Report to the

Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students

of

SUNY PLATTSBURGH
Plattsburgh, NY 12901

by

an Evaluation Team representing the
Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Prepared after a study of the institution’s self-study report
and a visit to the campus on March 25-28, 2012

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This report represents the views of the evaluation team as interpreted by the Chair, and it goes directly to the institution before being considered by the Commission. It is a confidential document prepared as an educational service for the benefit of the institution. All comments in the report are made in good faith, in an effort to assist SUNY Plattsburgh. This report is based solely on an educational evaluation of the institution and of the manner in which it appears to be carrying out its education objectives.
AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

President/CEO:
John Ettling, Ph.D
President

Chief Academic Officer:
James Liszka, Ph.D
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Chair of the Board of Trustees:
H. Carl McCall
Chairman of the SUNY Board of Trustees
State University of New York
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Section I: Nature and Context for the Visit

Institutional Overview

Founded in 1889 as a normal school for the education of teachers, Plattsburgh was incorporated into the SUNY system in 1948. The comprehensive liberal arts college offers more than 60 baccalaureate programs and 16 master’s or certificate programs administered by four academic divisions, each with its dean: Arts and Science; School of Business and Economics; Education, Health, and Human Services; and Library and Information Services. The college’s largest undergraduate programs include business, criminal justice, education, nursing, and psychology. The academic deans report to the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. The divisions of Student Affairs, Business Affairs, and Institutional Advancement (each headed by a vice president) provide educational, co-curricular, health and safety, and administrative support.

Current enrollment for the main and branch campuses combined is approximately 5,800 undergraduate students and 600 graduate students. The college enrolls approximately 950 first-time students and 800 new transfers each year; 94 percent of undergraduate students attend full-time. Women students outnumber men 56 percent to 44 percent, and just over 12 percent of all students identify themselves as African-American, Hispanic-American, Asian-American or Native American/Alaskan. Most SUNY Plattsburgh students come from the eastern-most counties of New York State, especially Clinton-Essex-Franklin counties, the Capital District (Albany) region, mid-Hudson Valley, New York City and Long Island. Over four percent of SUNY Plattsburgh students are out-of-state residents; over six percent come from more than 60 countries.

There are 281 full-time faculty and 198 part-time faculty (fall 2011). Of the full-time faculty, 154 are men and 127 are women; 22 men and 12 women are members of protected minorities. Most full-time teaching faculty hold a doctoral or terminal degree and view themselves as teacher-scholars. Many faculty involve students in their own research, listing them jointly on publications, as participants in exhibitions and performances, or as presenters at professional conferences. Additionally, there are 24 administrators/managers and 220 professional staff. Clerical and maintenance staff and graduate assistants bring the total number of college employees (full-time and part-time) to 1,052.

Recent developments and work in progress at the college informed the Self-Study. These include the development and adoption of the college’s Strategic Plan; revision of the College Mission and Vision Statements and Pledge as part of the Strategic Planning process; expansion of academic programs at the college’s Extension Center at Adirondack Community College and approval of its designation as a Branch campus by SUNY and as an additional location by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE); accreditation of the teacher education programs by the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC); implementation of measures to help alleviate the campus’s budget deficit; construction of the new Hudson Hall.
Laboratory Annex; renovation of the Hudson Hall Science Building; and construction of a new building for the School of Business and Economics and Computer Science Department.

Nature and Scope of the Self Study

The most recent strategic planning process at SUNY Plattsburgh began in 2007-08. Key assessment and planning initiatives were identified and facilitated by the Strategic Planning Steering Committee in consultation with the College Planning Council, Faculty Senate, Resources and Planning Committee, Student Association, and college-wide meetings with faculty and staff and the broader campus community.

The strategic planning process defined planning themes; established committees to develop action plans to facilitate specific objectives and accomplish major goals; identified the individual(s) and committee(s) responsible for addressing the action plans; and determined the time frame over a three year period (2009-12) for completion of each action plan.

The final draft of the Strategic Plan Report (2009-12) was presented to the President’s Cabinet, Deans’ Cabinet, College Planning Council, Faculty Senate Resources and Planning Committee, and Faculty Senate for approval of broad goals of the strategic plan and revised mission/vision statements.

Because the college’s strategic themes are institutional priorities connected to the critical mission of the college, SUNY Plattsburgh chose the “Comprehensive Self-Study with Special Emphasis” model for the Middle States reaccreditation process. The special emphasis is the integration of institutional goals and the Strategic Plan, including themes, goals, objectives, and action plans identified and discussed by the college community over the last three years.

In addition to demonstrating compliance with the Middle States Standards of Excellence, SUNY Plattsburgh’s Self-Study offered the institution the opportunity to re-focus the attention of the campus community on the implementation of strategic initiatives, including review and assessment of the sustainability of the campus in the current economic climate.

SUNY Plattsburgh’s objectives and strategies assume particular importance for this institution in the context of the New York State budget cuts to the SUNY system. There is an urgent need for SUNY Plattsburgh to determine precisely how it will meet commitments to academic excellence and secure its reputation as an exceptional teaching and learning environment for faculty, staff, and students in the face of a constrained budget that impacts all resources.

Using institutional goals and the Strategic Plan to thematically organize the Middle States Self-Study, the institution utilized campus-wide expertise and thus increased participation in planning and assessment, not only to articulate institutional needs and priorities in the immediate budget crisis, but also to create a common vision for shaping the institution as part of the next planning cycle. The resulting report offers an integrated, meaningful study of the college, which, in turn, the visiting team analyzed standard-by-standard, as reported below, to maintain focus on the Middle States Characteristics of Excellence for the college’s use in advancing its vision and plan.
Section II: Evaluation Overview and Compliance with Accreditation Standards

Standard 1: Mission and Goals

The institution meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings

Based on Chapter 1 of the Self-Study, institutional documents and campus interviews with members of the President’s and Deans’ Cabinets and the Planning Integration Task Force (3/26/12), the team developed the following conclusions relative to this standard:

The college’s ongoing process of planning and review marks February 2008 as the timeframe when the College Planning Council Steering Committee (CPCSC) began work on the strategic plan and drafted a revised mission statement that resulted in the current version.

- This mission statement defines SUNY Plattsburgh’s focus on preparing a range of students for various professional pursuits and civic engagement through close faculty interactions and experiential learning in a sustainable global community. There is an emphasis on the college’s contributions to Northeastern New York State’s cultural environment.

- To meet this goal, the institution pledges five elements: welcome and support, challenges for learning, teaching by dedicated faculty, experience of diversity and pursuit of potential.

- SUNY Plattsburgh’s mission also incorporates the dynamics of the SUNY system mission (SUNY Mission NYS Education Law, Section 351).

- Assessment of the mission’s effectiveness is communicated via the Strategic Plan at the institutional level and the Assessment Plan for department and program levels.

- As already noted, an ongoing planning process is in place for mission evaluation and revisions.

- Development of the Strategic Plan template in 2010, including external and internal data, fostered the institutional effectiveness plan that delineates a process through which the mission’s fulfillment is met (Self-Study, p. 8)

- Creation of the Planning Integration Task Force in 2011 supported efforts to analyze the current status of the college’s mission in preparation for next stage of planning.

- Currently, responsibilities of the Planning Integration Task Force include the coordination of the internal structure and process for revising and modifying the Strategic Plan.

- Reviewing the status of the mission and vision is considered a first step.
➢ The Planning Integration Task Force members agreed that a process is in place to elicit and consolidate feedback from the various constituent groups for reviewing the mission (Meeting with Task Force, 3/26/12).

➢ The expectation is that 40 focus groups will be conducted across the campus (meeting with President’s and Deans’ Cabinets, 3/26/12). Several faculty members will complete the necessary training to facilitate these groups. The results will be triangulated at an open meeting to institutionalize the strategic direction related to constituents’ feedback. This process urges discussion, recommendations, and feedback for the mission and vision that will move the institution forward into the next cycle of planning, budget allocations, and program development.

➢ The mission is guided by a vision to make SUNY Plattsburgh the public college of choice.

➢ The Self-Study noted the fundamental purpose under budget constraints is to provide students with a healthy and safe environment via conscientious and coordinated instruction by qualified faculty to complete curriculum for degree requirements.

A Strategic Plan is in place at the college as is a process for gathering input from campus constituencies.

**Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal**

The institution meets this standard.

### Summary of Evidence and Findings

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

The college has established a culture of planning that engages a broad array of campus constituencies. A Strategic Plan covering 2009-12 is in place and a number of task forces, overseen by a College Planning Council Steering Committee, were responsible for drafting goals and objectives for each strategic plan initiative. Each task force developed action plans to facilitate specific objectives to accomplish major goals, identified individuals and committees responsible for addressing the action plans, indicated the impact on goal development, defined the time frame for completion and estimated the costs associated with the action plan. The Strategic Plan Template is the document that lists the individual(s) responsible for achieving specific objectives, the target date for accomplishing the objective, the expected outcome, and the anticipated cost.

Requests to fund these initiatives involve a bottom up process that begins at the department level, receives approval from the Dean or Director, and is then forwarded to the respective Vice President. The final step is a review by the President’s Cabinet, which approves or rejects the proposal. Until 2006, the college provided $100,000 annually to fund initiatives. After 2006 the funding dropped to $50,000. The college expects to resume initiative funding
The current Strategic Plan ends in June 2012. During the site visit, the Provost (3/26/12), representatives of the Institutional Research Office, and members of the Planning Integration Task Force (3/26/12) described current work and a time-line for a new Strategic Plan that will be drafted during summer 2012; vetting would take place in fall 2012; and the new Strategic Plan would be implemented in January 2013. An outline maps how this Strategic Plan will be integrated with the Academic Plan and the budget process. The described goal is to have the efforts outlined tie in to the Institutional Mission, the specific institutional goals of Promoting Effective Use of Resources and Improving the Academic Reputation of SUNY Plattsburgh. Additionally, these efforts will align themselves with the Six Big Ideas put forth by the SUNY Chancellor. This new plan addresses some of the concerns and unanswered questions of the team resulting from the economic difficulties not addressed in the Self-Study.

Reports of the planning process are shared with numerous constituencies, including the College Planning Council, the Faculty Senate, the Faculty Senate Resources and Planning Committee, and the Student Association. While the University Strategic Plan and related documents are vetted through a wide range of planning committees and governance groups and while the president hosts three “town meetings” to share information of college-wide importance to the college community, the report clearly indicates that the President’s Cabinet is the final decision-making body for all matters related to strategic planning and resource allocation.

In addition to the Strategic Plan, the college also has a Facilities Master Plan, an Enrollment Management Plan, and a Technology Plan. While the Facilities Master Plan is a long range guide to campus development, the Enrollment Management Plan and the Technology Plan are intended as short term operating documents that are updated on an annual basis.

While the original Strategic Plan had five institutional goals, budget reductions in 2009 caused the college to reevaluate and reprioritize the goals. As a result, two high priority goals were identified: 1) Enhance the College’s Academic Excellence and Reputation and 2) Promote More Effective Use of Resources. Documentation of the college’s progress in achieving its goals is found in the Strategic Plan Template.

Strategy statements in the Strategic Plan Template are broad, but the objectives and the action plans are more specific, detailing tasks to be accomplished, a timeframe for completion, and approach that will provide measurable outcomes.

Clearly, planning is woven into the fabric of the college, yet it remains unclear whether resources will be available to accommodate the plans. As previously noted, the funds available to address strategic initiatives have been reduced by 50 percent, initiatives have been revised to match up with reduced resources, and only two goals were carried forward as “high priority”. After additional budget cuts for FY12 were expected, the president asked all constituents to “protect as much as possible the basic academic mission of the college.”

A special emphasis of the Strategic Plan is to increase Academic Excellence and Reputation, the 2008 Seven Broad Strategic Plan Initiatives, Faculty and Administration Recruitment and
Retention, Enrollment Management, Information Technology, Fiscal Resources, and Student Support Services. The budget situation has affected all of these, and CESTA (Cultural, Environmental, Structural, and Technical Assessment) survey data indicate that the faculty’s ability to provide desired levels of effective teaching/advising and scholarly/creative work has also been diminished (Refer to p. 10 of this report for additional information).

Section 5 of the Strategic Plan 2009-12 expresses, from a macro level, the need and intention to analyze the problems noted, and new information provided during the site visit (meetings with Provost, representatives of the Institutional Research Office, and members of the Planning Integration Task Force 3/26/12) indicate an intention to do so.

Recommendation

Report to Middle States, with appropriate documentation, any changes and progress in the Strategic Plan and the Academic Plan being prepared for implementation in January 2013.

Standard 3: Institutional Resources

The institution meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings

Based on a review of the Self-Study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty and administrators, the team developed the following conclusions relative to the standard:

The Self-Study acknowledges a structural deficit in the amount of $2.1 million and identifies steps to address the situation, such as participating in both statewide and local early retirement incentive programs and eliminating two majors. The Vice President for Administration (meeting, 3/27/12) described the plan to eliminate the deficit within a four-year period using a portion of the extra revenue anticipated from a $300 annual tuition increase that was approved in spring 2011 by the New York State Legislature.

In FY 2012, the $300 tuition increase merely offset a reduction in appropriated support. However, the college plan will reduce the deficit by 25% in each of the next four years.

That gradual deficit reduction will support college initiatives as well as new faculty lines. It also will provide alternative funding if the State of New York further reduces appropriations. To cover the structural deficit in FY 2012 and remain in the black, the college used “temporary” funds, the bulk of which came from the State University Tuition Reimbursement Account (SUTRA), the account that captures tuition revenue exceeding budgeted tuition revenue. The college plans to continue this practice, at a decreasing rate, for the next four years.

For capital support for campus buildings and infrastructure, the SUNY system utilizes the State University Construction Fund (SUCF), which provides annual funding to address critical maintenance issues. Over the past ten years, SUCF has provided Plattsburgh with $10-14M per year; for FY 2012, Plattsburgh has been awarded $14.3M. The deferred maintenance backlog in
2007, the latest data available from the SUNY system, was $34 million for buildings and $10M for infrastructure. Additionally, construction is in progress on a new $32M classroom building.

The current Facilities Master Plan projects a space deficit of 101,000 nasf by 2028. Plans to eliminate this deficit involve, for the most part, repurposing and adding to existing buildings using SUCF funding.

The Plattsburgh College Foundation, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) fund created to provide external support to the college. Its recently completed Capital Campaign raised gifts and pledges of $16M, $4M of which were unrestricted gifts. The endowment at the end of FY 2011 was valued at $14M. The Foundation annually provides resources to the college in the form of scholarships/student aid and program support. Over the past five years, program support has ranged between $1M and $1.65M, including scholarship aid ranging from $807,000 to $1.2M.

Despite severe cuts in state allocation and severe limitations on the ways the institution can increase revenue, the college appears to be on a financially sustainable path.

**Significant Accomplishment**

The college has continued to focus on the strategic initiatives in the face of extreme budget adversity.

**Suggestion**

Consider preparing annual financial reports for management’s review and evaluation. This would improve management’s ability to assess its financial position and aid in reconciling college financial data with the SUNY data submitted for the IPEDS report.

**Standard 4: Leadership and Governance**

The institution meets this standard.

**Summary of Evidence and Findings**

Based on the evidence presented in Chapters 3, 6, and the appendices of the Self-Study, the website, and campus meetings, the team developed the following conclusions relative to this Standard:

SUNY Plattsburgh has a well-defined system of collegial governance that includes written policies outlining the composition, duties, and responsibilities of the governing structure. As part of the SUNY system, the college operates under the statewide SUNY Board of Trustees and the SUNY Chancellor. The president “is appointed by and accountable to the SUNY Chancellor and the Board of Trustees” (Self-Study, p. 29). An advisory board, the College Council, serves as liaison between the college and the SUNY BOT as well as organizer of a local presidential search process when needed. The chair and eight members are appointed by the governor, and the tenth member is president of the campus Student Association.
The SUNY BOT delineates the president’s responsibilities, which are enumerated on the system’s comprehensive website. The President’s Cabinet includes an Executive Assistant and Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs, Business Affairs, Institutional Advancement, and Student Affairs. The Executive Council includes the academic deans. Extensive information about all lines of responsibility in the college’s governing structure is available in both the SUNY Board of Trustees Policies (Self-Study, Appendix H) and on the president’s webpage. The campus administrators are evaluated by their supervisors. The president sends an annual report containing the accomplishments and concerns affecting the college to the Chancellor. The Chancellor then responds to the president.

Faculty governance at the institution is well-defined; pertinent information about it is posted on the college website. The college has well-organized committee structures and also uses town meetings to obtain input from students, faculty, staff, and administrators. There appear to be methodical and inclusive processes for disseminating information and gathering input to implement change (meeting with President’s Cabinet and Deans’ Cabinet, 3/26/12).

CESTA survey results (Self-Study, p. 31) showed improvements between 2000 and 2010 in the effectiveness of the college’s organizational structure and governance. The improvements resulted in “increased openness of top college administrators . . . and more genuine consultation.” This positive change coincides with the arrival of the current president.

Overall, student input to governance is appropriate and sufficient. The President of the Student Association (SA) meets with the college president once a week and is a voting member of the College Council (meeting with the College Council, 3/26/12). Student Opinion Surveys are administered, results analyzed, and suggestions implemented as appropriate. The SA officers (meeting, 3/26/12) were emphatic that students’ suggestions are taken seriously and frequently acted upon.

Although the president notes that the Faculty Senate has “ultimate responsibility for the curriculum” (Self-Study, p. 30), the current General Education curriculum was put in place under a very short timeline, due to severe budget constraints, without the usual faculty approval processes (meeting with president, 3/27/12). A General Education curricular change process is now going forward appropriately, but the campus needs to ensure that good planning supports appropriate curricular consultation and processes in future.

The Self-Study (p. 95) states that no evidence exists of a “governing body that assists in generating resources”; thus no issues pertain to the generation of resources and conflict of interest policy. (The college’s conflict of interest policy is covered by New York’s 1987 Ethics in Government Act.)

**Significant Accomplishments**

The College Council supports the college mission by strengthening cooperation with the local community. Open to the public, the College Council meetings allow for the involvement of appropriate institutional constituencies in policy development and policy making.
Openness seems to be pervasive: Faculty Senate minutes, for example, are posted on ANGEL, and a survey, CESTA, showed improvement in openness and genuine consultation (Self-Study, pp. 30-31).

**Suggestion**

Seriously involve faculty in the evaluation of the deans, associate provost, provost and president.

**Recommendation**

Ensure that in the future good planning and decision-making lead to appropriate curricular consultation and processes.

**Standard 5: Administration**

The institution meets this standard.

**Summary of Evidence and Findings**

Based on the Self-Study and other institutional documents as well as interviews with faculty, staff and administrators, the team developed the following conclusions relative to this Standard:

The Administration at SUNY Plattsburgh is appropriately credentialed and has the necessary background and training to effectively manage the institution, achieve its goals, and facilitate its operation. Clear and open lines of communications provide for shared information and participation in shared governance. Regular and documented assessment takes place within a clearly defined organizational structure.

The organizational charts for the administrative structure are clearly articulated in the Self-Study. The University’s administration is divided into four areas: Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Administration, and Institutional Advancement. The organization within each of these four primary areas is complete and logically designed. The college has a Comprehensive Diversity Plan (2008-09), and within it a Diversity Task Force operates with representation from all administrative areas.

The president routinely meets with the College Council. He is a member of and meets weekly with the President’s Cabinet and meets monthly with the Executive Council. The president and other senior administrators meet monthly with the executive councils of each of the major unions and attend Faculty Senate meetings as ex-officio members.

Top-down assessment of administrative performance takes place annually; faculty and staff are surveyed through the CESTA Survey on a ten-year cycle (2000 and 2010) on issues such as administrative emphasis on participatory decision making. Current policy also affords faculty the opportunity to evaluate deans on a three-year cycle. However, in practice the self-study notes that such evaluations are rarely done.
Significant Accomplishments

There has been exceptional stability within the college administration. Extended service alone is not an indication of success, but the results of the CESTA survey completed by faculty and staff between 2000 and 2010 indicate a significant increase in satisfaction with the work being done by the administration.

The Self-Study implies the existence of a good working relationship among administration, faculty, and professional staff. Faculty and staff used words such credibility and fairness to describe the administration in their dealings with all constituencies. The current administration was described as being supportive and maintaining open lines of communication; participatory governance appears to be used in all aspects of decision-making processes.

Suggestions

Consider taking the CESTA Survey more frequently than every ten years. [Note: The CESTA survey is no longer commercially available.]

Determine whether the opportunity for the faculty to evaluate deans on a three-year cycle should be implemented as designed.

Standard 6: Integrity

The institution meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings

Based on a review of the Self-Study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty and administrators, the team developed the following conclusions relative to this standard:

The institution adheres to ethical standards and its own policies. Policies are found both in print and on the institution’s website. The institution clearly states the conditions of employment and study. This information is communicated through the website, brochures, posters, the college Catalogue, the student conduct manual, and a number of handbooks—the SUNY Plattsburgh Handbook, the Faculty Handbook, and the Student Handbook.

Fair and impartial human resources processes are supported through several practices and policies at Plattsburgh. A tenured, full-time faculty member is currently re-assigned half-time to serve as the college’s Affirmative Action Officer and work with the Office of Human Resource Services to oversee hiring and recruitment activities, among other responsibilities. Academic employees are reviewed according to Article III of the contract between the college and United University Professions.

SUNY Plattsburgh practices additional means for ensuring equity. The college provides a means for input from faculty, staff, and students and has an established process for hearing grievances. The grade grievance process, published on the web site, offers students step-by-step details about the process, including timelines and student protections.
With regard to discrimination and harassment, the institution employs an “Equity Advisors Resource Network” to advise students on discrimination issues; the Affirmative Action Officer offers consultation on issues of these types; and a Facebook site on sexual harassment is available. The college’s portal also has a new feature, “Help a Student,” which provides faculty and staff with the links to many services including medical needs, harassment, disability, and legal problems.

Academic freedom, intellectual freedom, and freedom of expression are supported with widely disseminated policies and procedures. The college encourages feedback and openness among faculty, staff, and students. In 2010, the Faculty Senate adopted the Rights and Freedoms of Students, which also includes academic freedom. [Note: The Rights and Freedoms of Students statement was approved many years ago by Faculty Senate. The 2010 action was a revision of the Student Grade Grievance Policy which includes a reaffirmation of the Rights and Freedoms statement.]

Plattsburgh upholds honesty and truthfulness in public relations announcements, advertisements, and recruiting and admissions material and practices. The Office of Public Relations has adopted the ethical code recommended by the Public Relations Society of America and follows these recommendations when disseminating information through email, the web site, and press releases.

Plattsburgh offers required and elective courses that students need to complete a program of study in a timely fashion. Department chairs follow a prescribed procedure for tracking the number of majors and minors needing courses and request adjustments to given sections or the addition of new sections when needed.

The college informs its accrediting agencies of significant changes in accordance with policy. For example, Plattsburgh filed a substantive change proposal when Hudson Valley Community College was approved as an additional location. The Provost’s Office keeps the SUNY system administration apprised of significant changes and supplies SUNY with reports and information as requested. The Office of Institutional Research, Division of Business Affairs, the President’s Office and the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs are among the offices that supply data and information to external audiences. Administrators are also in contact with local, state and federal officials and business leaders.

Institutional information for students and the public is both printed in brochures and posters and published on the website. The graduate school newsletter has increased the visibility of the graduate programs. The website contains information for prospective students, first-year students, transfer students, international students, and graduate students. The site also contains financial aid information and other issues related to cost, including the Net Price Cost Calculator that enables prospective students to estimate the cost of attending Plattsburgh.
Standard 7: Institutional Assessment

The institution meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings

Based on a review of the Self-Study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff and administrators, the team developed the following conclusions relative to this Standard:

Various mechanisms support institutional assessment at the college. The institution has Faculty Senate Policies on Assessment (Self-Study, p. 23), and the College Assessment Coordinator records department/unit achievements as well as plans for the coming year into the Effectiveness Plan Template and the Strategic Plan Templates with updates provided by the Deans’ Council (Self-Study, p.13).

Evidence indicates that the college closes the assessment loop, improving practices and programs through analyses of assessment data. For example, assessment results were used to inform the focusing of college priorities in response to the recent budget crisis. The subsequent success in directing recruitment efforts and scholarship funds to yield an entering class with higher averages was notable. Moreover, the monitoring and analysis of campus utility consumption encouraged improvements that resulted in financial savings (Self-Study, p.71). Expansion of metering systems will undoubtedly target more environmentally sustainable practices, one of the college’s strategic goals.

The 2008-11 Assessment Records,” Use of Assessment Results to Improve Unit Services Non-Academic Programs,” documenting the college’s accomplishments relative to this standard, indicate varying levels of understanding and approaches to assessment. In many cases, the information provided by the units appears focused on tracking activities more than on assessing effectiveness of operations. The use of dashboards to monitor unit level operations is limited.

The Self-Study recommends that the college should “[i]ntegrate the planning, assessment, and budget allocation deliberations into one cohesive and documented process” to improve the college-wide culture of planning and assessment (p.87). The groundwork for these developments is in place with the Planning Integration Task Force and the renewed commitment to communicating college outcomes.

Interviews with Planning Integration Task Force members (3/26/12) indicated that the next round of planning is expected to integrate more systematic use of data, including plans for benchmarking and trend analysis, to inform decision-making. College staff members are looking forward to the results of the resource allocation study based on the Delaware model. The implementation of a data warehouse at the system level is expected to improve reporting functionality in key areas including enrollment, finances, and human resources.

Significant Accomplishment

Organizing the institutional Self-Study around the college’s strategic plan goals has extended the opportunities to integrate another dimension of assessment into the planning process.
Suggestion

Increase the visibility of how the college’s outcomes relate to the systems goals.

Recommendation

Design and implement a more systematic and robust model of institutional assessment to promote more direct alignment of the resource allocation process to the institution’s strategies.

Standard 8: Student Admissions and Retention

The institution meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings

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

The Mission Statement of the Admissions Office aligns with college goals for recruiting students (Meeting with the Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management/Director of Admissions, 3/26/12). Staff project enrollments and develop plans to capitalize on possibilities or offset potential shortcomings. For example, staff are aware of an anticipated 10% decline in high school graduation rates over the next ten years (Self-Study, p.16) and have adjusted to these projections by developing recruitment strategies for geographical areas on Long Island and northeastern New York that are likely to yield more students, especially those in higher admissions selectivity groups.

Observations about admissions practices and procedures include the following:

- Online applications and college publications are reviewed and updated annually.
- Admission publications contain accurate information regarding financial aid, scholarships, grants, and loans, and student support programs, including the Educational Opportunity Program.
- The college’s website offers easy access to all information pertinent to the application process, including academic programs, student services, and campus activities.
- Current admission goals include a planned increase in the number of students transferring to both the main and branch campuses in 2009-12 (Self-Study, p.16); review and renewal of the hundred articulation agreements in place position the college to meet this goal.

A number of retention activities support Plattsburgh students. Among these are the Early Alert System, available through the campus portal, which allows faculty to bring attention to potential problems a student is having; the new residence hall programming curriculum in first-year housing; residence life staff monitoring of both midterm and final grades of residents; a follow-up to the discontinued First Year Experience Program (2010), which identifies resident students
in academic difficulty and recommends support services; and the monitoring practices in place for all athletic programs.

Ongoing assessment of retention activities, which is integral to the functioning of the departments and programs that deliver these services, occurs annually. Program activities are monitored and subsequently improved as needed.

The increase in the retention of first-year full-time freshmen (Self-Study, p. 49) underscores the effectiveness of these programs in supporting students as well as advancing the college’s mission to retain students. Since the college’s last decennial review (2002), the retention of first-time full-time students has increased from 77.4% to 80.09% (Self-Study, p. 17). This increase is above the national average for institutions similar to Plattsburgh. In the view of advisement, academic support, and special program staff (meeting, 3/27/12), the increase has occurred due to monitoring programs, effective advisement, and the informal referral of students to support programs. An underlying factor in all these activities appears to be the obvious concern throughout the campus for student development and success.

Suggestion

Develop academic strategies within departments to monitor and support students in academic difficulty.

**Standard 9: Student Support Services**

The institution meets this standard.

**Summary of Evidence and Findings**

Based on a review of the self study, assessment data, and institutional documents as well as interviews with staff and students, the team developed the following conclusions relative to this standard:

From the Self-Study, it appears that several major student support areas are working successfully.

- Freshman orientation reports high student attendance.
- The First-Year Experience program that resulted from the efforts of the Quality of Undergraduate Life Task Force in 2005. Notable accomplishments were developing a comprehensive first-year housing model that began in 2005 and increasing the offering of one-credit FRX classes in 2007 that included (Self-Study, p. 65) EOP students, international students, student athletes, and students working with the Student Support Services Office.
- Information access is available on campus and by remote access (Self-Study, p. 65).
- Student surveys indicate overall satisfaction with Health Center services (Self-Study, p. 61).
Alumni survey data indicate increasing awareness and appreciation of “cultural diversity and individual differences” (Self-Study, p. 62).

Professional and peer (Academic Personal Trainers) staff offer a variety of academic support services at the Claude J. Clark Learning Center, a unit within the Division of Academic Affairs. Individual tutoring, walk-in sessions, small group sessions, and scheduled workshops are available. General information about the Center as well as specific and useful resources, such as the list of over a hundred courses for which tutoring is provided and tips for study groups, is available on its website (http://www.plattsburgh.edu/academics/learningcenter/services/).

Composed of 17 offices, including the First Year Student Program, Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Program (Refer to Chapter 13 of this report), and Student Health & Psychological Services, the Division of Student Affairs is the primary source of student support services. Its educational mission (http://web.plattsburgh.edu/offices/admin/studentaffairs/) aligns with the college’s mission, providing a rubric for the mission statements, policies, and procedures for all the offices it houses, aiding their collaboration with each other. A comprehensive division-wide assessment plan offers evidence of the division’s responsiveness to changes in students’ lives, such as the technologies they use. Policies and procedures for all offices in the division are available in various forms, including online, print (the student newspaper and the Catalogue), and through the Student Association.

The college provides a wide range of activities and programs to meet students’ complex needs and interests, as illustrated by the following selected list of programs delivered in 2010-11:

- The Student Association Activities Board planned and delivered 70 events for the campus community;
- University Police staff conducted 27 programs for students, faculty, staff, and student organizations;
- The Career Development Center presented 80 career-oriented workshops;
- Project HELP sponsored 2 “Days of Service” that provided 550 students the opportunity to complete 1,200 hours of community service during the 2010-11 academic year.

**Significant Accomplishment**

The college has developed a culture of a student support. Caring for the well-being of all students is evident in the daily activities of the college staff and faculty

**Standard 10: Faculty**

The institution meets this standard.

Based on references in the Self-Study and other institutional documents as well as interviews with faculty, staff and administrators, the team developed the following conclusions relative to this Standard:
Summary of Evidence and Findings

The college has the necessary structures to hire, mentor, and assist in all aspects of a faculty member’s career. Policies of the SUNY Board of Trustees and the SUNY University-Wide Human Resources Manual and a set of locally developed standards and procedures provide a common set of guidelines from which to operate for hiring and assessment of performance.

Although no comprehensive mentoring program exists for faculty, entities such as the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE), which was established in 2004, the Institute for Ethics in Public Life, which was established in 1999, and the United University Professions (UUP) provide resources for faculty development, review and evaluation.

The chairs, deans, and provost are responsible for promoting high standards for teaching excellence, including advising. The Self-Study indicates that the geographic location of the college impacts on the ability to attract and hire from diverse groups; however, college data indicate that the number of women faculty mirror national norms.

The college offers ample opportunities for professional development. A significant number of faculty have been recognized both locally and within the SUNY system for their pedagogical and service accomplishments. Faculty development opportunities include both traditional options such as sabbatical leaves and professional development activities provided by the UUP, CTE, and the Provost’s Office, and less traditional opportunities such as seed money for securing external grants and leaves to help untenured minority faculty work on scholarly activities.

Despite these multiple opportunities, recent budget shortages have led to reductions in the number of sabbatical leaves and the amount of compensation received for them. Similar reductions have been made in areas such as travel and professional development. Faculty teaching loads also saw the effects of hard fiscal times: in fall 2010, standard workload increased from 3-3 to 3-4 with a promise of return to 3-3 in fall 2012.

A tuition hike of $300 per year for in-state and $900 per year for out-of-state students will help solve some of the financial problems. However, one cannot easily gauge the long-range effects of recent retirement incentives and voluntary separation programs as well as reported increases in class size and number of advisees. Faculty’s ability to maintain both effective levels of instruction as well as scholarly and creative endeavor may be affected.

The CESTA report (Self-Study, Table 5-1) shows increases in scores related to support for teaching and professional development; however, the score for “the extent that the current budget and work load allow for scholarly activities” indicates that there are areas of concern.

Significant Accomplishments

The CTE and the work it does in support of faculty teaching appear exceptional.

The faculty’s willingness to work with the administration and assume changes in conditions of employment during hard economic times is an exceptional example of collegial behavior and shared responsibility.
Suggestions

Implement a more formal faculty mentoring system, particularly for new hires in tenure track positions.

Nurture the possibility for more participation by branch campus faculty in governance back at the main campus.

Investigate the possibility of providing support needed for Center for Teaching Excellence, Institute for Ethics in Public Life, and Center for Diversity, Pluralism, and Inclusion in order for them to operate at a level that existed prior to recent budget cuts.

Standard 11: Educational Offerings

The institution meets this standard.

Based on a review of the Chapter Four of the Self-Study, institutional documents, and interviews with faculty, staff and administrators, the team developed the following conclusions relative to this Standard:

Summary of Evidence and Findings

- SUNY Plattsburgh offers 60 undergraduate degree programs (B.A., B.S., or B.F.A) 16 graduate programs (M.A., M.S., M.S. Ed., M.S.T or C.A.S.) and 10 combined undergraduate/graduate programs (B.A./M.S.T or B.S./M.S. Ed.).

- Several credit-bearing and registered certificate programs currently exist at SUNY Plattsburgh, most designed primarily to address local and regional needs.

- Ten majors include a total of 64 courses with environmental conservation and sustainability content. Most of these are incorporated in CEES degree programs.

- Item 2 of the Strategic Plan conveys the focus on educational offerings:

  2. Strategy: Better prepare students by strengthening the campus culture of teaching and learning, expanding/improving course delivery options, increasing students’ access to information resources and up-to-date technologies, increasing their participation in professional development activities, increasing their sensitivity to and awareness of diversity and ethical issues, and increasing their access to international experiences

- There is a standardized process for the submission of new programs, review and modification of existing ones, and decommissioning. New programs generally originate at the academic department level with proposals including student learning goals and projected enrollment over five years. If interdisciplinary collaboration is involved, another committee must review. The proposal then goes to the dean, provost, faculty senate, resource and planning, curriculum & programs, LIS (Library & Information Services to vet technology requirements), the president, SUNY, and then the NY State Education Department. The process of review at the state level may take 30 to 90 days.
The final step through the Governor’s office can be unpredictable. [Note: New and substantially revised degree programs are reviewed at the State level by SUNY System Administration and the New York State Education Department (NYSED). Most do not require the Governor’s review. Only programs that represent a departure from SUNY Plattsburgh’s approved Master Plan require review beyond the NYSED level.]


- Recently proposed new programs include:
  - Graduate Certificate in Leadership
  - Graduate Certificate in Childhood Education
  - MSED Teaching and Learning
  - Entrepreneurship Minor
  - Bioinformatics Minor for Majors in Computer Science

- Recently reconfigured programs include:
  - BA/BS Audio-Radio Production
  - BA/BS Broadcast Journalism
  - BA/BS TV-Video Production
  - BA/BS Digital Media Production

- The geography program was decommissioned following a quantitative analysis using the academic profiles, dean’s input, enrollment figures, and the Delaware study instrument to determine instructional costs (Meeting with the President’s and Deans’ Cabinets, 3/26/12). However, concern was expressed that the process was somewhat shortchanged due to the impending retirement of geography faculty (Faculty Senate Executive and full committee, 3/27/12) [Note: Deactivation of the Geography bachelor’s degree program did not make use of Delaware Study data, which were unavailable to the campus at that time.]

- A meeting with the Interim Dean of Library and Information Services (LIS Interim Dean, 3/26/12) illustrated the role of information and technology literacy. The Library reviews new programs (as noted above) and assesses existing and needed resources before returning program documents to the appropriate department.

- New students must take a LIS course or test out via a proficiency exam. Students may opt out of other courses by taking one or more CLEP exams.

- The library is developing an institutional repository to publish journals for faculty and to highlight faculty and student research.

- In response to the provost’s initiative to enhance career development, the LIS is also proposing a certificate through a partnership with the student career development department to help their student workers transfer what they have learned into workforce readiness skills.
An academic profile process for program review is in place. The Strategic Plan notes the intent to improve the use of assessment data for academic program planning. The Academic Unit Profile reports the review and status of departmental reviews, with indices concerning demand for the program, productivity, program needs, centrality of mission, efficiency, and costs (Institutional Reports Accompanying the Self-Study: Academic Unit Profiles, p. 1).

According to documents referenced by the Self-Study, program review reports include department-level summaries of department assessment activities and their findings. The reports vary. Some reflect professional accreditation procedures and highly consistent results with respect to attaining student learning outcomes. Some departments identify learning issues and faculty efforts to address student needs. Some departments report limited or inconsistent findings shaped by efforts interrupted by lack of time for follow-through.

The learning outcomes of each academic program are assessed every five to seven years by external evaluators. The dean’s office coordinates this process.

A component of the Strategic Plan is the goal to strengthen activities with respect to scholarship and creativity in promotion of ethics, leadership, and social justice. Faculty (representatives from Business, Sociology, Teacher Education, Counseling, meeting 3/27/12) generally reported strong ethics and social justice inclusion across their curricula. Members of the Business School identified an example of students’ work related to ethics. Faculty support students’ annual participation in an ethics competition.

It is unclear whether departments other than those identified above address these themes with similar efforts. Similarly, there was some expression of need for guidance in program review of departments that are not evaluated by professional associations (Faculty Senate Executive Committee and Faculty Senate Members, 3/27/12).

The framework for the data collection and its review seems to be in place. Data have been collected regarding demand, productivity, efficiency, and need. Data for instructional costs are being processed using the Delaware study. All necessary data are expected to be in place by the end of spring 2012.

Educational offerings are generally offered via traditional format, and several are offered online.

The college promotes a wide diversity of experiential learning opportunities. The website identifies these opportunities as Internships, Labs and Facilities, Field Experiences, and Research & Institutes. However, students’ responses to this item in the 2009 Student Opinion Survey report only 51.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had opportunities for experiential learning (Self-Study, p 40).

The Study Abroad and Exchange Programs offer international experiences in several countries and on a variety of U.S. campuses.
Assessment of the experiential and study abroad programs does not appear to occur in the existing program review and assessment process.

In summary, SUNY Plattsburgh provides a broad array of educational offerings for the preparation of a diverse student population. There are procedures in place for the review and revision of existing programs and the development of new ones that reflect the mission and vision. Several out-of-classroom opportunities exist for demonstrating gained knowledge or for learning.

Suggestions

Refine the procedure for in-department review and follow-up of external reviews and assessment.

Provide evaluative links of academic programs with their out-of-classroom activities.

Standard 12: General Education

The institution meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings

Based on evidence in the Self-Study, Chapters 2 and 4, the college catalogue, and discussions on campus during the site visit, the team developed the following conclusions relevant to this standard:

General Education at SUNY Plattsburgh conforms to requirements established by the SUNY Board of Trustees.

The General Education requirements are clearly and accurately described in official college publications, including the catalogue and website. The rationale for the program as a whole and for each of its components is explained effectively.

As required, curricular structure appears to support development of scientific and quantitative reasoning, proficiency in written and oral communication, and technological competency. Students accomplish these abilities through coursework or placement exams in written expression, mathematics, information and technology literacy and oral expression. Some of these may be fulfilled by advanced coursework.

The Knowledge requirement covers natural sciences, social sciences, arts or humanities, U.S. civilization or Western civilization, and world systems or foreign language. The Integration requirement recognizes the importance of global issues and allows alternatives to coursework (such as study abroad). To satisfy the remaining required 30 credits, students may choose from among any SUNY-approved General Education courses (college catalogue). Flexibility in course choice provides students with opportunities to combine individual interests with college requirements.
During the campus visit, members of the General Education Committee expressed concern about the program. Current requirements allow students to avoid certain disciplines such as foreign languages or U.S. history. Students might not, therefore, according to committee members, complete a “true” General Education curriculum (meeting, 3/26/12).

In Fall 2010, significant budget cuts forced the college to very rapidly review General Education requirements and reduce the number of instructors teaching General Education sections (meeting with president, 3/27/12, and meeting with GE Committee, 3/26/12). These changes were implemented by administrators rather than by faculty as time was short and, the visiting team was told, United University Professions guidelines discourage faculty members from participating in initiatives that reduce faculty lines.

A new GE program, called GE5, was implemented in January 2011. However, in the improved economic climate, the GE Committee is now revising the program, with support from the provost and the president, and plans to achieve faculty approval in two years. The college will send a team to the AAC&U workshop on General Education this summer.

Another topic related to General Education deals with the relationship between GE courses and the major. The institutional perspective is that, since GE courses can fulfill major requirements, the skills and abilities acquired through GE courses can, depending on the department, be applied to the major (Self-Study, p 45). However, GE Committee members indicated (3/26/12) that formal assessment measures are not yet in place for determining how GE skills and abilities contribute to student learning in the major.

The GE Committee, a standing Faculty Senate committee, oversees a well-defined process for reviewing and renewing courses in the GE Program. Both proposed and existing courses are evaluated according to rigorous criteria. Although the Self-Study and supporting documents do not highlight these, the GE Committee indicated (3/26/12) that rubrics for the process do exist and are used. Since the SUNY system establishes criteria for General Education and campus programs are subject to review and approval at the state level, courses presumably meet official criteria.

Overall, however, evaluation of GE courses is not systematic. Departments do not report course analyses to the General Education Committee (Self-Study, p. 46). Assessment of GE currently involves some rubrics, tests created by faculty rather than item analyses, but departments do not share findings. The GE Committee reported to the visiting team that there is “increasing responsiveness to . . . assessment results.” While issues of “course availability, structure, and pedagogy” still need to be worked on (Self-Study, p. 46), the culture of faculty participation in GE has changed (meeting with GE Committee, 3/26/12).

An example of inconsistent assessment concerns writing skills. As an important element of the GE Program, writing skills should be regularly assessed. A survey of department chairs in 2007 indicated that “fifteen departments viewed their students as having “average” writing skills; ten perceived them to be “above average” (Self-Study, pp. 41-42). When discussed at the meeting with the GE Committee (3/26/12), however, participants said that no objectives or measures were used to support these statements. No follow-up to these surveys has been developed.
Another example concerns critical thinking. The Deans’ Cabinet “set as a goal that all academic departments would” provide . . . experiences in critical thinking” (Self-Study, p. 42). The Self-Study indicates that a “follow-up survey is required.” Although the survey dates from 2007, the institution’s plans are not mentioned in the Self-Study.

2010-2011 CAAP Critical Thinking Test (Self-Study p. 42) results are impressive as aligned with the national norm. However, the results were used as data before the new GE5 requirements were in place and may not be relevant to the current GE curriculum. The results show an improvement over those of 2003 and 2005, but no analysis of the change was reported in the Self-Study.

GEAR approved the college’s “closing the loop” portion of the assessment plan in 2010. Yet, the faculty have not defined and articulated how GE “assessment results and discussions [will]… lead to positive changes in curriculum” (Self-Study, p. 46). As discussed in the 03/26/12 meeting with the GE Committee, the institution has not assessed the overall General Education Program as opposed to components of individual disciplines.

**Suggestion**

Organize faculty discussions, probably by the GE committee, to determine which skills, knowledge realms and experience will be valuable to the students of SUNY Plattsburgh, taking note of the SUNY General Education Assessment Review. Participation in the AAC&U institute this summer should provide useful guidance.

**Recommendation**

Continue with the plan to have a new GE program in place for fall 2014. It should include the expected student learning goals as well as specific assessment measures.

**Standard 13: Related Educational Activities**

The Institution meets this standard.

**Summary of Evidence and Findings**

Based on institutional documents and campus interviews, the team developed the following conclusions relative to this standard:

a) Basic Skills:
The “Enrollment Plan Update” indicates that 15% of incoming first-time full-time students are “Special Admits or Other Risk.” Three programs for meeting the needs of students identified as being “at risk,” and the retention and graduation rates of students accessing those programs are tracked. The Educational Opportunities Program offers extensive tutoring as well as a pre-college Summer Institute for those who do not meet traditional admissions. The 2008-11 assessment records indicate that the initial retention goals for this program have been met. Specialized advising and student contracts for performance are featured in other programs.
b) Certificate Programs
There are five certificate programs included in the college catalog. Each is directed to a specific niche, follows regular program proposal processes, and is taught by faculty members. The certificate in Multimedia Journalism is “limited to journalists . . . who hold an associates (or higher) college degree” (Calendar, p.87). All of the other programs require bachelor (or higher) degrees and are appropriately integrated to the relevant professional schools.

c) Experiential Learning
Strengthening experiential learning was one aspect in the Academic Plan Goals for 2006-10, and approximately 30 program areas provide opportunities for internships, practica, or clinical experiences. The published guidelines for internships include faculty sponsors and a plan for the evaluation of demonstrated learning. Over 400 affiliation agreements are in place to provide for internship supervision in disciplines such as communication disorders, nursing, and social work. Some discipline specific accreditations include review and reporting on experiential learning, but, according to the self-study (p. 41), those “without external accreditation review are not uniformly assessed, evaluated, cataloged or reported.”

Prior experiential learning is only recognized through an externally administered examination and then may be applied as transfer credit toward bachelor degree requirements.

Credits awarded for “Study Abroad” activities are monitored by the relevant academic departments. There are efforts to increase student awareness of these opportunities.

d) Non-credit Offerings
The College Auxiliary Services contracts out non-credit and professional training and, as a 501(c)(3), it is outside the scope of this review.

e) Branch Campuses, Additional Locations, and Other Instructional Sites
The Institutional Profile for 2010-11 indicates there are 384 students in nine programs offered at the additional location in Queensbury. Four programs are designed for transfer students with at least 57 credits (Business Administration, Childhood Education, Criminal Justice and Psychology). Since 2006, enrollment at this site has more than doubled. There has also been an increase in the number of transfer students coming from SUNY Adirondack into programs at the main campus. [Note: SUNY Plattsburgh’s Branch Campus at Queensbury is located on the campus of SUNY Adirondack, formerly known as Adirondack Community College.]

Faculty members hired for programs offered at Queensbury are approved and assessed through the same procedures as those at the main campus, and they have opportunities to participate in college-wide activities. The core requirements for the programs are the same at both sites, but the students at off-campus locations have fewer courses from which to choose. Some courses are offered only in teleconference (i.e. distance delivered) formats. Efforts are made to provide comparable support services through direct and online access, and plans are in place for further development of support services. The administration at the branch campus responds to the needs identified by students, including a request for career counseling. Some ambiguity has arisen regarding fiscal arrangements with SUNY Adirondack, and this issue could impact the sustainability of the activities at this location.
According to the institutional profile, SUNY Plattsburgh students take courses at the Miner Institute in Chazy and at the SUNY Plattsburgh Extension Site at Hudson Valley Community College in Troy.

f) Distance Education, Distributed Learning, and Correspondence Education
Distance Education is coordinated through an Online Learning Office within the Library and Information Services (LIS). It is guided by the strategic goals of enriching student, faculty, and staff experience and of providing service to the region. More specific direction is provided through the Information Technology Plan and the e-Learning Action Plan 2008-11.

The Institutional Profile for 2010-11 indicates that more than 3,000 students took distance education courses that year, but there is only one program (Nursing) for which students can meet 50% or more of their degree requirements at a distance. As a result, most students take a mix of distance and face-to-face courses.

Specific support services for distance education students include access to an online writing lab, resource web pages hosted by the library, electronic course reserve readings, and toll-free telephone helpdesk support. Required to have training before they can offer online courses, faculty members have access to workshops and technical support and other resources.

The Self-Study suggests (p.84) that the results of the online learning student satisfaction survey should be shared annually with the campus along with trend analysis and suggestions for course development and faculty interaction. Department-level comparisons of direct outcome measures of distance and classroom based student learning should also be considered along with follow-up on the CESTA responses on faculty perceptions regarding the effectiveness of distance education for instruction.

The E-Learning Best Practices and Distance Learning Agreement provides a framework for faculty members and departments to improve online delivery, yet interviews with faculty indicate that the central support team has not received confirmation about implementation of this rubric.

With increasing demand and the complexity of decentralized implementation, the sustainability of distance and hybrid offerings will depend on the focused use of resources as directed by and aligned with the academic vision of the institution.

**Significant Accomplishment**

The college should be commended for its programming for the Educational Opportunities Program and other supports for students identified to be at risk. The staff is committed to student success and to the ongoing incorporation of assessment results to improve the program.

**Suggestions**

Implement a comprehensive review of the strengths and weaknesses of all of the experiential learning opportunities currently being offered by the college (per the Self-Study p. 41).
Even though the branch campus activities are governed by Part 54 of the Regulation of the New York State Commissioner of Education (http://www.highered.nysed.gov/ocue/54.htm) the fiscal arrangements between the hosting and providing institutions could benefit from clarification. SUNY policy should attend to the operational needs of the branch campus arrangements and honor existing arrangements in its deliberations.

**Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning**

The institution meets this standard.

**Summary of Evidence and Findings**

Based on a review of the Self-Study, other institutional documents, and interviews with faculty and administrators, the team developed the following conclusions relative to this standard:

The institution demonstrates that the students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals. There are learning outcomes at the institution-level, the school-level, program-level and course-level. The outcomes are aligned to each other and to the University’s strategic plan.

The SUNY General Education Assessment Review Group (GEAR) confirmed that Plattsburgh’s General Education program objectives relate directly to the student learning outcomes outlined in the Provost’s Advisory Task Force on General Education. The Task Force confirmed that the measures for assessment are designed to provide the needed evidence of student learning.

While the Task Force stated that the institution “closes the loop” through appropriate discussions and actions, the General Education Committee indicated some disagreement on whether the assessment findings are collectively discussed and disseminated back to all faculty (meeting with GE Committee, 3/26/12).

The institution does close the loop regarding program-level learning outcomes assessment in a number of cases. On its website, the institution publishes improvements made as a result of assessment processes. The assessment process is documented and organized, and faculty are directly involved in and supportive of the process. Assessment activities have led to improvements in the curriculum, policies, student advising, and the assessment program itself.

The assessment report for the Marketing and Entrepreneurship department exemplifies how an effective assessment system works. The department met to discuss the rubric assessment tool and identified the assessment responsibility of each faculty member. The actions taken by each faculty member show how the department analyzed issues and identified solutions. Detailed follow-up a year later documents how assessment activities are systematic and how the department spends the necessary time sharing best practices. There are many more examples of this collaborative work among the assessment reports for Plattsburgh’s academic departments.

Assessment plans and results are presented on the website for most of the academic programs. There are examples of how assessment data is being used to make improvements to curriculum, policies, the assessment program, and other aspects. The importance of learning outcomes assessment appears to resonate with many of the faculty and administration. The Deans’ Cabinet has made the effort to evaluate the assessment process and culture on campus through the use of
the Middle States’ Assessment of Student Learning Rubric (p. 14). The follow up and re-evaluation will be very important and useful.

The results of the Deans’ Cabinet’s assessment using the “rubric for evaluating institutional student learning assessment processes” identify areas with a “range of opinions” (Self-Study, p. 14). Among these areas is that assessment results are used to improve teaching and by institutional leaders to inform planning and budgeting decisions.

Policies and governance structures support student learning assessment. The master course outlines are updated and revised every five years, ensuring that they are reviewed regularly. The Faculty Senate adopted the policy associated with annual assessment in 2002 (Self-Study, p. 25). In 2007 the Senate stipulated that each course must include the learning outcomes in the syllabus. The recent Assessment Advisory Committee’s recommendation, adopted as policy by the Deans’ Cabinet, for all academic programs to conduct curriculum mapping, should result in better aligned outcomes for courses and programs with the general education program and the all-college learning outcomes.

**Suggestion**

Replace the policy to evaluate assessment plans every five years with a more accurate policy that reflects the continuous and ongoing evaluation of the assessment plan.

**Recommendations**

Plan, implement, disseminate, and share the results of general education assessment with all faculty.

Provide consistent support and guidance to all departments for learning outcomes assessment.