

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY MIDDLE STATES EVALUATION TEAM REPORT

OVERVIEW

The evaluation team found at Syracuse University a community of remarkably engaged teachers, scholars, and students. We are pleased to recommend to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education the university's continued accreditation. Syracuse University has demonstrated clear compliance with all 14 standards the Commission has set for continued accreditation. More broadly, it offers a striking and inspiring example of the impact that higher education and advanced research can have on students and communities.

This is an exciting time for Syracuse University. We found a high level of enthusiasm for the work of the university both on and off campus. There is a tremendous amount of positive energy at the university. The visit team was particularly struck by the congruence in the views expressed across the various constituencies with whom we met, including not only members of the faculty and administration but also students, trustees, donors, and members of the local community.

What is happening at Syracuse University is especially important and timely in light of the broad public concerns about how universities can best respond to the complex needs of contemporary society. Chancellor Nancy Cantor is an articulate advocate for a vision of engaged scholarship that builds on the university's historic strengths and its recent history. Today, Syracuse University is developing a national and international reputation as a leader in engaging creatively and effectively with broader communities. At the same time, it has demonstrated an exemplary concern for broadening access to higher education, assessing the outcomes of its initiatives, and fostering transparency in its operations.

It is clear that the ideas generated at Syracuse University are having an impact inside as well as outside the academy. Syracuse maintains a serious commitment to the development and dissemination of knowledge in the best tradition of America's research universities. As Chancellor Cantor put it in an address delivered shortly before the evaluation team arrived at Syracuse, "Scholarship in Action is a two-way street that affects both the scholarly disciplines and the world." Few universities are as well positioned to prove this point.

The university began its self-study process as it prepared to launch a number of important initiatives, including a new budgeting system. The site visit gave the evaluation team an opportunity to look at the processes of change in real time. We believe that Syracuse University is being strengthened as an institution and energized as a community as a result of these changes.

REVIEW PROCESS

Syracuse University began its self-study process in the fall of 2006. Associate Provost for Academic Programs Sandra N. Hurd chaired the Steering Committee, which developed a broadly consultative process.

The review process began in November 2007. On November 14-16, 2007, two generalist evaluators conducted a review of the documentation provided by Syracuse to substantiate its compliance with the characteristics of excellence identified by the Middle States Commission.

On November 16, the team chair and another member of the team visited Syracuse to meet with the generalists and the university's leadership. The generalists, who had completed their review, confirmed the university's compliance with the characteristics of excellence identified by the Middle States Commission. The visit team would like to express its thanks to the generalist evaluators, John J. Convey and James F. Trainer. They have submitted a separate written report detailing their findings.

The determination that Syracuse had demonstrated compliance with all 14 standards for continued accreditation meant that the forthcoming site visit could focus on those issues the University itself had identified, through its self-study process, as critical for its next decade. The University had previously forwarded to the team chair a draft of its self-study report. Meetings on November 16 with the Chancellor, the Vice Chancellor and Provost, the Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, and the Associate Provost for Academic Programs offered an opportunity to discuss the University's own goals for the self-study and to develop shared goals for the site visit.

In mid-February 2008, the team chair reviewed the Syracuse program in London, an important representative example of the extensive programs operated by SU Abroad.

In March, the evaluation team received the final version of the Syracuse self-study and substantial supporting documentation on key topics (primarily Responsibility Centered Management and engagement with the world) as well as critical University publications and reference documents.

The team visit took place March 30-April 2, 2008. In order to leverage the time available, much of the visit was organized in concurrent sessions. The schedule included sessions with undergraduate and graduate students; members of the faculty, including new and untenured faculty; academic department and program heads; senior administrators; trustees; and community partners.

During the visit, individual team members paid special attention to the self-study's areas of emphasis as follows: Responsibility Centered Management—Paul N. Courant and Marilyn McCoy; faculty and interdisciplinary scholarship—Paul N. Courant; graduate education—Patricia E. Beeson; undergraduate education—Paula P. Burger; engagement with the world—Lawrence S. Bacow.

Special sessions covered topics including access and enrollment management, community engagement, graduate education, institutional advancement, interdisciplinary scholarship, partnership programs, partnerships between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, Responsibility Centered Management, sponsored research, and student support. A tour of University facilities included not only the main campus but also the Warehouse in the Armory Square district, which has brought a number of academic programs in close proximity to sites of community engagement.

This evaluation report represents the collective experience of the team. We are grateful to all those who worked on the University's thoughtful self-study report, and to the staff and students who went out of their way to give us a warm welcome to the University. We offer special thanks to Associate Provost Hurd for her critical role

throughout the entire process, and to her staff colleagues for ensuring that the visit ran smoothly and that the team was able to work productively.

INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES, PLANNING, AND ASSESSMENT

At the time the self-study was being designed, Syracuse University was in the early stages of designing and implementing Responsibility Center Management budgeting. The University rightly recognized that the self-study process provided a unique opportunity to plan for the monitoring and evaluation of RCM's impact. In particular, the self-study focused on measures of success, community involvement, and on institutional assessment.

The implementation of Responsibility Center Management is now in its second year. It is clearly too soon to judge its success, but the experience to date has generally been positive. The University was well aware that the transition to a new budget system would be a major institutional challenge. The implementation of the new system has fostered constructive dialogue within the institution about priorities and options.

Working with the RCM Committee and with the Budget Committee of the University Senate, the Vice Chancellor and Provost and the Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer have shown great openness to adaptation as the University works through the implementation of this new system. They have also been appropriately attentive to the key values of the institution and to assuring that they are not impaired by RCM. It will be important to continue to attend to these issues, including assuring continued good relations among the deans. The high quality of the leadership in the individual Schools has been a great asset to this effort.

The increase in transparency among the academic units of the University has been very well received and seems to be fostering greater trust and willingness to cooperate among them. There are opportunities to bring a similar level of transparency to administrative operations so that units that receive and (implicitly) pay for services can be assured of the value, relative cost, and efficiency of these functions.

RCM policy and practice continue to evolve. This is understandable and indeed typical in the implementation of such systems.

- The administration is aware that the role of research centers and institutes in the system has not yet been adequately resolved. A working group now under development will offer an opportunity to address these important issues.
- The University will also need to continue to calibrate its model. Currently, for example, assessments to responsibility centers for facilities costs are based primarily on square footage. The University may wish to consider whether a more differentiated approach would further increase transparency and strengthen financial planning.

The University will need to balance ongoing review and calibration of the system with the need for stability, which is essential for the responsibility centers' financial planning. Central administrative services may require additional contingency funding in order to assure that needed investments in university-wide infrastructure or unpredictable budget pressures do not lead to unanticipated changes in assessments.

The successful implementation of RCM will be a major accomplishment for the University. In particular, RCM should help Syracuse develop the resources it needs to

meet its goals in a competitive and increasingly costly environment. RCM increases incentives for entrepreneurship and innovation in the Schools. It is already fostering the availability of new funds for innovation and seed grants. Going forward, it should encourage deans and Schools to raise additional private support, increase the volume of sponsored research, and develop and refine professional master's degree programs to meet existing and emerging needs.

In its self-study, the University identified resource allocation issues as an important potential hindrance to furthering interdisciplinary scholarship. The implementation of RCM is providing new opportunities for Schools to collaborate on faculty hires that have the potential to advance interdisciplinarity.

Continuing communication and dialogue will be essential as the campus adapts to RCM. A new website under development by the Budget Office will be an important step. Schools may also need to familiarize their own faculty and staff with the relationships and expectations that support their own budgeting, which is generally and appropriately not based on an RCM model.

The administration is aware of the need for ongoing assessment of RCM and its impact on the University. In addition to regular reviews by the Vice Chancellor and Provost, the Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, and the RCM committee, the University may wish to undertake a more formal and open review in the fifth year of implementation.

UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE EDUCATION

Undergraduate Education

Syracuse University offers a broad array of undergraduate academic programs, and first-year students are admitted directly to those programs through the individual colleges. The University has taken important steps to recruit, enroll, and educate an increasingly diverse student body. The self-study looked closely at the systems in place to support these efforts and these students.

University and school recruitment initiatives appear to be effectively coordinated. Recruitment efforts have been successful in increasing the quality and the size of the University's applicant pool. Over the past several years, differentials between the applicant pools of different schools have narrowed. This has allowed for greater selectivity and enhanced the University's ability to present itself as a single institution.

Entering students are increasingly diverse. There have been increases in international student numbers, but even more significant have been the gains in minority enrollment. Special recruitment programs and partnerships have been successful in increasing numbers from about 17% in 1999 to 27% in the fall of 2007. The critical mass now in place helps considerably in attracting additional minority students. Looking ahead, the University seeks to increase geographic diversity to offer a richer experience for all its students.

The evaluation team saw evidence of a strong institutional commitment to be a welcoming place for diverse students. The offices providing critical student services appear to be very appropriately student-centered. Members of the staff know and trust one another and work well together to ensure that students do not fall through cracks in the system. The University is aware, however, that it will need to ensure

that its student services can keep up with the needs of an increasingly diverse student population.

The University's commitment to diversity along many dimensions is laudable. Approximately two-thirds of its undergraduates already receive some form of need-based financial aid from Syracuse or other sources. Going forward, the University will have to balance its aspirations with respect to student diversity and qualifications not only with financial resources but also with available policy options.

As the self-study recognized, continued research on retention, student success, and student satisfaction will help Syracuse build on its recent momentum in recruiting talented and enterprising students. Staff members recognize the need to better understand the interplay between issues such as financial aid, residential and community life, academic opportunities, and support services in the decisions of admitted students and the outcomes of those who enroll.

Residential and community life have become increasingly important in attracting prospective students. This is especially true for the strongest applicants, since many of the most selective institutions have made significant investments in building student community. The recent report on housing and residential life at Syracuse may provide a basis for further consideration of the University's vision for student life.

Currently, increases in undergraduate enrollment are constrained by residential capacity. The implementation of RCM budgeting has the potential to generate new pressures for growth. An integrated assessment of enrollment management and residential life may emerge as a need.

The diversity and breadth of the University's programs inevitably affect its ability to present a unified vision for undergraduate education. A number of important initiatives have served to deepen the undergraduate experience, including the residential learning communities and a range of partnerships between Academic Affairs and Students Affairs. There are notable opportunities to participate in entrepreneurship and innovation activities.

Engagement with the world is one theme that can be said to characterize undergraduate education at Syracuse University overall. Some 40 percent of undergraduates have an international study experience during their time at Syracuse. SU Abroad is one of the University's signature programs, and represents an important opportunity to engage students with the world. In its self-study, the University indicated its desire to expand access to international educational opportunities by increasing their number and reducing financial barriers to participation.

The six overseas centers currently operated by SU Abroad range from freestanding programs to partnerships with local universities. As part of the evaluation process, the chair of the evaluation team visited the SU Abroad program in London, spending a full day at Faraday House on February 18, 2008.

SU London is clearly well run and meets the critical criteria of the Middle States Commission that study-abroad programs should meet standards for quality of instruction, academic rigor, and educational effectiveness comparable to those of other institutional offerings.

More than 80 percent of the students studying in the program this spring are from Syracuse itself. Students said they were very satisfied with their experience, and there was high praise for the onsite direction of the program. Faculty members reported

that the program fully met the intellectual standards of the University itself. They noted that teaching in London provided valuable opportunities to work across traditional disciplinary boundaries. Syracuse can be proud of the work of its students and faculty in London.

Graduate Education

Syracuse University offers a rich and diverse set of graduate and professional programs. It has nationally recognized strength in training students for leadership in government, industry, and law as well as in the academy. The University's self-study focused in particular on recruitment and financial aid, student services and the educational environment, and the impact of RCM and engagement with the world on the graduate experience.

The self-study identified recruitment of talented and diverse graduate students as key to further strengthening graduate education at Syracuse. The evaluation team found broad agreement on specific initiatives to further strengthen graduate education, including competitive aid, centralized support for recruitment of minority students, and development of policies to further encourage the inclusion of graduate students in sponsored research. Individual schools and programs have already begun to take positive steps in these areas; many, though not all, felt that the RCM would facilitate further progress in these areas.

The newly instituted process for regular review of doctoral programs is a particularly important initiative. It will play an important role in ensuring continuing program development, and in monitoring the impact of RCM.

Students expressed strong satisfaction with their programs, the Graduate School, and the University. They felt that Syracuse had delivered on the promises made when they enrolled. The Graduate School in particular received very high marks from the various constituencies across the University. The School is viewed as providing very strong student support services, particularly in appropriate areas of professional development through the extensive orientation program as well as ongoing programs such as Future Professoriate, and Preparing Future Faculty. Students found the Graduate School to be responsive to their needs and supportive of their development as scholars and teachers.

The University has carefully considered the potential impact of the RCM on graduate education and has demonstrated its willingness to make appropriate adjustments to ensure that students continue to be encouraged to take advantage of the educational and research opportunities outside their home departments/units. The refinement of the assessment on graduate tuition was cited as one instance of timely response to perceived inequities. A reflective process is in place to monitor the impact of RCM on graduate and professional education, including the potential impact on graduate offerings and graduate student funding. Appropriate communication with stakeholders will be important.

The University has been equally careful and reflective in considering the impact of engagement with the world on the graduate and professional programs. Appropriate conversations are taking place as members of the faculty consider how their programs engage graduate and professional students with the world around them.

ENGAGEMENT WITH THE WORLD

At a time when public officials have questioned the accountability of higher education, Syracuse University is thoughtfully considering how it can both amplify and document the impact of its scholarship on the world, in local, national, and international arenas. Engagement with the world as a theme recurred across the University's self-study—how best to extend engagement, how best to support it, and how to assess it.

The Chancellor's attention to these issues has helped catalyze a vigorous conversation among students, faculty, staff, alumni, trustees, and donors about how the products of a great research university—its teaching and its research—can best be used to engage the broader community. The conversation itself is important. It has prompted serious discussion of the meaning of engaged scholarship.

The evaluation team viewed this conversation in real time. Although it is far from concluded, it is clear that this discussion is already having an impact on Syracuse:

- It has greatly energized the community. There is a real feeling of intellectual ferment as people wrestle with the role of Syracuse University in the world.
- There is great excitement among students. They are voting with their feet through their enthusiasm for courses and research that engage them with the community. As the University is aware, this success is already taxing the existing infrastructure to support such initiatives.
- The description of Syracuse as a place where scholarship makes a tangible difference in addressing the world's great problems is exciting to donors, alumni, and trustees, motivating them to deepen their involvement with the University.
- The commitment to engaged scholarship has provided validation for the work of many professional schools and departments who have traditionally pursued this type of teaching and research. At the same time, the conversation is also causing faculty to rethink some of their own scholarly activities, and stimulating innovative interdisciplinary collaborations in both teaching and research.
- The University's commitment to engaged scholarship has been extraordinarily well received by the broader Syracuse community. The University has become a welcome partner in fostering regional economic development. The University itself will benefit from a more vibrant host community. It is also enjoying improved town-gown relations.
- The enhanced role for engaged scholarship has shown itself valuable in recruiting promising faculty members who are excited about an expanded vision of scholarship.

The conversation has also raised some concerns, most notably within the faculty. While the goal of enhancing the influence of the University's scholarship is unquestioned, some faculty fear the emphasis on engaged scholarship may come at the expense of traditional scholarship. New members of the faculty seek to understand the relationship between the University's commitment to engagement and career development.

The conversation on engaged scholarship has offered the faculty an important, energizing opportunity to look closely at the core values supporting teaching and research. The members of the Academic Affairs Committee of the University Senate are, appropriately, playing a central role in these discussions. A thoughtful white paper on the issues of concern to the faculty has helped structure this dialogue. The Academic Affairs Committee is now considering how the University can best reflect its commitment to engaged scholarship in its tenure and promotion guidelines.

As with RCM, it is too early to judge the ultimate success of the University's intensified focus on engagement with the world. The early signs are—again as with RCM—very positive. Looking ahead, it is possible to identify critical measures by which the University will be able to judge its success:

- Whether Syracuse enjoys an enhanced scholarly reputation as determined by those academics outside the Syracuse community.
- Whether Syracuse enjoys a competitive advantage in recruiting students and faculty.
- Whether faculty feel that their investment in engaged scholarship is not made at the expense of professional advancement within their disciplines.
- Whether Syracuse remains a place where the canonical disciplines are valued and flourish.
- Whether substantial incremental resources flow to the University to support this initiative.
- Whether the university's faculty, students, and young alumni are seen to be having an even more substantial impact in national and international arenas than is already the case.
- Whether the city of Syracuse benefits tangibly from these efforts.

Ongoing discussion of these issues will emerge naturally inside and outside the University.

CONCLUSION

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education defines a university as “a community dedicated to the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge, to the study and clarification of values, and to the advancement of the society it serves.” We would be hard pressed to come up with a better summary of what we found at Syracuse University. Faculty, administrators, and students displayed a consistently high commitment to academic excellence, to expanding access to higher education, to accountability in operations, and to amplifying the impact of their work on the world. Their strong focus on these central values will serve Syracuse well in an environment that holds many challenges for even the strongest of universities.

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