is important that the University develop institutional consensus on the approach taken to grow incrementally in a period of regional decline. It is also important to investigate mechanisms to augment current scholarship resources and use those funds to create targeted financial aid disbursement strategies to work in concert with enrollment management priorities.

Finally, the University anticipates increasing graduate student enrollment in a relatively short period of time. A comprehensive planning process will be necessary to assure satisfactory completion of this goal.

Significant Accomplishments:

- The University should be commended for a positive retention rate
- The leadership and staff of the Admissions Office work collaboratively and effectively with a variety of offices including the Registrar and Residence Life.

Suggestions:

That the University develops a plan to augment current scholarship resources to support planned growth.

That the University continues to review current enrollment planning initiatives for efficacy and efficiency including tactical approaches to recruit greater numbers of graduate and out-of-state students.

That the University reviews its strategies to recruit and retain Hispanic students (a growing cohort in the Northeast region).

Standard 9: Student Support Services

The institution meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

Bloomsburg University offers a robust cadre of student support services designed to enhance student satisfaction, retention, and success. The Student Affairs staff is well qualified, experienced, and supportive of students' needs. The staff provides developmentally appropriate services that support all segments of the student community. Students are provided opportunities for engagement, leadership, and shared governance.

Students and the Student Affairs staff speak highly of the department's Vice President and respect the collegial and supportive environment embraced within the division. Staff also expressed a sincere appreciation for the autonomy offered in the pursuit of their daily responsibilities, while acknowledging the importance of support that is offered when necessary. Given the size and comprehensive nature of the division, opportunities for all Student Affairs unit directors to meet together tend to be limited.

Policies and procedures are articulated to students through a variety of mechanisms including the web and new student orientation. A review of judicial records indicate that the campus discipline process is educational in nature, fair, and offers appropriate due process that includes ample appeal venues. Students indicate that advice from the student body is sought when policy changes are being considered.

Procedures are in place to assure confidentiality of student records across the student services sector, including the Registrar's office. Students indicate that a review and update of the campus web site would better articulate the many positive attributes that the University offers.

Athletics offers a comprehensive array of intercollegiate offerings that nicely supports the mission and culture of the University. The twenty athletic sports are well balanced and provide equal opportunity to men and women. An opportunity exists for stronger collaboration between Athletics and other administrative offices as student athlete data is processed for NCAA reporting processes.

The University provides supportive services to students who are undecided or undeclared in major. In addition, the advising staff is committed to student development and concerned about student welfare. Students report, however, that sometimes they are challenged by the advising process. The Five-Year Review of the Academic Advisement Center completed in May 2008 provides a productive roadmap for further development of the advising function for the University and should be encouraged.

The University offers a variety of successful residential Living Learning Communities. Both students and staff speak highly of their success in engaging students in academic endeavors outside of the classroom and helping support the academic mission of the University.

Finally, the Warren Student Services Center one-stop-shop concept has worked well for the University and has been embraced by the student body. The concept has helped to consolidate services in a manner that appears seamless to students. While reporting channels differ among Business Services, Academic Affairs and Student Affairs for many of the offices associated with the Services Center, in students' eyes the services are effective and convenient.

Town Gown relationships are cordial. The mayor of Bloomsburg is a recent graduate who is enrolled in graduate courses at the University. Efforts to maintain or enhance relationships with the community had been established in the past. In recent times those efforts have shifted in other directions. With continued moderate growth of the University expected, efforts to strengthen ties will benefit the students and the University.

Significant Accomplishments:

- The Vice President's and senior staff's tenure and experience at Bloomsburg University have brought stability and vision to the division and should be congratulated.
- Students speak highly of the commitment of staff and willingness to work in partnership on events and projects.
- Students find the campus environment safe, supportive, and encouraging.

Suggestions:

That the University provides opportunities for the Student Affairs staff to collaborate as a group on planning and professional development opportunities.

That the University offer greater opportunities for areas outside of athletics to collaborate with the Athletics Department on NCAA reporting requirements.

That the University implements the recommendations found in the academic advising five year academic review process.

That the University continues to develop positive and collaborative town gown relationships.

Standard 13: Related Educational Activities

The institution meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

The self study has described a variety of other educational offerings: a pre high school in college program involving 20 regional school districts; off campus programs; degree completion programs with community colleges; the Department of Audiology and Speech Pathology master's program; a variety of non credit offerings at the Magee Center and elsewhere involving over 4,000 enrollees and university employee training. Non credit programs cited are consistent with the Mission Statement of serving "a broad range of community needs..."

Two certificate programs in eLearning and the ESL Program Specialist Certificate program, issued by the College of Professional Studies, are noted on p.78 in Chapter 7 in the Self Study. Four additional certificate programs are also offered, coordinated and supervised by the Academic Advisement Center. All credit courses/programs offered off campus must be approved in the normal fashion by the Curriculum Committee and an Omnibus Form [Self-Study Exhibit 77] is required for these courses as well. But, as noted below, the university is beginning to explore offering more courses off campus in the near future. Practicum courses in the Education and Allied Health curricula and some internship programs in the College of Business are appropriately supervised, in some cases according to accreditation standards mandated by the program's specific accrediting body. In addition to named faculty internship coordinators for at least 18 specific academic departments, there is the Office of Academic Internships and Community Outreach which aids faculty in supervising internships and monitors compliance with specific guidelines such as minimum GPA, fulfillment of necessary course prerequisites and indication of an affiliation agreement in place with the business or agency where the student is interning.

The Notebook and Distance Education Committee was charged by the Provost to "provide leadership for the university's pilot notebook university program as well as its distance education programs and courses... [with a] written progress report to be delivered to Deans Council by the conclusion of each spring semester." Some courses are currently offered through distance education. The Instructional Media and Design Center offers individual assistance and provides workshops for faculty. However, it is not clear where the responsibility will reside for identification of credit-bearing courses suitable for distance education delivery, their development and delivery, and the administration of distance education. When the Committee report is completed, it should provide recommendations on these matters. The Director of Corporate and Continuing Education will have responsibility for some marketing aspects, but that unit does not generally deal with developing credit-bearing courses and programs.

Suggestion:

That the Distance Education Committee report with recommendations to the Deans' Council as soon as possible, identifying tasks and responsibilities with a timeline.

CHAPTER SEVEN

EDUCATIONAL OFFERINGS AND GENERAL EDUCATION

Standard 11: Educational Offerings

The institution meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

As stated in the Institutional Overview, the University's 32 academic departments currently deliver over two hundred programs at different levels and of different types. Curricula are compatible with the University's mission to provide a broad range of educational opportunities for students, and they support the mission of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education.

Curriculum review/revision is ongoing and linked to program review, changes mandated by accrediting bodies, and changes in the labor market. It occurs at several levels within the organization, as appropriate for the nature of the curricular change/development, and complies with state system requirements, as stated in PASSHE Policy. The role of the Bloomsburg University Curriculum Committee in this process is clearly explained in the body's bylaws (Exhibit 23). Information about program requirements is available electronically in the form of course sequence sheets, worksheets, and a Graduation Requirements Sheet (Exhibit 66). All information is consistent and presented clearly.

In support of transfer students' alignment with their specific programmatic requirements at Bloomsburg, the University has identified over 1,000 course equivalencies for inclusion in a system-wide data base established by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. In addition, the University developed the BATS (Bloomsburg Articulation and Transfer System) database, which allows administrative and advisement staff to identify specific course transfer equivalencies for a broad range of institutions throughout the region. This tool has further expedited the evaluation of credits.

Information literacy, defined in the Standard as "a student's competency in acquiring and processing information in the search for understanding," is a major service of an academic library that supports educational offerings. Librarians are working more closely with faculty to develop and offer information literacy instruction that meets the needs of courses. The number of instruction classes has increased each year and the librarians are reaching more faculty and their students.

It is noteworthy that Bloomsburg has added 21 new programs to its offerings since its last accreditation self-study in 1999: three academic majors, four master's degrees, the doctoral program, ten minors, an academic concentration, and two certificates. The five-year program review process supports curricular reform, including the elimination of programs, as does the planning process, although the two processes do not necessarily communicate with each other as effectively as they could.

Suggestions:

That the revised Mission Statement establish a current and meaningful context for curriculum review, development, and change.

That the University support faculty development on how planning and program review can be coordinated in order to streamline administrative work at the department level.

That information literacy be a component of all undergraduate and graduate programs and be part of a student outcomes assessment rubric.

Standard 12: General Education

The institution meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

In contrast to the concise and focused description in the Middle States standard, the Bloomsburg University statement of the goals of its General Education program is comparatively prolix and diffuse. There is no apparent connection between the requirements, as laid out in PRP 3612 (Self-Study Exhibit 46), and the general statement of learning objectives in Self-Study Exhibit 50. The requirements as they stand seem somewhat complex and overlapping to an outsider, and careful guidance is required in order for students to navigate their way through these requirements. The requirements are very broad and ambitious, showing every sign of having been assembled by a committee, with something for everyone. But no sense of hierarchy or priority is apparent in the resulting “laundry list” of desiderata. At the same time, the broad categories of the distribution requirements allow students to elude what are said to be core goals – for example, a student could avoid any fine arts course altogether, so that he or she would not have any opportunity to develop “a greater appreciation of literature, art, music, and theatre,” even while completing the Humanities group of courses. We find it rather disturbing that education majors are among the students least convinced of the value of general education in their lives and careers (p. 87 of the Self-Study). We acknowledge that Bloomsburg may have “a dynamic undergraduate curriculum which is constantly undergoing review and change...” as far as its major programs are concerned, but this can scarcely be said of its general education program.

There is a clear contrast with the concern expressed in the faculty opinions concerning the effectiveness of the General Education program and the MAPP results. The faculty generally feel that student writing and critical thinking skills are inadequate. The Self-Study working group dealing with the General Education Curriculum has made some cogent observations and recommendations, which we generally endorse. Our meeting with the ongoing General Education Task Force was reassuring in that we found a very hard-working and dedicated group of faculty and administrators who were coming to terms with the problems of redefining a coordinated general education program. They presented a draft of a revised definition of general education, which seemed promising to us at first hearing. But, as the Task Force realized, it is necessary for Bloomberg to move vigorously forward.

Bloomsburg University has chosen to assess the results of its General Education Program by use of a standardized test, ETS' Measurement of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP). The test is administered annually to a sample of freshman and senior students. The results appear to show that, while the freshmen fall below academic norms in the areas examined, the upper division students consistently outperform their academic peers. However, the MAPP is taken by a fairly limited group of students (about 133 freshmen and 98 seniors in 2008), chosen as a consequence of registration in particular courses, in which the MAPP result counts for a small portion of their overall grade. It is unclear how well the chosen students represent their classes statistically, and we suggest that at a minimum the GPAs of the MAPP students and of the two classes as a whole be reported as an indication of their representativeness. The MAPP result seems to indicate, whatever the philosophical shortcomings of the General Education program, that it is effective, as implemented by a caring faculty, in raising the skills and knowledge base of the students. Nevertheless, students have certainly changed over the last twenty years, and a revamped program developed to reflect those changes should produce a still better result. We urge Bloomsburg University to get on with revision of the General Education program with all deliberate speed. We also note that the MAPP at best examines only half of the PRP 3612 general education goals, and means will be needed to assess the remaining goals.

We were somewhat chagrined to discover, at the end of the Self Study report, that creation of the Office of Outcomes Assessment and an advisory committee, recommended by the Self-Study Task Force, had been postponed as a result of a system-wide hiring freeze. We were initially concerned that this development treated University-wide assessment as a luxury to be postponed until good times prevail. MSA Standard 14 makes the assessment-improvement-reassessment cycle a core obligation of the university. However, pending appointment of the Director, the Provost clearly indicated that academic assessment efforts were proceeding apace under the aegis of his office. He did not believe it appropriate to create the proposed Outcomes Assessment Committee until after the Proposed Director of Planning and Assessment had been installed. However this may be, we consider it essential that Bloomsburg must define and implement a more focused, purposeful and assessable general education program.

Given the above observations, we believe that Bloomsburg University is poised to develop a cutting-edge, meaningful General Education Program that supports and strengthens its already solid curriculum.

Suggestions:

That the University consider recruiting MAPP test-takers from a more broadly representative course, such as introductory writing.

That the University test the validity of the MAPP results by statistical comparison of the test takers with their peers, using GPA as a serviceable criterion.

Recommendation:

That the University restructure the general education program into a more focused, sequential, and testable one, capable of ongoing assessment and improvement. The discussions to date appear to be moving in the desirable directions, but they must be capped off with decisive and timely action to be addressed in a two-year report.

VI. Summary of Recommendations for Continuing Compliance and Requirements

The team recommends that a monitoring report be prepared by Bloomsburg University in 24 months to address the following recommendation.

Standard 12: General Education

The institution's curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, and technological competency.

Recommendation:

That the University restructure the general education program into a more focused, sequential, and testable one, capable of ongoing assessment and improvement. The discussions to date appear to be moving in the desirable directions, but they must be capped off with decisive and timely action to be addressed in a two-year report.

The team recommends that a progress letter be prepared by Bloomsburg University in 24 months to address the following recommendations.

Standard 1: Mission and Goals

The institution's mission clearly defines its purpose within the context of higher education and indicates who the institution serves and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's stated goals, consistent with the aspirations and expectations of higher education, clearly specify how the institution will fulfill its mission. The mission and goals are developed and recognized by the institution with the participation of its members and its governing body and are utilized to develop and shape its programs and practices and to evaluate its effectiveness.

Recommendation:

That the institution revise the mission statement to be more specific and focused and yields strategic objectives that are clearly measurable.

Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

An institution conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals, develops objectives to achieve them, and utilizes the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal. Implementation and subsequent evaluation of the success of the strategic plan and resource allocation support the development and change necessary to improve and to maintain institutional quality.

Recommendation:

That the University review its entire strategic planning process, examining the way strategies are expressed so progress can be measured and not just be accounted for by a "yes" and "no" response. Priorities should be assigned at the strategic, rather than operational, level, and dollars correspondingly assigned. Furthermore, the entire method of assigning money to activities should be systematized to mirror priorities assigned them in the Strategic Plan. The degree to which each is achieved and the manner in which it is cycled back into the subsequent year's strategic plan should be more clearly documented and tracked.

Standard 7: Institutional Assessment

The institution has developed and implemented an assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals and its compliance with accreditation standards.

Recommendation:

That the institution proceed with self-study recommendations 4 and 5 to create an Office of Outcomes Assessment (or Institutional Effectiveness) and an elected Outcomes Assessment (or student learning assessment) Committee.

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment of student learning demonstrates that, at graduation, or other appropriate points, the institution's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals.

Recommendation (affirmed relative to commentary for Standard 7):

That the University appoint a Director of Assessment of Student Learning to centralize and consolidate these assessment activities.