

Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, and Students

of

Muhlenberg College
Allentown, Pennsylvania

By

A Team Representing the
Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Prepared After a Visit to

the Campus on

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I. Content and Nature of the Visit

Founded in 1848, Muhlenberg College is an independent, undergraduate, coeducational institution related to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The college is located in Allentown, Pennsylvania, in the residential West End neighborhood, approximately 55 miles north of Philadelphia and 90 miles west of New York City.

The College has a student body of 2200 in its traditional undergraduate program and nearly 200 additional adult learners in the Wescoe School's evening, day, and weekend programs. Muhlenberg has a full time faculty of approximately 170 members.

Through the traditional college program, BA and BS, as well as combined BA/BS degrees are offered in 40 majors. Through the Wescoe School, Bachelor's degrees and certificates are offered in the traditional liberal arts in more than 25 fields of study. Associate's degrees are offered in Business Administration, Accounting, Computer Science, and Psychology. Over the past decade, in an effort to align student preparation with local workforce trends, concentration areas in Healthcare Management, Human Resources Leadership, Financial Services, and Supply Chain Management have been added to the Business Administration major in the Accelerated Degree Program.

The self-study is a comprehensive review, the process for which began in the summer of 2013 and involved extensive participation by the entire Muhlenberg community, including nearly sixty faculty and administrators who served on the Steering Committee and the Working Groups. In addition, a student liaison group and a trustee liaison group received regular reports and were afforded regular opportunities to comment on the report as it was developed. The self-study covers the fourteen standards in eight chapters. The Visiting Team report follows this structure, with those chapters that discussed the standards in a fully integrated way discussed in that way and those that separated the standards out within the chapter discussed in that way.

II. Affirmation of Continued Compliance with Eligibility Requirements

Based on a review of the self-study, interviews, the certification statement supplied by the institution and/or other institutional documents, the team affirms that the institution continues to meet the eligibility requirements in *Characteristics of Excellence*.

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

Based on the separate verification of compliance with accreditation-relevant provisions of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 and, as necessary, review of the self-study, certification by the institution, other institutional documents, and/or interviews, the team affirms that the institution meets

all relevant federal and state regulations and the requirements of the Department of Education recognized accreditors.

Because some links were broken or some evidence was not found by the initial compliance reviewer, the visiting team followed-up to be sure that: 1) the student identity verification policy is posted (<http://www.muhslenberg.edu/main/aboutus/registrar/policyandprocedures/tableofcontents/p-z/#STUDENTV>);2) that the transfer policy and guides are on the Wescoe School website (<http://www.muhslenberg.edu/main/wescoc/TransferGuides.html>); 3) that criteria for the transfer of credit is present on the registrar's website (<http://www.muhslenberg.edu/main/aboutus/registrar/policyandprocedures/tableofcontents/p-z/#t2>);4) that links to the Wescoe School's articulation agreements are publicly available on the website (<http://www.muhslenberg.edu/main/wescoc/prospectivestudents/gettingstarted/>); 5) the Student Affairs Appeals process is on the Dean of Student's website: (<http://www.muhslenberg.edu/media/contentassets/pdf/about/deanst/services/problem-resolution-and-complaint-policy.pdf>); 6) the link to the Wescoe School grade appeal process is available (<http://www.muhslenberg.edu/media/contentassets/pdf/wescoc/FormalRequestforReviewAppealofGradedforstudentinTheWescocSchool.pdf>); 7) the link to the Student Policy and Resource Guide is working (http://www.muhslenberg.edu/main/aboutus/deanst/services/student_guide.html); 8) the link to disaggregated graduation rate and cohort graduate rate is working (<http://www.muhslenberg.edu/media/contentassets/pdf/about/consumer/Disaggregated-Graduation-Rates.pdf>); 9) the teaching licensure pass rate link is working (<http://www.muhslenberg.edu/main/academics/education/studentteaching/>); 10) The Success after Berg link is not broken (<http://www.muhslenberg.edu/main/admissions/success-after-muhslenberg/>).

In addition to these issues with links, we verified that the guidelines for hybrid and on-line courses are provided through reference to the general syllabus guidelines sent to departments each semester. Hybrid and on-line courses are also expected to follow these guidelines. In addition, proposed hybrid and on-line courses must be submitted to the College Committee on Technology and Digital Learning using the form attached as Appendix A.

Evidence that the institution monitors and applies policies regarding credit hours was in the original submission. Please see p. 263 and other materials that indicate room scheduling.

Finally, we were asked to verify compliance with Title IV, specifically that the description of any limitations, suspensions, or termination actions taken by the U.S. Department of Education and/or fines, letters of credit, or heightened monitoring arising from U. S. Department of Education actions or reviews. No correspondence was found in relation to these matters because no such actions have been taken. The original materials included a letter indicating default rates, rates that are very low.

IV. Evaluation Overview

The visiting team wishes to express its gratitude and commendation to the Muhlenberg community for completing a thorough and readable self-study, one that gave us a very good sense of the institution before visiting and that we expect will provide a solid base for strategic planning. We also want to thank the Muhlenberg community for the time that they took to meet with us and to answer our questions. It is clear to us that this is a college about which faculty, staff, students, and trustees care deeply and have invested much. It is also clear to us that the presidential transition has gone smoothly

and that John I. Williams, Jr. is a President who values Muhlenberg and wishes to provide the leadership necessary to continue to build the college's reputation and resources. Thus, we congratulate the College on the search process and the transition planning and implementation.

We believe that this success is a reflection of a well-governed and administered institution. Shared governance and research-based decision-making are taken seriously. The College revisits its mission periodically to ensure that it is retaining its commitments in a way that is consistent with changes to society. Students and faculty identify the classroom as a place where best educational practices are occurring. The programs offered reflect both the traditional liberal arts and some additions that connect the liberal arts to new, more interdisciplinary areas of study, such as neuroscience, film studies, and public health. Though Admission numbers and retention of students is not an immediately pressing concern, it is clear that recent efforts to diversify the applicant pool geographically are necessary if the applicant pool is to be strong enough to generate a diverse class with an affordable discount rate.

As Muhlenberg knows well, their biggest challenge is to increase resources so that they better support faculty and staff in their work with students. Interestingly, one of our reactions to the self-study was that given the clear quality of the institution, there was less of a celebratory tone in the document than we would have expected. We suspect that this cultural tendency to be modest needs to be balanced with the discussion of the college's many strengths in order to make the strengths and value of a Muhlenberg education more widely known, particularly outside of the College's traditional markets. Conservative budget processes that have left the college in an enviable position. We do, though, believe that the time has come to be less conservative so that necessary investments are made that can result in increased revenue. Without such revenue, the pattern of "doing more with less" seems to us not sustainable very far into the future, as regulatory changes and the admission of students with new needs requires additional time from staff and faculty.

We also believe that the current focus on diversity will be critical for the institution's future. We are impressed that students initiated a strategic planning process, and that faculty and the administration responded positively. The planning process that has occurred is already beginning to bear fruit, and the development of the President's Diversity Advisory Council will likely be critical for maintaining momentum.

As we reviewed the materials and spoke with people on campus, we were intrigued both by the history and potential of the Wescoe School and concerned that this area of the institution does not seem to be better integrated with the "day program." Wescoe provides an opportunity for many adults, including veterans, in the Lehigh Valley to pursue their education; day students appreciate the life experience that Wescoe students bring to classes when either Wescoe students take day classes or day students take night or summer classes; and the Wescoe School is an alternative source of revenue. All of this is good; we worry, however, about the primary discussion of this aspect of the college being restricted to the chapter on related educational programs and see this as an indication of lack integration in a number of ways. We are concerned that faculty hiring may not be vetted as consistently as the policy states; we are concerned that providing necessary services to support Wescoe provides additional strain on faculty and staff; we are concerned that assessment of student learning is not integrated between the two parts of the institution. Equally, department chairs do not see a degree with Wescoe courses as the equivalent of a degree with courses taken in the day program. Without integrated assessment, we do not know whether this is perception or reality. We believe that the relationship between Wescoe and the "day school" needs further clarification, particularly if the College is to give serious consideration to expanding the Wescoe School.

Overall, we wish to recognize that Muhlenberg is a caring, committed, and collaborative college. We witnessed this among all constituencies during our time on campus. It is an institution that inspires students and that has much to celebrate.

V. Compliance and Accreditation Standards

Chapter 1 Mission, Goals, and Integrity

Standard 1: Mission and Goals

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

In the team's judgment, Muhlenberg College appears to meet this standard.

Summary of evidence and findings

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff, students, or others the team developed the following conclusions relative to Standard 1.

Muhlenberg College has a mission statement (approved by its Board of Trustees, October, 2014) that is appropriate for a contemporary liberal arts college. The statement emphasizes the development of intellectual skills and preparation for civic engagement and leadership. It also conveys a commitment to diversity in its educational offerings and in the make-up of its community.

The Muhlenberg College Wescoe School of Continuing Education operates under the College's global mission statement and has its own mission statement which specifies Wescoe's purpose: educating "lifelong learners" with an awareness of their "life experience, maturity, and other developmental differences between their students and the more traditionally aged "day students" of the College.

While mission itself has been well articulated, success in communicating it throughout the institution and its various constituencies is less evident. While four of five (80%) of academic department chairs have "a strong understanding of mission," only two of three graduating seniors and managers and staff (66% and 68%, respectively) convey a good understanding of Muhlenberg's mission and values.

Significant accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- The institution has succeeded in integrating greater awareness of diversity in its mission and campus life, as called for in the Muhlenberg College Five-Year Diversity Strategic Plan.
- The various components of the institution (divisions, departments, programs, etc.) have developed their own mission statements which for the most part resonate with the general mission statement.

Suggestions

- The team suggests a more robust effort to communicate mission and values throughout the institution among students and staff, perhaps at orientation and staff in-service events. Given the centrality of diversity to the College’s mission, it will be important to be sure that all constituencies are educated about diversity so that they may act on this part of the mission.
- The team suggests that fulfillment of mission would be enhanced with a more diverse faculty, in light of what has been noted elsewhere in the self-study, namely that “retention of racially and ethnically diverse tenure-track faculty has been a challenge.” (p. 50)
- For purposes of mission and identity, the team suggests a clarification of the relationship between Muhlenberg College, the traditional liberal arts college, and The Wescoe School for Continuing Education.
- Muhlenberg is fulfilling its mission at nearly every turn and the team suggests the College create ways to celebrate its many successes and achievements among students, faculty, and staff.

Recommendations

The team has no recommendations for this standard.

Requirements

The team has no requirements on this standard.

Standard 6: Integrity

In the conduct of its programs and activities involving the public and the constituencies it serves, the institution demonstrates adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies, providing support for intellectual and academic freedom.

In the team’s judgment, Muhlenberg College appears to meet this standard.

Summary of evidence and findings

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff, students, and others, the team developed the following conclusions relative to Standard 6.

Muhlenberg College has well articulated and accessible grievance processes for faculty, students, and staff, communicated in the *Faculty Handbook*, the *Handbook for Managers/the Handbook for Support Staff*, and the *Student Guide*, respectively.

The *Student Guide* contains a Sexual and Gender-Based Misconduct Policy and the College’s Discriminatory Harassment Policy Statement. Upon matriculation, students sign the Academic Integrity Code and Social Code.

The institution reports relatively few hearings (they are “rare”) for alleged violations of academic integrity, with most instances addressed by individual faculty outside of a formal process. Faculty report on their actions so that repeat offenders can be identified.

A Judicial Panel drawn from a trained pool of students, administrators, and faculty, holds hearings for higher level violations of the Social Code.

The Faculty Handbook describes processes for the tenure process and for safe guarding academic freedom on campus.

Significant accomplishments, significant progress, and exemplary/innovative practices

- The institution has succeeded in developing and maintaining practices that safeguard integrity among its various constituencies.
- The phrase, “integrity,” occurs frequently and affirmatively among various constituencies when asked about campus climate and values.
- While descriptions were understated in the Self-Study, campus interviews revealed that Title IX initiatives, including trainings, prevention work, and adjudication initiatives have been proactive and in accordance with generally regarded best practices.

Suggestions

The team has no suggestion for this standard.

Recommendations

The team has no recommendations for this standard.

Requirements

The team has no requirements for this standard.

CHAPTER 2

Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

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.

Standard 3: Institutional Resources

The human, financial, technical, facilities, and other resources necessary to achieve an institution's mission and goals are available and accessible. In the context of the institution's mission, the effective and efficient uses of the institution's resources are analyzed as part of ongoing outcomes assessment.

In the team's judgment, Muhlenberg College appears to meet these standards.

Summary of evidence and findings

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with Trustees, faculty, staff, students and others, the team developed the following conclusions relative to the standard.

Muhlenberg continues to be a financially sound institution primarily resourced through student charges. Careful budgeting and maintaining an appropriate annual contingency fund has enabled the College to operate successfully, including during the Great Recession. While some wealthier peers had layoffs and large budget cuts, Muhlenberg implemented only a hiring freeze and still offered modest salary increases every year. Thus, while the College has fewer resources than their competition, their financial planning enables them to continue to offer a quality educational experience for all students.

Both short-term and long-term planning are data driven and inclusive. Assessment in all venues leads to better decisions about effective and ineffective institutional and unit practices. With the arrival of President John I. Williams, Jr. in the summer of 2015, the College is poised to undertake a new strategic plan to plot the direction of the College for the years ahead.

Muhlenberg makes good use of all its resources - everything from faculty and staff to technology in the classroom to a well-maintained campus. Some positive changes in the last few years include: a completely wireless campus, the switch from primarily paper to electronic library resources, significant residence hall and facilities renovations, and increased fundraising activity in Development. The faculty and staff continue to be committed to the success of every student.

In summary, Muhlenberg does more with less. Planning is systematic, well organized, and thoughtful. Thus, the College is in sound financial shape and able to compete with better resourced institutions.

Significant Accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- Strong financial management practices and careful financial planning has provided the financial capacity to support the mission of the College in a most challenging environment.
- Muhlenberg's has achieved and maintained an A1 rating from Moody's Investors Services, which reflects the strength of the college's unrestricted liquidity position, which provides a good coverage of debt and enhances operating flexibility.
- Muhlenberg has consistently achieved healthy operating performance evidenced by strong operating margins, cash flow, and debt service coverage.
- For fiscal 2015 Unrestricted Net Assets were \$264.2 million, an increase of \$2.8 million over the previous year.
- Among recent improvements to Muhlenberg's physical plant are the new Multicultural Center located at 2252 Chew Street and a \$31 million expansion and renovation of science facilities, including a new science building, and renovations of Shankweiler (life sciences) and Trumbower (chemistry, physics, math) Halls.
- Other significant building projects include: 1) the completion of 2201 Chew Street Residence Hall and the Village, making a total of six new residence buildings that offer apartment-style housing for upper-class students; 2) the opening of the Rehearsal House, which includes an outdoor amphitheater, to provide rehearsal and performance space for the Departments of Theatre and Dance and Music; 3) the renovation and addition to a building that houses the Hillel House and office and classroom space for the Sociology and Anthropology Department; and 4) the completion of renovations to Seegers Union and the addition of the Ilene and Robert Wood Dining Commons, which included new kitchens, serveries, student club space, meeting rooms, performance space, and expansion of the Career Center, Academic Resource Center, and Disability Services Office. A comprehensive renovation of East Hall, Muhlenberg's oldest residence hall and a model of Collegiate Gothic architecture, was recently completed. We particularly recognize the success of the design and programming of the Seegers Union and expansion and renovation of science facilities.
- Muhlenberg has diligently assessed and funded deferred maintenance (items such as leaking roofs), and has systems in place to address this important issue, with a relatively modest backlog compared to the industry estimated at \$10 - \$15 million currently.
- All sectors of the community, from Faculty to the Office of the Library and the Registrar, seem to be working hard to make for a better College.
- Deep understanding by the Trustees, President, key institutional leaders, faculty, staff and others of the aspirations of the College, its markets, the challenges facing higher education and the institution, particularly regarding enrollments and financial aid, and the adequate but limited resources of the institution.
- The Community understands the challenging and dynamic operating environment with the national focus on the cost of higher education, demographic and economic environmental challenges, and changes in the marketplace for educational programs, admissions and careers.

- The Community understands the risks and rewards associated with the series of financially significant initiatives that require monitoring, consolidating and successfully institutionalizing these initiatives.
- Muhlenberg is currently seeking to raise \$11 million in endowment gifts for financial aid and educational programs as a bridge between its successful Talents campaign (completed in 2010 with \$110.4 million raised) and an anticipated new campaign in support of the next strategic plan.

Suggestions

- As noted in the self-study, currently, planning for new facilities and renovations focuses on individual projects and is not integrated into a comprehensive strategic campus plan. The College should develop a campus master plan (we understand this process has recently started) to inform current and future facility renovation and construction. The plan would provide a structure to identify how individual projects fit into the larger picture and would provide a strategic perspective for advancement efforts.
- As noted in the self-study, Muhlenberg relies heavily on student charges. The College has begun developing additional revenue streams, such as summer conferences, but should find other ways to reduce the dependence on student charges. Options may be expanding the Wescoe School programs and online courses, summer enrichment programs, and working with Development to increase the donor base to build the endowment and the Annual Fund.
- It will be important as the College moves to a new Strategic Plan, that progress updates and comprehensive reviews are done on a regular basis to note areas completed, and identify areas where effort is needed to move items back on track, particularly regarding adapting to changes in enrollment, financial aid, finances, and other situations. Managing net tuition and fees in this most competitive and challenging economic time will be critically important.
- As noted in the self-study and is true at many colleges and other organizations, there is a fairly widespread feeling that faculty and staff have been asked to do more and more over the past decade without an increase in headcount sufficient to absorb the extra workload. In the upcoming planning work, this important issue will need to be addressed, as in many ways these individuals are the College and key to continued success.
- We suggest the College review and study the current peer group admissions overlap comparisons of institutions to include other important factors, such as financial resources, including as an example endowment per student, and consider also adding an aspirant group.

As noted in the self-study, while annual operating budgets work best for most departments, the College should consider creating multi-year budgets (two or three year) so some units can support large purchases. Such budgeting is already done with Special Projects in Plant Operations and may be beneficial overall for the College.

Recommendations

The team has no recommendations for this standard.

Requirements

The team has no requirements for this standard.

Chapter 3

Leadership, Governance, and Administration

Standard 4: Leadership and Governance

The institution's system of governance clearly defines the roles of institutional constituencies in policy development and decision-making. The governance structure includes an active governing body with sufficient autonomy to assure institutional integrity and to fulfill responsibilities of policy and resource development, consistent with the mission of the institution.

Standard 5: Administration

The institution's administrative structure and services facilitate learning and research/scholarship, foster quality improvement and support the institution's organization and governance.

In the team's judgment, Muhlenberg College appears to meet the standards.

Summary of evidence and findings

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff, students, and trustees, the team developed the following conclusions relative to the standard. Per the Bylaws of the College, the responsibilities, terms and structure of the Board of Trustees are clearly delineated. The 2004 Governance Committee Final Report affirmed the role of the Board, and provided additional recommendations with respect to its functions. Prominent among the recommendations is the addition of Article I, Section 11 of the Bylaws, "Working Resolutions," that stipulates the annual adoption of a set of resolutions to "supplement these Bylaws and control and guide the operations of the Board." As a result, the Board has the opportunity to remind Board members on a regular basis of the expectations regarding their duties. Furthermore, the Nominations and Governance Committee of the Board conducts a general review approximately every five years. Board member performance is assessed through an annual self-evaluation process, and members are assessed by the Nominations and Governance Committee prior to serving additional terms. The sixty-member Board of Observers, formed in 2005 to conduct academic and administrative departmental assessments, serves to identify potential talent for the Board of Trustees as well as to cultivate donors.

The senior staff of the College, led by President John I. Williams, Jr., are dedicated to furthering the mission of the College and supporting its constituencies. Importantly, the senior staff feels supported by the Board of Trustees, indicating the Board is understanding of its role and does not resort to "micromanaging," providing further evidence of the delineation of roles and responsibilities. Several upcoming retirements and senior level shifts will provide the relatively new president with an opportunity to shape his leadership team according to the College's future needs.

Muhlenberg's structures seem well-defined, and the senior staff enjoys an appropriate amount of autonomy as a group and in their individual roles. The theme of collaboration across departments was a regular refrain. However, overall administrative resources are stretched. The team heard repeatedly the refrain that Muhlenberg has been operating in a "do more with less" mode for several years. Some staffs are so lean as to strain effectiveness, especially as the needs and expectations of students have risen. The College will need to explore organizational realignment especially in the areas of student and administrative support using a strategic as opposed to an additive approach.

Faculty participation in governance seems appropriate, through monthly general faculty meetings as well as specific faculty committees and general college committees. The faculty meetings are chaired by the provost, who brings matters to the faculty for full consideration. However, there are a great many

faculty committees, with no faculty executive group functioning in an oversight fashion or in an advisory capacity to the provost, especially with setting agendas for faculty meetings.

Several individuals reported a lack of clarity about the Budget Advisory Committee, specifically with respect to how faculty and staff are appointed.

The Student Government Association serves as the representative body for student voice as interests with the administration. Students report general transparency with respect to decision-making at the College; although there are one or two recent examples of disagreement (e.g. the Campus Protest and Demonstration Policy), students overall seem satisfied with the opportunity for input. Both faculty and students are afforded two “constituent representatives,” respectively, to the Board of Trustees.

Faculty report (through interviews and the HERI Faculty Survey) effective communication with the administration, and timely access to information. Managers and staff report that communication among the various units is effective and “carried out in good faith and trust.” There exist some opportunities, such as with the budget process, and the Budget Advisory Committee in particular, where additional transparency might be enhanced. However, Muhlenberg is to be commended for its overall climate of collegiality, mutual support, and commitment to the College’s mission.

Significant Accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- The Board of Trustees regularly undertakes reviews of its Working Resolutions, and recently enhanced its relationship with the Alumni Association.
- The Board regularly conducts a 360 degree review process of the president.
- Communication among and within groups appears collaborative and collegial, thanks to general goodwill, effective structures, and a genuine commitment to community.

Suggestions

- With two key senior staff searches underway, Muhlenberg should prepare accordingly for departmental shifts and reorganization to accommodate current and future needs. In particular, the College might evaluate the feasibility of dividing the VP for Student Affairs/Dean of Students role to allow a new vice president the opportunity to focus on strategic planning and organizational alignment.
- With low turnover rates for administrative managers and support staff, limiting the institution’s ability to diversify, the College should invest in training and education resources to ensure that students from diverse backgrounds are supported and welcomed by all members of the community.
- While there are financial and cultivation benefits associated with the Board of Observers, faculty expressed misgivings due to the lack of understanding some members possess about specific academic disciplines. As part of its recently launched review of the Board of Observers, the College should conduct a “cost/benefit” analysis, and determine whether the system should be restructured to address faculty and administrative concerns.
- The Budget Advisory Committee should become part of the faculty governance structure, by having faculty vote on its representatives and then report back at regular faculty meetings.

- The faculty should explore streamlining the governance process. There are too many committees, which place an undue burden on faculty who already feel taxed by teaching, scholarship and service obligations.

Recommendations

- Muhlenberg’s “do more with less” approach has proven unsustainable, and can no longer be perceived as a badge of honor. The College should conduct a full review and evaluation of its administrative needs, adopting a strategic as opposed to an additive approach, in order to meet its current and future needs.

Requirements

The team has no requirements for this standard.

Chapter 4 Faculty

Standard 10: Faculty

The institution's instructional, research, and service programs are devised, developed, monitored, and supported by qualified professionals.

Overall evaluation

In the team's judgment, the institution appears to meet this standard.

Summary of evidence and findings

Based on a review of the self-study, of other institutional documents including the Faculty Handbook, the 2005 Talents Entrusted to Our Care Strategic Plan, the Diversity Strategic Plan, the 2014 HERI faculty survey, HERI senior surveys of 2008 and 2012, and the 2014 NSSE survey, as well as college and departmental websites and interviews with faculty and students, the visiting assessment team developed the following conclusions relative to Standard 10.

We observed a faculty appropriately qualified to fulfill the educational mission of the College, with 87% holding terminal degrees. Faculty showed extraordinary dedication to student learning. Despite the constraints inherent in the competing demands of a 3-3 teaching load, additional work with students outside of class, service to the College and wider community, and ongoing scholarly development in an environment of necessarily limited space and stretched resources, we see evidence of relatively high faculty morale and engagement with students. On the HERI survey, faculty reported feeling valued by colleagues for their teaching and research at rates higher than those of their comparison institutions. They appear to be strongly engaged in student learning, and compared to their counterparts at peer institutions, place higher importance on mentoring students and on helping them develop in all areas of scholarship, including critical analytic skills, multicultural awareness, and openness to other beliefs. HERI responses indicate a general climate of active learning, with greater engagement of students in discussions and group presentation and less reliance on lectures than is typical of peer institutions. These survey findings were echoed in our meetings with faculty. In surveys and conversations, students echo our impression of a faculty dedicated to student learning. Students report high rates of satisfaction with faculty availability outside of class, interactions with faculty, and major advising, although some expressed a desire for more autonomy in selecting their own major advisors. The availability of faculty may have reached its natural limits, however, and some department chairs expressed concern about the effects of current pressures to take on increasing class sizes.

Through our reading of the Faculty Handbook and interactions with faculty we see evidence of significant institutional commitment to fairness and transparency in hiring, tenure, and promotion of tenure track lines. The faculty handbook details the standards and procedures for hiring, performance review, tenure, promotion, and any appeals of tenure and promotion decisions. The clear guidelines for the selection interview and candidate evaluation form help to ensure a consistent, fair process of hiring. The timing of tenure reviews is somewhat flexible, with provisions for a one-year extension from the Provost in the case of illness, paternity/maternity, or family emergency. The timeline of Revisions to the Faculty Handbook Regarding Evaluations and Grievance Procedures demonstrates the College's ongoing engagement in clarifying and refining its standards and procedures. The HERI faculty survey indicates generally high satisfaction with institutional structures for faculty decision-making in tenure and promotion, academic policies and curriculum, and faculty development.

There is less clarity about non-tenure track lines, which apparently has resulted in uneven practices across departments. Chairs report that there needs to be more uniform correspondence between the titles given to non-tenure track faculty and their specific responsibilities. The Faculty Policy and Personnel Committee (FPPC) is working on this issue in terms of clarifying the governance policy. Chairs also reported a need for more uniform practices in light of policy, noting that a long history of financial and time constraints led to a pattern of ad hoc decision making because it was simply easier, short-term, than making new policy. We encourage FPPC's efforts to clarify and standardize expectations and responsibilities within non-tenure track faculty title across the departments.

We also were concerned about the relationship of the Wescoe school faculty to the general faculty of Muhlenberg, a function of the relationship between these two entities within the institution. We understand from our readings and conversations with Wescoe representatives that new hires are to be vetted by department chairs in the corresponding area of the curriculum, but some hires preceded this policy, some were reported to have "slipped through" without adherence to this policy (possibly as rehires from an earlier time and vetting), and some may have been subject to "mission creep," insofar as the range of courses original to the conditions of their hiring have expanded over the years without department chairs feeling as if they had sufficient input in these decisions.

We see evidence that the College offers institutional support to faculty for their teaching and scholarly responsibilities. The College places a high premium on excellence in teaching, noting that it remains "foremost among the criteria used to evaluate members of the faculty. Other criteria are, in part, evaluated by examining the influence they have on teaching performance" (Faculty Handbook, section 3.2.5.1). Peer visits to the classroom are an integral part of the tenure review process, with second year review visits serving a teaching development function and third year visits, a more evaluative one. Institutional support for the advancement and development of faculty in teaching includes a very active Faculty Center for Teaching that offers formal and informal conversations on pedagogy, curriculum, and a range of special topics, as well as course design workshops, ongoing reading groups, and the like. Financial support for faculty research and scholarship includes leaves, for which faculty become eligible after seven years with full pay for one semester or half-pay for two semesters. The Faculty Handbook lists some additional faculty fellowships

We see evidence that the College offers institutional support for new tenure-track faculty, with varying levels of start-up funds, no expectation of first year advising, a faculty mentoring program, two years of targeted programs through the Faculty Center for Teaching, and a developmental review in the second year to assess and support teaching, research, and service for the three year review. Funds are also available for the completion of doctoral studies and dissertation for faculty who arrive pre-Ph.D. Many colleges have moved toward offering a semester's paid leave after the first three years, which gives junior faculty an additional opportunity to focus on scholarship that pays dividends in the intellectual vitality of the community, and we understand a proposal for a revenue-neutral version of this will soon come before the faculty. We would encourage the College in these kinds of efforts.

The College is committed to recruitment of faculty from historically under-represented populations and retention remains a challenge, but recent data suggests a positive trend. There have been fewer resignations from the faculty from the most recent cohorts, and if the numbers continue to hold, then the Consortium for Faculty Diversity program may be helping to increase the success rate. Strategic use of Mellon funds has resulted in at least one new hire.

Faculty publication rates appear to be somewhat low, especially given the rising expectations in recent years, and yet, this may be typical of institutions with a 3-3 teaching load and high expectations for interactions with students beyond the classroom. In light of the faculty teaching load, we find it appropriate that Muhlenberg has taken Ernest Boyer's broadening of the definition of scholarship as their standard. The Faculty Handbook lists the scholarship of application (of knowledge to consequential questions), the scholarship of artistic production, the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, and the scholarship of teaching, including the systematic study of pedagogy. The "dissemination of information" appears not to be restricted entirely to traditional academic publication, and yet, the guidelines for review give some priority to traditional, peer-reviewed published scholarship.

In terms of outcomes, only one individual appears to have been denied tenure since 1998, which suggests that the College is offering ample support for its faculty in meeting the requirements for tenure or, possibly, that individuals who would otherwise be denied tenure are self-selecting to resign at the mid-probationary review, as 20 individuals have done since the 1998-1999 cohort. The Faculty Handbook indicates explicitly that "tenure is granted because very positive reasons exist for doing so rather than lack of reasons for not doing so." Since 1998, termination has occurred during the years before the tenure review in six cases (four in one cohort), but none from cohorts since 2009. We heard from various constituencies that decisions at the third year review typically result in about 25% attrition (this includes those terminated and those who resign), and it appears that the third year review represents a more critical decision point than tenure.

Academic freedom is explicitly supported in the Faculty Handbook, and we do not see any cause for concern in this area.

Significant Accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- We applaud the exceptional dedication and collegiality of the Muhlenberg faculty and support current initiatives toward even better support of junior faculty.
- We support FPPC's initiatives toward clarifying the titles, roles, and specific responsibilities associated with various types of non-tenure track appointments.

Suggestions

- As noted in other chapters, the strategic planning process should examine ways to streamline the governance, including strategic pruning in order to focus efforts and faculty time most effectively in meeting the College mission and goals.
- The governance should provide greater clarity about the relationship of Wescoe faculty to the general faculty of the College, particularly through the corresponding departments.

Recommendations

The team has no recommendations for this standard.

Requirements

The team has no recommendations for this standard.

Chapter 5

Student Retention and Admissions

Standard 8: Student Retention and Admissions

The institution seeks to admit students whose interests, goals, and abilities are congruent with its mission and seeks to retain them through the pursuit of the students' educational goals.

In the team's judgment, Muhlenberg College appears to meet the standard.

Summary of evidence and findings:

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff, students, the team developed the following conclusions relative to the standard.

Despite the challenges of recruiting a talented pool of students in the era of the post-Great Recession, coupled with demographics shifting away from the Northeast, Muhlenberg's admission results have remained relatively steady. The College experienced a small decrease in enrollment from 2225 in fall 2010 to 2176 in fall 2014, a 2.3% decline. The acceptance rate has increased at a similar rate, from 48.1% in 2010 to 52.8% in 2014. A large challenge for the College continues to be the focus on recruiting of students from the Northeast, which is its traditional market. The admission staff has begun to focus on expanding to other regions within the United States and internationally. Recruitment initiatives will be augmented by the addition of two professional staff members (an international recruiter and a data analyst) approved by the president and senior staff in fall 2015. It is worth noting that the entire Muhlenberg community supports the College's admission goals, and is heavily involved in the endeavor of attracting and yielding students.

Diversity initiatives in recruitment are bearing fruit. Students of color comprised 15.2% of the Class of 2018, versus 14% in the Class of 2014. In keeping with its Diversity Strategic Plan, the College has realized growth both with respect to overall students of color as well as graduation rates. However, there are some concerns (reflected in the HERI Senior Survey) with students of color reporting higher incidents of uncomfortable interactions and discrimination, and all students (majority and non-majority) reporting dissatisfaction with the diversity of the student body. This point was also made by the students interviewed by the team, who pointed in particular to the lack of dedicated support for international students. The College will need to continue and enhance broad-based collaboration around diversity in order to sustain steady enrollment figures and to improve any campus climate concerns.

Given limited resources, financial aid is a continuing concern. Muhlenberg is 92% need-blind in admitting students, with financial need taken into consideration for the remaining 8% of applicants. Therefore, keeping the discount rate (39.2% for the Class of 2018 and 39.8% for the Class of 2019) below the NACUBO average will continue to be a priority.

Significant Accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- Broad-based, collaborative efforts to diversify the applicant pool and student body are commendable as the College faces continuing demographic concerns.

Suggestions

- While the College has made progress on diversity recruitment, it will need to provide greater focus in concert with enrollment goals. An important component of that effort will be addressing

campus climate issues to ensure that diverse students not only graduate, but feel welcomed and fully integrated as members of the Muhlenberg student body.

Recommendations

The team has no recommendations for this standard.

Requirements

The team has no requirements for this standard.

Chapter Six

Educational Offerings,

Standard 11: Educational Offerings

The institution's educational offerings display academic content, rigor, and coherence that are appropriate to its higher education mission. The institution identifies student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings.

In the team's judgment, Muhlenberg College appears to meet the standard.

Summary of evidence and findings

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff, and students, the team developed the following conclusions relative to the standard.

Muhlenberg College offers a clearly articulated set of educational offerings in the form of majors, minors, certificate, and non-credit specialty programs. The majority of these programs are assessed both in respect to the learning outcomes of the major and, to some extent, their integration with the general education curriculum. The self-study did note some challenges in both assessing and integrating interdisciplinary programs into the larger curriculum but appears to be making consistent progress in developing methodologies and protocols that will remediate this perceived gap.

Departments have clearly articulated written statements of expected learning outcomes. Employing a systematic random sample of syllabi, examination of almost all syllabi explicitly stated course expectations. However, few syllabi referred either to departmental or college-wide learning outcomes. The need to do this was mentioned briefly in a memo dated 8/1/14 from the Dean of Academic Life. According to Standard 11 of *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education* (2006, 12th ed.) "appropriate interrelationships among institutional, program-level, and course-level learning outcomes should be evident (P.41). An effective way of doing this is to map each course learning outcome that is encompassed in departmental or college-wide learning outcomes to both the course as well as the higher order learning outcome. "Students learn more effectively when they understand the key learning outcomes of their program, course and institution ..." (P. 41).

Muhlenberg College has been proactive in designing multiple methodologies to provide a variety of opportunities to complement departmental learning goals as witnessed by their success in receiving the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement. Other active pedagogies include service learning, study abroad programs, internships and independent research.

The College currently has a "no MOOCs" policy, choosing instead, to develop a small number of online and blended courses with an associate dean position created to oversee this area of the curriculum. In addition to participation in consortium, national, and international conversations about online learning, the initiatives in this area include funds for faculty development through which four faculty members developed online courses in the summer of 2015 that fulfilled general education requirements, with student feedback indicating a high percentage who found their online course to be as rigorous or more rigorous than typical campus courses. Another five faculty will pilot new courses this summer, including an online course that could not be taught using campus resources only, as it will use of a Washington state coastal area as the basis for teaching marine biology.

Information literacy is primarily the responsibility of the library. They have used a variety of assessment tools to this purpose that indicate improvements in that area but in a narrowly focused manner. Specifically targeted needs for information literacy are dealt with in academic departments as the types of information literacy varies by discipline.

Muhlenberg College has a well-established set of educational programs that are evolving to meet the needs of an increasingly interdependent world. There are numerous opportunities at the college, within the Lehigh Valley Association of Independent Colleges, community engagement and study off campus both within the United States and abroad to offer diverse educational experiences. There is one caveat however. There is disagreement as to whether the educational offerings at the Wescoe School are equivalent to those of the traditional liberal arts program. This is discussed further elsewhere in this document along with accompanying recommendations.

Significant Accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- Being a recipient of the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement.

Suggestions

- We accept Muhlenberg College's suggestion that allocation of resources to staff the new general education curriculum, the MILA courses, and new programs abroad be carefully monitored so as not to overwhelm staff and faculty responsible for these programs (p. 87 self-study).

Recommendations

- Syllabi should not only reflect course goals, they should map these course goals to both departmental and college-wide learning outcomes.

Requirements

The team has no requirements for this standard.

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.

In the team's judgment, Muhlenberg College appears to meet the standard.

Summary of evidence and findings

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff, and students, the team developed the following conclusions relative to the standard.

For the purposes of this report the team focused on the development and implementation of the new general education requirement that was "rolled out" for the class year starting in 2013. Revisions of general education requirements are always challenging and often fraught with emotion and, on occasion, idiosyncratic. The process described in the self-study suggested that there was little of that, although we are sure there were some emotional appeals. Instead the process was slow, deliberative, rational, and

ever mindful of the educational mission of the college. Multiple modes of assessment were employed to ascertain the best paths to follow when making this relatively dramatic revision. And the results provide a clear model of what Muhlenberg College considers to be a liberally educated individual.

The new general education requirement incorporates many best practices such as a Culminating Undergraduate Experience (CUE), commonly referred to as a capstone. Other best practices include writing across the curriculum, making connections between the general education requirement and majors and minors, strengthening the place and role of diversity within the curriculum and clustering courses to mutually reinforce “a shared theme, question, or area of interest” as examined from the perspective of different disciplines.

The team cautions the college that such a new and ambitious general education program carries with it a substantial burden of assessment tasks. For example, assessing the success of writing across the curriculum or linked courses. Given the newness of this curriculum there is more than sufficient time to make sure these assessment mechanisms are in place. We do note that standardized tests such as NSSE do not necessarily capture the curricular success of these initiatives, but there are a plethora of other assessment mechanisms that do and evidence suggests that the college is making significant progress in assessing this program from its initiation.

Muhlenberg College’s new general education curriculum is a well-thought out and thoroughly reviewed successor to the previous general education requirement and well reflects the mission of the college.

Significant Accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- A thorough and thoughtful revision of the general education process continually driven by ongoing assessment mechanisms and open and thoughtful dialogue.

Suggestions

The team has no suggestions on this standard.

Recommendations

The team has no recommendations on this standard.

Requirements

The team has no requirements on this standard.

Standard 13: Related Educational Offerings

The institution’s programs or activities that are characterized by particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorship meet appropriate standards.

In the team’s judgment, Muhlenberg College appears to meet the standard.

Summary of evidence and findings

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff, and a Wescoe School student, the team developed the following conclusions relative to the standard.

Muhlenberg College offers several related educational offerings. All have been in existence for some time and appear well-organized and systematically directed to meet specific needs.

For predominantly traditional students there is the Lehigh Valley Association of Independent Colleges, the semester in Washington DC with an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America college consortial program and opportunities for study abroad in several contexts. These related educational offerings are with organizations external to the college.

For the purposes of this evaluation the team chooses to focus on the Wescoe School that has been in operation for over 100 years. The school operates under the College's Mission and also has its own mission statement. The specific purpose of the Wescoe School is to "provide lifelong learners the opportunity to continue and enhance their education and to do so in ways that recognize their experience, maturity, motivation, life circumstances and capacity for independent scholarship" (catalog). The Wescoe School offers traditional liberal arts majors and accelerated degree programs, and oversees the College's summer study program. Over the past decade, in an effort to align student preparation with local workforce trends, concentration areas in Healthcare Management, Human Resources Leadership, Financial Services, and Supply Chain Management have been added to the Business Administration major in the Accelerated Degree Program.

Drawn from the local community, the student population is richly diverse, comprising adults of varying age, socioeconomic, racial, and cultural backgrounds. Wescoe is a provider for the local Careerlink/Workforce Investment Board, which allocates funds to downsized workers for academic retraining after a lay-off. Student veterans and current military personnel are a thriving group in the Wescoe student population. All student that are 24 years of age or older must enroll in the Wescoe School.

The Dean of the Wescoe School reports to the Provost of the College and through the Provost to the President and Board of Trustees. All curricular changes to Wescoe programs are approved by the Wescoe School Academic Policy and Curriculum Committee (WSAP/CC) and then by the full Muhlenberg College faculty.

The faculty teaching in the Wescoe School include full-time Muhlenberg faculty teaching overloads, adjuncts teaching in both the day and Wescoe programs, and adjuncts who teach exclusively for Wescoe. All faculty teaching in the Wescoe School must have a minimum of a subject-appropriate master's degree; in nearly all cases, they also have prior college teaching experience. It is important to note that there are no full-time faculty exclusively dedicated to the Wescoe School.

The graduation rates for students pursuing their Bachelor degree through the accelerated degree program range from 77.8 % to 100 % over the last four years. Learning goals for traditional liberal arts courses in the Wescoe School are the same as those for courses taught during the day school. For courses in the accelerated degree program learning goals include not only the content of the courses but also skill development in areas such as collaboration, communication, team work, and leadership. Additionally, students pursuing majors in the accelerated degree program are required to complete a capstone project with an outside organization that is assessed through rubrics.

The Wescoe School is fully integrated into the larger Muhlenberg community, most notably in the piloting of new college-wide initiatives. The College's first blended learning course was offered during summer 2014 by a Wescoe adjunct faculty member who has extensive online teaching experience.

Additionally, Wescoe, in conjunction with the Provost's Office, worked with a market research firm to prepare a feasibility study to evaluate the viability of offering a small number of blended-learning master's or post-baccalaureate programs in areas in which the College has particular strength. It should be noted that at least some staff have questioned the efficacy of the marketing study.

It is important to note that there are varying viewpoints regarding the question of whether a degree earned through the Wescoe School is equivalent to a Muhlenberg degree earned by "day students" that are in the traditional residential liberal arts program. Wescoe School staff and the two Wescoe school faculty interviewed insisted that this was the case. Some full-time college faculty questioned whether this was the case. And, when this question was posed to department chairs there was a substantial and vociferous response that this was most certainly not the case. They supplemented this assertion with vignettes of how Wescoe students that attended day classes regularly needed supplemental instruction in many areas.

The chairs provided mixed opinions as to the degree in which they were involved in hiring Wescoe School adjuncts that taught within their programs and almost all stated that had no role in evaluation of these faculty. Some claimed they had never even met some of the Wescoe School adjuncts who taught subject matter in their departments.

Conversations throughout the course of the team visit indicated that the Wescoe School is viewed as a potentially substantial source of alternative revenue. Currently it generates marginal revenue in the range of \$1,000,000, with a projection of \$800,000 for the upcoming fiscal year. The Board of Trustees and senior administration see this as a potentially significant area of revenue expansion. The team believes that this needs to be done in a very strategic manner and will require investment in student support staff and, possibly, full-time dedicated faculty.

Significant Accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

None

Suggestions

The team has no suggestions on this standard.

Recommendations

- Expansion of the Wescoe Program should be a well-planned and strategic process subsequent to a more thorough assessment of the relationship between the Wescoe School program and the traditional liberal arts program. This includes providing sufficient student support personnel that are regularly present during the hours of operation, particularly in the evening and for Saturday class offerings. The college should seriously consider devoting full-time faculty lines to this program, as the practice of relying exclusively on faculty overloads taxes an already "stretched" faculty. Also there is such substantial reliance on adjuncts that the use of full-time dedicated faculty to this program will enhance its ability to provide quality instruction to these non-traditional students.

Requirements

The team has no requirements on this standard.

Chapter 7

Student Support Services and Campus Life

Standard 9: Student Support Services

The institution provides student support services reasonably necessary to enable each student to achieve the institution's goals for students.

In the team's judgment, Muhlenberg College appears to meet his standard.

Summary of evidence and findings

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff, students, and others, the team developed the following conclusions relative to Standard 9.

The Dean of Academic Life (DAL) and the Vice President for Student Affairs/Dean of Students (DOS) oversee the primary programs for student support, in academic and student affairs, respectively.

Conceptually, student support is divided into sections, roughly corresponding to milestones in a student's developmental journey from admission to post-graduate opportunities. Support for the transition from high school to college begins immediately upon acceptance with the Red Doors program for newly admitted students. A June Advising day includes a formal matriculation and a one-on-one meeting. There is a community based, Pre-Orientation option followed by Orientation proper that emphasizes academic advising, campus safety, residential living, and diversity.

The DOS supervises a division that provides robust student support services with a significant portfolio of reportages and programs: athletics, campus safety, judicial affairs, multicultural life, residential services, dining services coordination, health services, counseling, student activities, Title IX, Greek life, and community service. The DOS also coordinates a Behavioral Intervention Team which focuses on specific "students of concern." The students the team interacted with feel well supported in campus life.

With the watchwords, "what is in the best interest of the student," the DAL oversees programs for academically talented students, such as the Prestigious Awards Initiative, Student Travel Grants, and Summer Research Stipends. The Academic Resource Center provides content area tutoring, course specific assistance, and learning skills instruction, and includes an Office of Disability Services, and pre-professional advising for health and legal careers. Students' academic progress is monitored and academic standing is determined, and academic integrity policies are enforced. (Historically, the DAL have overseen The Career Center, which now reports to College Advancement.)

A recent DAL Annual Report (2015) documents substantial use of academic support services (peer tutors, learning specialists, LD/ADHD support, note-taking services, and transition workshops) and career services, with positive feedback from users. Overall, data provided suggests Muhlenberg students are making steady and satisfactory progress toward their degrees in a supportive environment.

Significant Accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- Though it was an outcome of a grass roots effort led by multi-cultural students, The Diversity Strategic Planning Committee represents significant institutional progress in the support of a diversifying student body (as well as faculty and staff.)

Suggestions

- The team agrees with the self-study's own suggestion to “continue to assess resources in high-traffic, high-impact student services.”
- The team suggests greater full-time, professional staff support for international students beyond what is now only an International Student Committee.
- The team also agrees with the suggestion that “the College carefully assess the types of support necessary to encourage success for our current and future student populations,” including-- the team would add, emphatically—students of The Wescoe School.

Recommendations

The team has no recommendations for this standard.

Requirements

The team has no requirements for this standard.

Chapter 8

Institutional Assessment and the Assessment of Student Learning

Standard 7: Institutional Assessment

This standard requires demonstration that “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.”

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

This standard requires a demonstration of “knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals” based on the articulation of key learning outcomes, courses to support these key learning outcomes, assessment of the achievement of key outcomes, and the use of assessment results for improving teaching and learning.

Overall evaluation

In the team’s judgment, the institution appears to meet Standards 7 and 14.

Summary of evidence and findings

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents including appendices of supplementary material, college and departmental websites, and interviews with faculty, staff, students, or others, the visiting team developed the following conclusions relative to Standard 7 and 14.

We observed from interactions with faculty and staff and in the self-study documents a substantial institutional commitment to ongoing assessment of student learning, administrative effectiveness, and continuous improvement of practices. In particular, the Academic and Administrative Assessment plans document a systematic approach to assessment designed to inform program improvement. At the department level, there appears to be substantial variability across departments in the degree to which regular and sustained assessment of student learning has been implemented. For example, the Languages, Literatures, and Cultures assessment report gives evidence of an ongoing process of assessment, but for some other departments, the development of assessment plans seems to be more of a work in progress. The interdisciplinary programs noticeably lag other programs in the development of an assessment framework. Results of a poll of 43 faculty and staff at a 2014 program assessment workshop suggest that about a third of them had established benchmarks for student progress in most areas, and about half, in some areas. This sounds promising and shows clear progress from the 2012 results of a similar survey. Clearly, the work of building effective assessment programs and institutional capacity is ongoing. We note, for example, that the newly created rubric for the cluster courses as an excellent instrument that is being used well, and conversations with faculty indicate substantial work on comparable rubrics or assessment tools for other areas of the general education program.

Workshops and the work of the Dean of Institutional Assessment and Academic Planning with individual departments, faculty, and staff indicate an institutional commitment to assessment. This commitment is evident in the systematic scheduling of assessment, and especially, in the reports of the assessment of student learning in specific areas, such as writing, information literacy, and languages, literatures, and cultures.

The College has, for the most part, articulated key learning outcomes clearly and coherently, and has made these learning outcomes accessible in the College Mission Statement, in the Academic Program

Goals adopted in 2011, in most departmental webpages, and in statements required for course syllabi. College-level goals are often well-integrated with department goals, especially as some of the stronger departmental mission statements make explicit reference to the College Mission Statement. In these cases, the department's role in meeting College missional priorities is evident. Many academic department websites present their missions and learning goals in easy-to-assess, operational terms. The departments of Accounting, Art, Biochemistry, Economics & Finance, Languages, Literatures, & Cultures, Religion Studies, and Sociology & Anthropology offer some fine examples. The further division of student learning goals into subareas such as content/knowledge, process/habits of mind, lab/computational skills, and values provides a very useful, systematic structure for the assessment of student learning, for which the departments of History, Philosophy, Physics, Political Science, and Psychology offer some excellent examples. In all of these cases, mission and goals were immediately accessible from the department homepage. However, not all of the mission and goals statements were easily accessible from the departmental websites. In one case (Theater & Dance), the Mission and Goals are clearly articulated but not immediately accessible from the department's homepage; an explicit homepage link would help. Some departmental websites (English, Environmental Science, Film Studies, Mathematics & Computer Science, Neuroscience), reported as having posted mission and goals at one time, no longer seem to have them accessible from their homepages.

We applaud the Wescoe school focus on the assessment and development of support for individual student writing. We also commend the collaborative work invested in the assessment of the capstone project. However, reviewing these two programs together, one cannot help but wonder if the capstone project, which we believe is team-based, might also hide some of the issues discovered in the development of individual students' writing abilities, namely, although the group may be successfully completing the team capstone project and doing excellent work, we cannot infer from that that each student in the group has profited equally from their Wescoe experience. We encourage the Wescoe faculty to build on the model developed for the assessment and development of individual student writing and extend that to other core learning outcomes in Wescoe programs.

The College has developed systematic procedures for developing a curriculum in line with its mission and goals for student learning, as evident in its forms for the designation of courses to fulfill specific general education goals and for the addition of new courses as well as in scheduled plans to review the general education aspects of the curriculum.

Evidence of an assessment "feedback loop" is strong in key areas. Effective use of assessment data was clearly evident in the development of the new general education program, which was adopted for the class matriculating in 2013. For example, NSSE data suggesting that seniors did not encounter an appropriate level of academic challenge were a significant motivation for developing the Culminating Undergraduate Experience graduation requirement. Assessment results were also used in meaningful and useful ways to inform the development of the diversity strategic plan and to improve practices for writing and information literacy. The College has assessed key student learning outcomes in general education areas and used the results of its assessments to improve student learning. We see evidence of this in the Writing Program Committee (WPC) report with its multiple assessments of student writing that resulted in a best practices document which appears to be a "living document," to be updated in light of each wave of writing assessment. Similarly, the library assessment of information literacy document contains action steps in response to areas needing greater support.

The College uses multi-level, multi-measure assessments of student learning, so that data from complementary and convergent sources may inform decision-making. These include both externally and internally-developed, direct and indirect measures of student learning. Reports from the Library, the

Writing Program Committee, and the Languages, Literatures, and Cultures all demonstrated the ongoing process of improving in-house assessment measures. The Information Literacy assessment showed exceptional clarity about the type of measures used and, implicitly, gave context for interpretation. The WPC assessed important behavioral contexts for learning (students' self-reported frequency of brainstorming, proofreading, meeting to discuss writing, etc.), which may be especially informative in the interpretation of more direct measures of student learning. Similar behavioral measures could be of use in the development of other in-house measures across the College. Externally developed measures include widely-used student satisfaction surveys that offer benchmark comparisons with peer institutions (HERI Senior Survey, NSSE). At a meta-level of assessment, the College's use of logic models of inputs, outputs, and impact for mission and goals-based assessment and decision-making in the area of student affairs suggests a strategic approach of maximum efficiency. Such models can help to identify the most effective use of resources for the greatest improvements for students.

At a structural level, the Board of Observers' role in assessment is potentially problematic. To be sure, the current make-up of the Board of Trustees, many of whom began deeper engagement with Muhlenberg as members of the Board of Observers, is testament to the effectiveness of the Board of Observers in identifying and grooming new trustees, which was one of the program's core goals. It is less clear that using the Board of Observers for external review is useful for effective assessment and program development, particularly in areas where the Board of Observers lacks members with appropriate expertise. Indeed, some employees expressed a reluctance to engage in substantive discussion of program challenges in the self-study leading up to the external review given that the reviewers drawn from the Board of Observers were not necessarily expert in the program area, may draw negative conclusions about the program from the self-study, and then might bring those conclusions to their service on the Board of Trustees, should they be elected to that role. Given that the Observers typically have other connections to the College, there is also risk that the Observer might place undue emphasis on non-representative data gathered from sources such as comments from children and their friends who are attending Muhlenberg or from their own experiences as Muhlenberg students, which may have been substantially different from that of current students.

Significant Accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- There is strong evidence of institutional commitment to the assessment of student learning, both administratively and in the curriculum, especially in the areas of general education and diversity.
- There is evidence of strong integration of mission and goals across levels of the institution, divisions, and departments.
- Learning goals are well-communicated in most cases, listed on College and departmental webpages and required for course syllabi.
- The multi-measure, multi-method approach to assessment used by the College enhances the reliability, validity, and utility of its assessments.
- Evidence of an assessment "feedback loop" is strong in key areas.

Suggestions

- All academic and administrative departmental webpages need to communicate mission and assessable learning goals in an easily accessible format.
- For many academic departments, clearer evidence is needed to demonstrate the integration of specific courses' goals with their department or program's mission and goals.

- The College has some exemplary assessment practices in place and is clearly on track to establish strong assessment programs across all programs. However, continued, sustained attention and resource investment will be needed to extend effective assessment across all facets of the institution. In particular, a substantial amount of the institutional capacity and energy for effective assessment seems to be invested in the position of the Dean of Institutional Assessment and Academic Planning, which poses a significant risk to further development of the assessment program should the staffing of that position change. Broadening the governance and administrative structures supporting assessment would mitigate that risk. For example, many institutions have created a college committee focused on institutional assessment that supports the work of an office like that of the Dean of Institutional Assessment and Academic Planning at Muhlenberg. Such a committee in collaboration with the Dean might lead in developing and monitoring schedules for assessment, making recommendations on data standards, and broadening the understanding of the value of assessment.
- The *Schedule for the General Education Assessment Plan* provides an excellent roadmap for the implementation of a general education assessment program that includes relevant direct and indirect assessment, as well as opportunities to use that work to inform program improvement. We suggest the College develop a similar schedule that includes all academic programs, many of which might benefit from an equally clear timetable and expectations for establishing effective assessment programs. Such a plan can also help ensure that development and implementation efforts are timed to make best use of institutional resources to support assessment without unduly burdening them.
- We suggest that the College continue to focus on developing administrative assessment that moves beyond counting units delivered to assessment that seeks to determine how the College might become more effective or efficient in delivering institutionally important outcomes. As one example, we applaud the reported shift of assessment focus in residential life from counting how many students reported being satisfied with a program experience to asking students the open-ended question, “What’s the most important thing you learned in this program?” which is much more likely to elicit responses than can help gauge how successful the program is in meeting its goals and how the program might be improved.

Recommendations

- Ambiguity about how the College allocates both budget and staff resources poses a significant threat to effective assessment. Developing some clarity around how assessment results will be used to inform resource allocation would avoid the development of an environment in which programs are incentivized to avoid hard questions or focus on identifying resource deficiencies so that they can paint their programs in the best possible light to gain new resources. In particular, we note that external reviews often recommend additional staffing, budget, or space, and it is unclear how these recommendations fit into the overall resource allocation process, particularly in an environment of constrained resources.
- As noted in the narrative, the Board of Observers program provides both institutional benefits and potential challenges to the assessment program. We recommend the College develop clarity about the Board of Observers process and its role in the assessment program. At a minimum, the role of the Observers on external review teams needs to be clarified. More generally, the Board of Observers process would benefit from clearly articulated goals, an effective assessment process to determine whether those goals are being met, and an honest assessment of the impact of the Board of Observers participation in effective program review.
- Given the substantial disjuncture in claims as to whether a Wescoe School degree is the equivalent of a traditional Muhlenberg degree, the lack of communication and evaluation

between traditional academic departments and Wescoe School adjuncts, and the differential assessment procedures between the traditional day program and the Wescoe School, we recommend that a uniform assessment procedure, including the assessment of student learning in those areas where learning goals are common, such as general education and shared majors, and the evaluation of adjuncts, rigor, and support service be implemented.

Requirements

The team has no requirements for this standard.