April 30, 2005

Dr. Graham B. Spanier
President
The Pennsylvania State University
201 Old Main Building
University Park, PA 16802

Dear Graham:

Enclosed please find the final report of the Middle States Accreditation team that visited the Penn State University April 10 through April 13, 2005. I understand that the Middle States Association has provided you with the mailing labels necessary for the distribution of the report to the appropriate individuals.

My colleagues on the team and I want to express once again how much we appreciate the effort that went into making our visit so successful and enjoyable. The hospitality and support provided by you and your colleagues were exemplary. We also want to convey our admiration for the quality of the report we had to review and, more generally, for the leadership that you and Penn State provide to the nation’s higher education community.

If we can be of further assistance to you as the accreditation process continues, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely yours,

William E. Kirwan
Chancellor

Enclosure

cc: Team Members:
    Trudy W. Banta
    Martha Garland
    Brent Ruben
    Mary Ann Swain
Middle States Staff:
    Elizabeth H. Sibolski
Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, and Students
of
Pennsylvania State University
University Park, Pa., 16802
by
An Evaluation Team Representing the
Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Team Members

Trudy W. Banta, Vice Chancellor for Planning and Institutional Improvement,
Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis

Martha Garland, Vice Provost and Dean for Undergraduate Studies, The Ohio
State University

William E. Kirwan (Chair), Chancellor of the University System of Maryland

Brent Ruben, Executive Director of the Center for Organizational Development and
Leadership, Rutgers University

Mary Ann Swain (Co-chair), Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs,
State University of New York

1. Prepared after a study of the institution's self-study report and a visit to the university
   from April 10 to April 13, 2005
2. This report represents the views of the evaluation team as interpreted by its chair; it
goes directly to the institution before being considered by the Commission. It is a
confidential document prepared as an educational service for the benefit of the institution.
All comments in the report are made in good faith, in an effort to assist Penn State
University. This report is based solely on an educational evaluation of the institution and
of the manner it appears to be carrying out its educational objectives.
AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

President:
Graham B. Spanier

Chief Academic Officer:
Rodney A. Erickson

Chair of the Board of Trustees:
Cynthia A. Baldwin
REPORT

I. Context and Nature of the Visit.

Institutional Overview. Founded in 1855, Penn State is a land grant, doctoral/research-extensive, state affiliated university. It offers associate, baccalaureate, certificate, Master's, doctorate, and first professional degrees. In FY 2003-04, it had approximately 7000 instructional staff serving some 84,000 students. It is governed by a 32 member Board of Trustees that includes the Governor as an ex officio member.

The Institutional Self-Study notes that, "In the last few years, Penn State has focused on four interdisciplinary initiatives that address important societal needs for the future, including the life-sciences, materials science, environmental studies, and children, youth and families. The 2004-05 budget plan includes funds to complete the multi-year commitment to provide a funding base for these initiatives. In addition, $1,000,000 is included for Information sciences and Technology as the University completes its multi-year development plan for the School." The study goes on to note that, "A total of $5,000,000 will be used to launch a series of high priority investments designed to enhance the University's educational programs."

Scope of Institution. Penn State is a single university geographically dispersed, with 24 campus locations, including the Penn State College of Medicine in Hershey, Pa., and the Dickinson School of Law in Carlisle, Pa. It offers distance learning education through an e-learning consortial arrangement among its various colleges and through its World Campus. The World Campus, which offers only online instruction, had approximately 10,000 course registrations in FY 2003-04.

Self-study Process. The university employed a Selected Topics Self-study process. The title of the study is Teaching and Learning in Undergraduate Education at Penn State. The self-study was guided by a 16 member steering committee, which included two vice presidents, nine administrators, three deans and two faculty members. The steering committee provided oversight for six working sub-committees containing a total of 35 faculty, staff and administrators. The work of the six subcommittees formed the basis of the six main chapters of the self-study.

II. Affirmation of Continued Compliance with Eligibility Requirements.

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews, the team affirms that the institution continues to meet eligibility requirements 1-7.

III. Compliance with Federal requirements: Issues Relative to State Regulatory or Other Accrediting Agency Requirements.
Based on review of the self-study, other institutional documents, and interviews, the team affirms that the institution’s Title IV cohort default rate is within federal compliance issues.

IV. Compliance with Accreditation Standards.

A. Standards Addressed Substantively within the Selected Topics

As summary comments, the Team was impressed by the remarkable spirit of pride in the Institution as expressed by virtually every individual and group of faculty, staff and students we interviewed. The university’s leadership enjoys broad-based and enthusiastic support. There appears to be an unusually high degree of alignment within the Institution for the President’s vision and goals. This is all the more notable because of the highly complex nature and organizational structure of this “single university geographically dispersed.”

Standard 8: Student Admissions

The Institution meets this standard.

Summary of evidence and findings – strengths

- Student recruitment and admissions processes are extremely well aligned with degree requirements, as evidenced by the Institution’s exceptionally high retention and graduation rates

- Extensive use of online resources provides prospective and current students with ready access to relevant materials

- A highly effective enrollment management operation produces robust enrollment in a complex network of campuses and programs

Suggestions for improvement

There is a disturbing and growing gap between tuition levels and available financial aid. The institution is well aware of this problem and is exploring ways to address the issue. Nevertheless, it caught the attention of the Team as an especially urgent matter. The recent drop in applications, though not large, could be a result of this problem and needs to be monitored. The root cause of the problem is the state’s inadequate support of the university, which now constitutes only about 24% of the Institution’s instruction budget. Hopefully, the recently announced reorganization, aimed at bringing even greater coherence to campus recruiting and enrollment strategies, is a step toward resolving the problem.
Recommendations

None.

Requirements.

None.

Standard 9: Student Support Services

The Institution meets this standard.

Summary of evidence and findings – strengths

- The Vice President for Student Affairs has set three goals for the division: (1) to enhance the student experience, (2) to build community, and (3) to develop civic responsibility and participation. Pursuing these goals will serve to help focus, prioritize, and integrate the many excellent separate activities that happen within such a large organization. She has further set an agenda to determine the appropriate level of services to be provided to students on all campuses and to assure that such services are available.

- Policies and procedures governing students are readily available on-line. Administrators on all campuses take steps to assure fair and just application of those policies and procedures.

- A “framework for diversity” has stimulated initiatives to increase the diversity of the student body and to improve the integration of all students into campus life. The Committee heard from students at the University Park campus that they had experienced a change in administrative, faculty, and student responsiveness to “hate incidents” during their tenure. Compared with a couple of years ago, it was their perception that the campus now unites in condemnation of such acts and rallies around individuals and groups affected by such incidents.

Recommendations

None.

Requirements

None.
Standard 10: Faculty

The Institution meets this standard.

Summary of evidence and findings - strengths

Penn State is dedicated to creating a culture that emphasizes the undergraduate experience in the context of a major research university. Evidence of the success of this effort can be seen in many areas, but perhaps nowhere is this outcome better illustrated than in the words of students we spoke with, indicating that "when you attend Penn State you become part of a family."

Within the past decade, the President has provided strong leadership in this regard, by articulating a vision of Penn State as a "student-centered research university." It is apparent that that vision has been energizing in many ways, and is being translated into an expectation that guides the thinking and activity of administrators, faculty and staff throughout the institution.

A reaffirmation of the importance of teaching and learning was provided in 2000 by a faculty committee which authored a report entitled: UniSCOPE 2000: A Multidimensional Model of Scholarship for the 21st Century. The report emphasized the value of an expanded view of scholarship focusing not only on research, but also on teaching and outreach, reflecting concepts presented in Boyer's Scholarship Reconsidered (1990).

The emphasis on teaching and student learning is apparent in policies which reinforce these values, and in any number of supportive activities and resources, including:

- Restructuring which will promote curricular and co-curricular integrity and coordination across all campuses.

- Increasing emphasis on teaching, and efforts to develop better methods for documenting teaching excellence in the appointment, promotion, and tenure review processes.

- Establishing university teaching development programs and grants programs supporting research (e.g., the public scholarship project and internationalizing the curriculum), and awards programs to recognize teaching excellence and support curricular improvement.

- College-level support for teaching and learning. Examples identified as "best practices" include: the Graduate School Teaching Certificate, John A. Dutton e-Education Institution of the College of Earth and Mineral Sciences (EMS), College of Engineering (Engineering Instructional Services (EIS), the Leonhard Center for the Enhancement of Engineering Education, and The Learning Factory in the Department of Mechanical and Nuclear Engineering.
• Establishment of, and support offered by, the Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence, which provides a unique and valuable resource dedicated to the support of innovations in teaching, and to the encouragement of continuous improvement initiatives in the academic domain. The Institute provides grants to support excellence, and sponsors pilot programs on teaching and learning effectiveness. Notable examples include a study of effectiveness of online placement, pilot projects on general education assessment, and a project to evaluate the experience for faculty and students in online courses.

• Efforts of the Division of Information Technology Services (ITS), which provides support through the Teaching and Learning with Technology initiative, and ANGEL (A New Global Environment for Learning), which is a course and instructional management platform, widely acknowledged as an extremely valuable resource to support instruction. Another significant resource is provided by e-Lion, an expert-based system designed to supplement student-adviser relationships, and to enhance student educational planning. Support and encouragement for student e-Portfolios represents another most noteworthy resource that supports the goals of student-centered practice.

Suggestions for Improvement:

The institution should expand its assessment efforts to include the impact of its many resources aimed at improving teaching and learning.

Specifically, additional attention to assessment would be useful for determining the extent to which faculty know about and use the many available teaching support initiatives and resources. Assessment would also be useful for evaluating the impact of these efforts, for identifying “best practices,” and as necessary, for focusing priorities and resources for future investment.

Note 1: Technology and Faculty-Student Contact. Some questions have been raised about whether the increased use of technology in support of teaching and learning, could be detrimental to student-faculty contact, and hence potentially damaging to the vision of a student-centered university. Assessment provides a means for addressing this technology-optimization issue.

Note 2: Communication. A number of faculty and administrators we spoke to commented that when they read the self-study report, they were pleasantly surprised by the wide array of resources and support initiatives available. This suggests that more communication and “marketing” of the many available resources may be needed and beneficial.

Recommendations.
None.

Requirements.
None.

Standards 11 and 12: Educational Offerings and General Education

The Institution meets these standards.

Summary of evidence and findings - strengths

- Management of university curriculum at all institutions is assumed to be essentially a faculty responsibility. In the case of Penn State, this responsibility is exercised through the leadership of the Faculty Senate in a manner that the Review Team views as extraordinarily valuable. Working truly collaboratively with the university administration (in a way not commonly seen in American higher education in general), the faculty leadership guides initiatives to reform curriculum, steers processes involved in implementation, and provides guidance about evaluating learning outcomes. The Review Team hypothesizes that the strength of the Senate comes in part from its concentrating almost exclusively on matters that are really central to faculty responsibility, namely curriculum and faculty issues. Whatever the explanation, Penn State should regard itself as extremely fortunate in its pattern of shared faculty and administrative leadership.

- Specific educational approaches that are especially valuable:
  - Clearly articulated goals for the general education curriculum: active learning experiences, writing across the curriculum, intercultural and international competence, health and activity.
  - Well organized and articulated specialized learning in the major fields, reflecting the scholarly excellence of a comprehensive research university. Further, numerous minors complement the major field of many students.
  - Curricular enhancements, including honors, study abroad, interdisciplinary opportunities and a range of combined degrees through the IUG program.
  - Appropriate support services for students, especially including systematic instruction in library use and sophisticated information retrieval; extensive collaboration between library staff and other instructional faculty.
  - Attention to providing a coordinated and systematic transition into the University, including on-line placement testing and integration of various student and course support systems through eLion and ANGEL.
- Research experiences provided for a number of undergraduates, with the University committed to expanding these opportunities

- A range of applied learning opportunities, including service learning, internships, and leadership development programs

- Careful attention through faculty oversight to assuring curricular consistency and transportability across the multi-campus system

- A First Year Seminar program, designed to provide each entering student with an understanding of the academic environment and the expectations he or she should have in engaging with this new community.

Suggestions for improvement:

Although the concept of a First Year Seminar is undoubtedly valuable, the Review Team believes that the institution would benefit from greater clarity—both for students and among the faculty—about the overarching goals and organizational expectations for these courses. Variations in presentation patterns, content, and credit hour value have left students expressing considerable confusion about the purposes of these experiences. Moreover, there appears to be disagreement about instructional responsibility for the seminars. Some individuals and publications state that only faculty teach the seminars, whereas, several deans say that a number of the seminars are taught by non-faculty staff.

Recommendations.

None.

Requirements.

None.

Standard 13: Related educational Activities

The Institution meets this standard.

Penn State describes itself as one University geographically dispersed. That vision is shared across its many campuses. The vision is further realized through faculty and administrative commitment to curricular integrity and by processes that balance central services and oversight with campus autonomy and initiative. Across a range of campuses and modes of delivery, Penn State promotes quality in its educational endeavors.
Campus Colleges

Summary of evidence and findings — strengths

- Faculty, staff, and students at all locations of the university are proud to be a part of the Penn State "family." The family metaphor was evident on all the campuses (including the University Park campus). The use of the metaphor came up voluntarily, especially in meetings with students on different campuses. Being "family" is to be a part of "the excellence that is Penn State" — to quote several different individuals.

- One Faculty Senate oversees courses and curricula for all Penn State campuses. The University (collectively and separately as faculty and administrative groups) espouses a seamless view of course equivalencies wherever a course/program approved by the Faculty Senate is offered. The self-study was an opportunity to review this value, reaffirm it, and to further strengthen its implementation.

- Administrators with University-wide responsibilities speak voluntarily about what they do for all the campuses. For example, the Vice President for Student Affairs spoke about collecting information on the extent and level of services in support of student learning on the different campuses with an intent to develop additional ways to assist the very small campuses in meeting the out of class needs of students on those campuses. Administrators on all campuses acknowledge the level of expertise and services available to them by being part of a multi-campus university.

- An exemplary University-wide information and decision-support infrastructure supports the educational endeavors of all the campuses — notable examples are eLion, ANGEL, the CAT, e-portfolio program, and LionShare (in development).

Suggestions for improvement

None.

Recommendations

None.

Requirements

None.

Distance Learning/Continuing Education

Summary of evidence and findings — strengths
• Programs, certificates, and courses offered in the distance learning mode are approved by the Faculty Senate. Efforts to promote curricular integrity among the campuses apply as well to distance education courses and programs. Faculty or instructors in the respective schools and colleges offer the distance education courses. Being "inside" the regular curricular structure promotes academic quality and coherence.

• Faculty are provided with design assistance in converting residential to distance learning modes of delivery. Sufficient technical assistance is available to encourage and support on-line learning in both residential and virtual environments. Penn State's vision is to blend these two environments into educational opportunities that marry the best of both.

• Penn State faculty have shown a willingness to engage in instructional experiments that "push the envelop" in leveraging technology to assist student learning and to provide greater access to a quality education for both traditional and adult learners. These experiments are shared around the University through workshops and other means for the benefit of other faculty.

Suggestions for improvement

• In a State with a projected population decline, Penn State will prosper if each of the campuses does reasonably well with enrollment (whether students are in residence or on-line). To foster that goal, revenue sharing models for campuses and distributed learning need to provide incentives for both entrepreneurship and cooperation. Previous revenue sharing models were focused on entrepreneurship. The goal is to recruit and retain traditional and adult learners within Penn State and not lose them to another campus or have them drop out. Campuses should reap some direct benefits from helping another campus(s) to recruit or retain students, just as they benefit from tuition income from students enrolled on their own campuses.

Recommendations

None.

Requirements

None.

Cooperative Extension, Non-credit Offerings, Experiential Learning, Other Educational Endeavors
Summary of evidence and findings — strengths

- As a land-grant institution, Cooperative Extension, non-credit instruction, credit for experiential learning, and public broadcasting are integral to the mission of Penn State. All extend access to the knowledge and insights developed by a research university to the people of the State (and elsewhere) and improve the knowledge and competencies of the populace.

- Penn State has excellent policies and practices that govern these educational outreach endeavors to ensure quality and coherence with mission. Furthermore, the University has restructured its outreach initiatives to foster greater synergy among these endeavors by assigning a Vice President for Outreach to serve as a “single point of advocacy” for the outreach mission. Conversations among individuals involved in these various enterprises may well yield other blended approaches to improving access to educational opportunities both within and outside the State.

Suggestions for improvement

None.

Recommendations

None.

Requirements.

None.

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

The Institution meets this standard.

Penn State has an impressive array of assessment activities underway. However, as noted in the self-study, there is not a systematic, integrated university-level assessment plan. We therefore recommend that such a plan be developed and implemented.

Summary of evidence and findings — strengths

- Across campuses there are several good examples of assessment activities and use of assessment findings to improve programs and services.

- Surveys of students, faculty, staff, and alumni are conducted periodically and the findings are widely disseminated. Various stakeholder groups discuss these findings and warranted improvement actions are implemented.
• The Faculty Senate initiatives are evaluated periodically and improvement actions are implemented.

• Annual plans submitted by academic and administrative units include information about initiatives designed to enhance the learning environment for students.

• Studies conducted under the auspices of the Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence center on evaluation of instructional and program innovations.

• Penn State has a successful CQI program that encompasses improvement initiatives in academic and student-centered areas.

• A data warehouse has been constructed and data stewards convene periodically to coordinate data collection, storage, retrieval, and analysis.

• Widespread recognition exists that a plan for coordinating all of the resources identified above should be developed.

Suggestions for improvement

The team identified a number of issues that the Institution needs to address as it proceeds with the development of an integrated institutional assessment plan. These include the following:

• The resources listed above are widely dispersed and important connections among them are not in place.

• There is no clear statement concerning what it means to be a student-centered university; therefore, it is difficult to tell if progress toward the goal is occurring.

• In particular, there is no plan for assessing general education.

• There is no process of periodic peer review for units offering undergraduate programs that are not subject to disciplinary accreditation.

• Some administrative and Senate-sponsored task forces evaluate the same program but work in relative isolation from each other.

• While many excellent student support services are offered, few efforts have been undertaken to assess the effects each has on students.

• Many units conduct student surveys, but these efforts are not coordinated, nor are they on a regular schedule. Uncoordinated survey programs can result in oversurveying of students and ultimately diminish response rates.
We are pleased to see that a Coordinating Committee on University Assessment has been appointed with the specific charge to develop an assessment plan. We offer some suggestions for the Committee to consider:

- Expand the membership of the committee to include a few more representatives from the faculty and from Student Affairs. Call upon the widely recognized Center for the Study of Higher Education for consultants as their expertise becomes relevant. Involve the data stewards as access to the data warehouse is needed. Link the committee’s work to that of alumni affairs, marketing and public relations, and development as appropriate.

- Develop a simple generic outline for a plan that links all Penn State campuses and identifies resources upon which all can draw. The outline could take the form of a cycle linking planning, implementation, assessment, improvement, and renewed planning—a familiar concept on a campus well-known for its work in continuous quality improvement.

- Build a clear definition and related performance indicators for a student-centered environment so that progress can be tracked.

- Provide faculty development that focuses on the purposes and benefits of assessment and provides guidance in areas such as developing learning objectives and selecting/designing assessment tools.

- Celebrate and disseminate the good practices in assessment that are under way on several campuses.

- Implement a plan for assessing general education. Electronic portfolios may be a useful tool here as well as in assessing student learning in the major.

- Assess the effectiveness of such out-of-class experiences as study abroad, service learning, undergraduate research, and living-learning centers.

- Establish a process for periodic peer review of undergraduate as well as graduate programs (a combined review to conserve resources) that are not subject to disciplinary accreditation.

- Establish a schedule for periodic surveys of students, faculty, staff, and graduates that permits observation of trends over time on important performance indicators. Consider using a national survey occasionally in order to obtain comparative data from peers.
- Connect assessment with the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning—good assessment is a form of scholarship and can result in material for presentations at national meetings and for publications.

**Recommendation**

Taking into consideration the team’s suggestions, the Institution should develop a comprehensive and integrated assessment plan drawing in large part on the various assessment resources already in place.

**Requirements**

None.

**B. Standards Addressed Partially within the Selected Topics**

None.

**C. Standards Reviewed via Documentation**

Based on the review of documentation, the team has determined that the Institution meets Standards 1 through 7. (See attached report).

**V. Summary of Team Recommendations and Requirements.**

The Team found no Standard that calls for a Requirement. It does have one Recommendation related to Standard 14, *Assessment of Student Learning*. The recommendation is as follows:

Taking into consideration the team’s suggestions, the Institution should develop a comprehensive and integrated assessment plan, drawing in large part on the various assessment resources it already has in place.