

# **Executive Summary**

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This Self-Study of Harrisburg Area Community College for reaccreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) presents the results of three years of preparation, research, and analysis of the College's performance vis-à-vis the fourteen standards detailed in *Characteristics of Excellence: Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation* (MSCHE, 2002). The Comprehensive Self-Study model was followed because of the number of significant changes that had occurred since the 2002 Periodic Review Report. These changes encompassed significant enrollment, staff, and physical growth, establishment of a "Virtual Campus," opening new centers and sites, administrative reorganizations, and consolidation of academic disciplines. The Self-Study involved over eighty members of the College community, encompassing administration, faculty, and support staff, with representation from the major academic divisions and the regional campuses. To facilitate coordination of this large group, and sharing of information, the Self-Study Chairs used WebCT (the College's online course management tool) to facilitate the reporting process. Final drafting of the Self-Study was performed collaboratively by the entire Steering Committee—a process that encompassed extensive discussion of recommendations and presentation of the research findings.

## **Mission, Planning and Assessment**

The College developed a Mission Statement in 1997 and since 2002 has been implementing planning via the Strategic Planning Committee and incorporating planning goals into College operations. The current Strategic Plan 2005-2008 (Appendix 1A) has five Major Goals:

1. Student Achievement and Academic Excellence
2. Excellence in Teaching
3. Effective Communication
4. Collegial, Inclusive College Community and Quality Work Environment
5. Partnerships and Teamwork

The strategic planning process has been streamlined in the last two years, and strategic planning is now more effectively connected to unit planning and financial planning across the College. However, implementation has been challenged by an effective assessment process and communication of updates to college constituencies. To help to formalize this process, the College drafted an Administrative Procedure to codify the strategic planning process and resolve these issues.

Assessment of all programs and services of the College is done every five years, according to the College's institutional assessment plan. This is accomplished via academic program assessment, process mapping to assess services, and third-party assessment by consultants. The Office of Institutional Research conducts and supports a variety of institutional assessment and reporting activities. While the Office of Institutional Research does an excellent job fulfilling its role, awareness of their information is limited and access to specific information can be confusing. The Self Study has recommended the College develop a way to make information, including assessment reports, easily accessible to internal and external constituencies. Communication of information throughout the College continues to be a challenge. Communication to external

constituencies is coordinated through the Office of Public Relations via public relations and marketing campaigns, the College web site ([www.hacc.edu](http://www.hacc.edu)), and public access to the archives. Revision of the general protocol for public relations has been recommended along with a new procedure to make formal the scope of the College's Web site and procedures for posting information to the site.

### **Financial, Human, and Physical Resources**

Since the last *Self-Study Report* in 1996, enrollment growth in all areas has increased the financial resources at the college. While the College has a healthy reserve for future operations, the College's funding sources challenge financial planning because of uncertainties in enrollment projections and recent changes in the Commonwealth's funding formula. An inquiry into the budget planning process at the division and campus level indicated a clear link between financial planning and the college's institutional priorities. Assessing the financial planning effectiveness of revisions to the College Budget Advisory Committee structure (including the regional committees) has been recommended by this Self Study. Despite the financial health and success in planning, this Self Study recommends assessment and follow-up with cost allocation between campuses, academic program costing, non-credit education, full-time/part-time faculty ratios, and the administrative overhead rate.

In Human Resources, the College transitioned the hiring process to an online employment site that automated both the application process itself and the initial applicant review by search committees. While the process has the benefit of allowing access from any location, some problems have been revealed in screening applicants and tracking transcripts. Resolution of these problems is being pursued, and the Self Study recommends the process continue to be assessed based on feedback from applicants, hiring managers, and search committees. The Self Study also recommends assessment of the Halogen administrator, professional, and classified staff appraisal process and subsequent improvements to the process.

Physical facilities have been improved with the addition of buildings to the Harrisburg and Lancaster campuses, and the addition of leased space in Gettysburg and York. The Facilities Management Department has implemented continuous assessment and improvement processes at each campus. In addition, as a result of a recent comprehensive Facilities Master Plan, specific physical facilities priorities have been identified at each campus:

- **Harrisburg Campus:** The major challenge is balancing the academic and enrollment pressures on infrastructure with the resources and accessibility needed for updates and renovations, particularly for the McCormick Library and the science laboratories.
- **Lancaster Campus:** New buildings provide new classroom, office, and lab space; the only suggestion is to better fit class size to room size.
- **Lebanon Campus:** The Master Plan reconfigured various rooms to make more-efficient use of space, expand library capacity, improve security, and make classroom space a better fit with class size.
- **Gettysburg Campus:** Expansion in a leased facility poses challenges.
- **York Campus:** This facility currently offers ample parking and appropriate facilities for the courses and programs being offered; however, growth rates indicate the need for expansion plans soon.

Recommendations have been made by this Self Study to mitigate these issues.

### **Governance and Administration**

This Self Study assessed College governance via a survey that measured involvement, effectiveness, representation, and need for change. While the various constituencies are aware of their governing bodies, participation in committees, councils, and other activities tends to be low. Exploring the feasibility of developing a governance organization for administrators and professionals was recommended because a majority of respondents believe one is needed. Regularly assessing the governing bodies and governance process was recommended because they are currently being assessed only on an informal, *ad hoc* basis.

Concern about governance effectiveness and equity were revealed by survey comments which indicated disconnects existing between shared governance and executive level administration. Improvements to the input, content, timing, and communications of executive level governance activities and decision have been recommended. For students, the College recently created a Student Government Association Executive Council to improve multi-campus representation; the effectiveness of this new structure will need to be assessed after it has been implemented.

Administratively, the college is organized into several key areas: Academic Affairs and Enrollment Management, Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, Regional Campuses, Finance and College Resources, and College and Community Development. College administration is constantly evolving; recent changes include improvement of the multi-campus administrative structure, creation of a Virtual Campus for distance education, and various departmental reorganizations and consolidations.

Complex administrative changes have recently been implemented via task forces with representatives from various College constituencies. However, communication of task force activities to the greater College community has been inconsistent, as revealed in the contrast between the published findings of the Multi-Campus Task Force and the delayed reporting of the results of the Virtual Campus Task Force. With the need for openness and communication being central to the College's administration and governance, the Self Study has recommended publication of task force membership, charges, and deliberations to the College community and provisions made for College-wide discussion of preliminary task force reports. Mixed opinions about multi-campus functionality and the need to improve regional campus representation were revealed in the Self Study; hence, assessment of the changes resulting from the Multi-Campus Task Force Report is recommended. The Virtual Campus was established to manage administration of the increasing number of online offerings. The Self Study recommends it be assessed in the next year because of its rapid growth and increasing complexity.

### **Services to Students**

The College has implemented a comprehensive approach to student recruitment, admissions, and retention via an Enrollment Management Plan. The College also has moved toward a “one-college concept” in public relations materials to achieve a consistent branding of the College.

Work in this area is still needed, however, so this Self Study recommends following through on completion of recruitment materials as well as changes in the catalog production.

Enrollment services have changed dramatically with the increase in federal and state reporting requirements and the increased use of technology. As a result, this Self Study recommends the College assess the effect of the changes on staffing levels and service to students in the areas of records, registration, and advising. An analysis of the advising and counseling areas revealed the need for more detailed assessment and improvements in several areas, including a comprehensive assessment of the counseling/advising system, secure email communication with students, and more effective ways of handling behavioral and crisis counseling.

Other student support services have recently been assessed with varying conclusions. The expansion of learning support services seems to serve students more effectively, and that will continue to be tracked. Child care services, however, are different from campus to campus, and the Childcare Task Force pointed to a number of concerns. These need to be considered as the College develops a clear and consistent framework for child care at all campuses. In Student Life, the biggest change has been the addition of athletics. As a result of a sports task force in 1999, the College now offers basketball, volleyball, tennis, soccer, and golf. Assessments to date have been positive; perhaps as a result of the retention efforts of the Athletic Director and the coaches, retention rates of student athletes have met or exceeded the college-wide rate.

## **Faculty and Educational Offerings**

Faculty are the heart of the institution as they develop and deliver the curriculum. Faculty are hired with appropriate credentials as determined by the discipline and evaluated annually by the division administrator (for full-time faculty) and the program or discipline coordinator (for adjunct faculty). Procedures for evaluating tenured and adjunct faculty are undergoing improvements to maintain faculty quality; however, further revision has been recommended because the current process relies solely on student evaluations and faculty self assessment. In addition, there is a need for specific, measurable criteria to assess faculty tenure eligibility and faculty performance, rather than just “excellence.” While academic freedom for faculty is generally supported in the Faculty Organization Constitution and College Policy, concerns exist with balancing academic freedom on the one hand with necessary standard protocols to ensure quality and consistency as the college continues to expand. Faculty need to continue discussions on academic freedom and work to refine the college procedures in order to resolve this conflict.

Program curriculum design is led by faculty and involves a rigorous approval process by the College governance committees. The College’s processes for developing and promoting new programs now include the newly developed Data-Driven Enrollment Management Committee. While this committee conceptually provides collaboration between faculty, Public Relations, and Student Affairs for marketing the College and recruiting and retaining students, the Self Study has recommended defining the composition, purpose, and procedures for the Committee as well as the types of data used in light of the institution’s mission.

A key component of the curriculum is the general education requirement. These core requirements are designed to build scientific reasoning skills, numerical data skills, an

appreciation of arts and culture, and an understanding of society and politics. Assessment of the general education requirements has lagged behind program assessments. Cumulative learning outcomes for general education have not been assessed and student learning outcomes for general education have only recently been developed. In addition, diversity, technology literacy, and information literacy components needed to be developed to ensure College graduates are equipped with the skills and knowledge to be lifelong learners, successful in future academic work, competitive in the job market, and productive members of the community. A faculty committee developed a new Administrative Procedure which outlines the purpose of general education, establishes learning outcomes, defines the criteria for qualifying a course as a “Core” course, and delineates the process for making changes to the general education requirements. As executing this new Administrative Procedure will be challenging, this Self Study recommends an expedient implementation and assessment of the new general education requirements.

In addition to on-campus credit program offerings, the College offers a number of related educational activities. For example, the College offers a progression of developmental courses for students needing further academic preparation in reading, writing, and mathematics to be successful at the college-level. Changes have been made recently in placement procedures and advising support for developmental students, and the Self-Study recommends the College continue to examine, assess, and enhance services to identify and retain developmental learners. Because studies on the effectiveness of developmental education ultimately impact numerous courses and programs, the College also needs to better coordinate efforts between the Adult Basic Education and Developmental Studies Division and the divisions housing the developmental English and Math courses.

College in the High School (CHS) involves teaching college classes in a high school setting, using qualified high-school instructors as college-approved adjunct faculty. While procedures have been implemented to ensure consistency of educational standards for all courses, results of assessments to date show that high school students have earned grades that are significantly higher than the equivalent on-campus courses, prompting the need to review liaison reports carefully to ensure that college-level standards are maintained.

The growth of the online course offerings led the College to create the Virtual Campus after an extensive planning process. This growth, however, has led to questions about communication in planning course offerings, faculty and cost sharing, and evaluation of faculty, which the College is working to address. Hence, the College needs to assess the nature of the educational experience and quality of teaching and learning in the Virtual Campus to ensure that it meets institution-wide standards for quality, rigor, and educational effectiveness.

### **Assessing Student Learning**

Assessment of student learning has begun since the last Self-Study report and consists of a program review process and individual course assessment. The program assessment process works well. Course assessment, on the other hand, is still being developed and is not implemented consistently across disciplines and campuses.

Courses associated with outside accredited programs are reviewed and updated regularly. On the other hand, general education and developmental courses have not been regularly or consistently assessed because they are not tied to a specific program. All courses are assessed at least informally every five years through the cyclical updating of the course outlines as mandated by Pennsylvania's Department of Education. As a result, currently student learning is assessed primarily through the individual instructor's graded materials.

Faculty Council has charged a committee with recommending a plan for implementing college-wide course assessment procedures. As a result, several college procedures are being updated and the Curriculum Coordinator has been charged with tracking course assessments along with program assessments on a five-year basis. This Self Study recommends the Office of Academic Affairs and Enrollment Management continue to work with faculty to establish procedures to ensure regular and consistent assessment of learning outcomes across campuses and delivery platforms.