

**Report to the  
Faculty, Administration, College Council and Students  
Of  
State University of New York College at Oswego  
Oswego, New York**

**By an Evaluation Team representing the  
Middle States Commission on Higher Education**

**Prepared after study of the Institution's Self-Study Report  
And a visit to the Campus on April 1-4, 2012**

Members of the Team:

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**Representing the State University of New York System**

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This report represents the views of the evaluation team as interpreted by the 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 The State University of New York at Oswego. This report is based solely on an educational evaluation of the institution and the manner in which it appears to be carrying out its educational objectives.

### **AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT**

#### **President**

Dr. Deborah Stanley

#### **Chief Academic Officer**

Dr. Lorrie Clemo, Interim Provost  
And VPAA

#### **Chancellor, State University of New York**

Dr. Nancy Zimpher

## Report to the Middle States Commission

### I. Context and Nature of the Visit

Established in 1861 as a normal school by its founder, Edward Austin Sheldon, the State University of New York at Oswego is a comprehensive public institution located along the beautiful southeastern shore of Lake Ontario, enrolling over 8,000 students, in more than 110 undergraduate and graduate programs.

In 2008, SUNY Oswego opened a metropolitan graduate and professional center in Syracuse, N.Y., to meet the educational needs of the area, to help revitalize Syracuse's urban core, and to develop and retain a highly skilled and well-educated workforce for the region. The institution generates \$428 million annually for the region. A campus infrastructure renewal initiative begun in 1997 has led to over \$750 million in construction and renovations that have been completed or are in progress. This initiative has helped to fuel the local and regional economy and meets faculty, student, and staff expectations for an attractive, modern, and technologically advanced environment. SUNY Oswego has been recognized by external organizations: U.S. News and World Report selected SUNY Oswego for its list of just 30 well-regarded colleges nationally that offer small classes without high prices; The Princeton Review named SUNY Oswego one of the best 220 colleges and universities in the Northeast in its book *The Best Northeastern Colleges: 2012 Edition*. The Carnegie Foundation awarded SUNY Oswego a Community Engagement Classification in January 2011.

SUNY Oswego is also extensively engaged in international education. Oswego programs are consistently ranked among the most highly enrolled in the SUNY system. During the past decade, the focus has evolved from that of a traditional study abroad office to one that is richer and more varied in its offerings. In 2010-11, 511 students participated in international programs, including many on faculty-led short-term programs embedded in the college's curriculum. There are three main categories of education abroad offerings at SUNY Oswego: institutional exchange partnerships and study abroad centers, student teaching/practicum and internships abroad, and faculty-led programs abroad.

The Middle States evaluation team conducted its visit to SUNY Oswego from April 1 to April 4, 2012. The team enjoyed and is thankful for the open and warm hospitality from everyone involved in the process. It was a pleasant and professionally rewarding experience for all members of the team. The team also appreciates the work of all involved in the institution's self-study. It is an honest and candid document, and it is the result of the work of a large portion of the community from all areas of the college. The evaluation team commends the college for its approach to both highlight areas of accomplishment and to recognize areas that need further attention and in many cases offer self-identified recommendations for improvement. In some instances we have incorporated those suggestions in our report.

During the course of this visit, the evaluation team conducted extensive interviews, toured the campus, and reviewed the exhibits and collected documents and data that substantiate the self-

study. The team also reviewed the IPEDS information for 2010 and 2011. Audited financial statements were not available as they are managed centrally by the SUNY System. The evaluation team believes that the self-study experience has been helpful to SUNY Oswego and will play a significant role in the way that the college continues to chart its future. The team did not issue requirements or recommendations but has made a number of suggestions designed to help the college on its path to continuous improvement.

I. Affirmation of continued compliance with Eligibility Requirements

The Institution meets all established requirements of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

II. Compliance with federal requirements, issues relative to state regulatory or other accrediting agency requirements

**Standard 1: Mission and Goals**

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

The institution meets this standard

**1. Strengths, significant accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovation practices**

SUNY Oswego has a clearly defined mission statement that states its purpose. The mission of the institution is to contribute to the common good by lighting the path to wisdom and empowering women and men to pursue meaningful lives as productive, responsible citizens. This mission statement was the result of the Sesquicentennial Plan, launched by the President in 2007. The planning process also crafted the vision to be a premier institution that provides a transformative experience to a diverse body of students, empowering them to live ethical and meaningful lives and build a better world.

To achieve the mission, the plan includes five points of emphasis under the acronym **VIEWS**:

**Vitality:** Secure the college's stature as a world-class comprehensive college with intellectual and cultural vitality that provides an education of exceptional quality to every student, supported by a strategically driven organizational structure and robust financial plan.

**Intellectual Rigor:** Sharpen our focus on academic excellence by creating an intellectual climate rich with ideas, inquiry, and discovery that provides students with meaningful experiences and

opportunities that challenge them to reach their full potential as intellectually empowered, creative, and productive individuals.

**Engagement:** Unite and enrich the college community by promoting and valuing individual and collective contributions to the common good and by developing closer ties and partnerships with the broader society.

**World Awareness:** Adopt an expansive understanding of the world in order to develop the capacity of students to be more self-aware, responsible, and empathetic.

**Solutions:** Give priority to developing knowledge and applying the expertise of our community of scholars to find solutions to the problems of our time.

These five points are the basis for the overall strategic plan, and each point has specific goals attached to it. The mission, vision and goals associated with this process were developed with broad input from the campus community and are widely disseminated through print and electronic means.

## **2. Areas for commendation**

SUNY Oswego is to be commended for the rapid and successful development of international programs, as part of its world awareness focus. 20% of graduating seniors have an international experience before they graduate,

SUNY Oswego is to be commended for its achievements in diversifying its student body. Currently almost 16% of undergraduate students come from underrepresented groups.

## **3. Suggestions**

Ensure that newer faculty and staff members know the college's mission and strategic directions, and encourage the involvement of this group in the development of annual goals to further these strategic directions.

Improve on communication of decisions based on the college's mission and goals and communicate the linkages between planning and budgeting decisions more effectively and consistently.

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

*An institution conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals, develops objectives to achieve them, and utilizes the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal. Implementation and subsequent evaluation of the success of the strategic plan and resource allocation support the development and change necessary to improve and to maintain institutional quality.*

The institution meets this standard

## 1. Strengths, significant accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovation practices

- Institutional planning occurs at both the State University of New York (SUNY) system level and at Oswego. At the system level, the planning framework is expressed in *The Power of SUNY; Strategic Plan 2010 & Beyond*. The SUNY system has placed great emphasis on planning at the campus level.
- At Oswego, the strategic plan (*Engaging Challenge: The Sesquicentennial Plan, 2007*) is the key document for planning – and also provides the framework for important assessment activities. Other planning documents include a capital plan, an enrollment management plan, a technology plan and academic program plans.
- The development of the Strategic Plan was begun in 2006 under the leadership of the 30-member Strategic Planning Advisory Board, utilizing input from all constituencies of the college community.
- The academic program plans are explicitly linked to elements of the SUNY strategic plan and Oswego's strategic plan. Goals are established annually; progress on goal achievement is reported annually.
- The ten-year capital plan encompasses the period from 2013 to 2023 and is programmatically linked to the strategic plan and to academic program plans.
- The various elements of the enrollment management plan are unusually complete in their consideration of all factors that impact on enrollment. In addition to recruitment, the elements include retention planning, with separate plans and strategies for addressing the retention of students who enrolled as first-time freshmen and for transfer students.
- The annual updating of the technology plan, so that there is at all times a documented plan that extends three years into the future, is a noteworthy improvement over the usual planning process of, for example, doing a new three-year plan when the old plan has expired or is about to expire.
- The budget process is effectively built upon the planning process so that budget decisions reflect and support the long-range strategies of the College.

## 2. Areas for commendation

- Oswego is to be commended for the extent to which its various plans are comprehensive and well integrated in functional terms.
- The Strategic Plan and its implementation by the Provost and her Office of Academic Affairs are very well recognized by the faculty and staff, and are worthy of commendation.
- Oswego has an enviable program of capital improvements, both in scale for an institution its size and in the quality of the design and implementation of its new and remodeled facilities. The Campus Center is a very impressive blend of new and remodeled facilities and the new science complex promises to be a big step up for improving the STEM disciplines so important for the state and the nation.

### 3. Suggestions

- While Oswego's planning processes are complex and comprehensive, and the plans are well integrated with the strategic plan functionally, the overall planning effort could benefit from more explicit statements within the plans of their connections to each other.
- While there are regular reviews of Oswego's progress on its various plans, it would be useful to update the strategic plan from time to time, even if the only result is to reaffirm the plan's action items and leave them unchanged.

#### **Standard 3: Institutional Resources**

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

The institution meets this standard

#### **1. Strengths, significant accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovation practices**

- During a time of austerity and budgetary constraint, the administration of Oswego has managed to allocate its financial resources in such a way that all mission-critical functionality has been maintained at reasonable levels of quality and effectiveness.
- The President and administration are responsible for Oswego's budget but have little control over many important budgetary considerations. There are two areas that are particularly problematic. First, tuition increases are set by the state legislature and thus are subject to intense political influence. Second, salary increases for unionized employees are negotiated by the Governor's Office of Employee Relations. These problems are exacerbated by the fact that, as with all public institutions of higher education across the country, Oswego's appropriation is set through a process controlled by the political branches of the New York state government.
- The consequence of the major factors controlled by forces beyond the campus and lacking in first-hand knowledge of the campus is that the President and administration are routinely faced with enormous problems in both balancing the budget and finding funds for new initiatives.
- Within this challenging set of circumstances, the President and administration have been reasonably effective in identifying the cuts in expenditures that would do the least damage as they have struggled to function within the limited resources that are available.
- Overall, the physical facilities of Oswego are good and are well maintained, in spite of reductions in maintenance and support staff. Deferred maintenance has received great attention in recent years and currently is at a manageable level. The extensive acreage of the College presents a challenge to the grounds crew; that challenge is

effectively met, with the result that the attractive landscaping is one of the positive features of the campus.

- Auxiliary Services, Inc. is extremely well managed and is an excellent resource for the College. An example of its extra services, it provides shuttle service to the campus at no cost to the College, using surpluses from its business operations.
- Auxiliary Services, Inc. provides jobs to some 600 students. This record provides substantial financial assistance to the students while at the same time meeting the needs of the campus. In addition, according to both statistical and anecdotal evidence, these jobs aid in the retention of students through degree completion.
- The guaranteed, stable, four-year pricing of residence hall rates and meal plans for incoming students has been a successful means of ensuring full utilization of facilities and services and assisted students and their families in planning confidently for college costs.
- The new science building will, when completed, provide an outstanding resource for meeting the needs of the planned increase in numbers of science majors.
- Although straitened by multiple years of budget deficits, the faculty and staff of Oswego continue to be adequate in numbers to fulfill the College's needs.
- While the IPEDS financial statements show deficits for operational and nonoperational revenues and expenses for the last two fiscal years, the finance staff of the College has effectively managed the college's cash to assure that critical needs have been fulfilled.
- Oswego's administrative information system is well managed and effective in meeting the needs of the institution.
- The College's Library has struggled to meet the needs of its constituencies in a time of straitened resources and increasing costs but has still managed to provide effective service.
- The Oswego College Foundation operates very effectively and is currently involved in the quiet phase of its second capital campaign. The amount of support for the College's operations provided by the Foundation, \$2 million per year, is a noteworthy achievement for a public college of this size.
- The College's leadership and personnel in general, and its financial staff in particular, have done an excellent job of maintaining essential functionality in all areas in spite of financial constraints and challenges.

## **2. Areas for commendation**

- The College is to be commended for having maintained the budgets of the academic areas throughout the recent period of increasing fiscal constraints.

## **3. Suggestions**

- The College's financial staff should analyze the overhead costs of supporting the residence halls to assure that the College is being fully reimbursed for those costs.



#### **Standard 4: Leadership and Governance**

*The institution's system of governance clearly defines the role of institutional constituencies in policy development and decision-making. The governance structure includes an active autonomous governing body with policy and resource development responsibility consistent with institutional mission.*

The institution meets this standard.

#### **1. Strengths, significant accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovation practices**

SUNY Oswego's governance is well defined and it is established by State law and by accepted principles of self-governance. As part of the SUNY System, major policy authority resides with the State University Board of Trustees, and with the SUNY Administration in Albany.

##### **College Council**

SUNY Oswego also has its own College Council. The Governor appoints all members of the Council except the student member and appoints the Chair of the Council as well. A student member of the College Council is elected each year by the Student Association. The College Council holds four meetings each year and receives reports and updates from the president, vice presidents, Faculty Assembly chair, and Student Association president at each meeting. Council members are invited to the college's cultural, educational, athletic, and social events and are active participants in official ceremonies and programs such as commencement. The most important responsibility of the council is its role in coordinating the search process for a college president. Council members also offer their advice and support to college initiatives.

##### **Faculty Senate**

The SUNY system has a Faculty Senate, with elected representatives from each of the four-year campuses. SUNY Oswego's representative serves a three-year term with the possibility of election for a second consecutive term. The faculty Senate meets three times a year, and the Oswego representative reports on these meetings to the Faculty Assembly. The report is posted in the Faculty Assembly website and is available to all members of the campus community.

##### **Faculty Assembly**

SUNY Oswego Faculty Assembly is an elected representative body that includes a representative of the United University Professions negotiating unit, three members of the professional staff, two management-confidential administrators, and four Student Association representatives. Senior level administrators are invited as non-voting members. Under the shared governance model, Faculty Assembly is responsible for recommending all new and revised courses and programs that have been vetted through the appropriate councils. Faculty Assembly meets bi-weekly, and it also includes a number of standing committees and task-forces.

##### **Collective Bargaining Units**

Campus employees are represented by four unions. The largest of these unions are the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA), representing civil service members, and the United University Professions (UUP), representing faculty and professional staff members. Union

leadership and representatives from the administration meet on regular basis and there is mutual respect and a positive rapport on both sides.

## 2. Suggestions

Review Faculty Assembly and its guidelines in an effort to make its work relevant and meaningful for newer faculty members. Find ways to engage recently hired faculty in service to the college to better distribute committee responsibilities among all faculty members.

Consider ways to eliminate or consolidate committees and task forces. The team notes that the college had begun working on this issue at the time of the team's visit as a result of the institution's Self-Study.

### Standard 5: Administration

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

The institution meets this standard.

#### 1. Strengths, significant accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovation practices

Based on a review of the *Self-Study*, other documents provided by the institution, and meetings and interviews with faculty, staff, students, and others, the Visiting Team reached the following observations, findings, and conclusions related to this standard:

The college's executive management team has remained relatively stable over the past decade and is generally viewed as having the necessary preparation and experience to be effective in their jobs. The administration has demonstrated responsiveness to the needs of the institution as it grows and changes over time. The President, Provost, Associate Provosts, and Deans are active in campus governance as appropriate and meet regularly with faculty, staff, and student leadership.

Changes such as the establishment of a new School of Communication, Media, and the Arts, the shifting of athletics from Academic Affairs to Student Affairs, the allocation or reallocation of resources to support sustainability, technology, and fundraising efforts have been made in response to needs based on data and in the context of supporting goals which are consistent with the College's strategic plan, *Engaging Challenge: The Sesquicentennial Plan*.

The above is an illustration of periodic assessment of the effectiveness of administrative structures that resulted in specific changes. While there are adequate information and decision-making systems in place to support the needs of the campus, communication regarding decision-making that directly impacts academic departments is perceived by the faculty as an area for improvement.

Organization charts and job descriptions document the reporting lines as well as the duties and authority of various positions.

## 2. Areas for commendation

- Employing a task force model to bring timeliness to policy-making without sacrificing inclusiveness, transparency, or circumventing the established governance structure.

## 3. Suggestions

Implement the *Self-Study* recommendation that states “There is a need to improve communication about assessment, line requests, and other crucial information between department chairs, deans, the provost, and the president” by “Develop[ing] more effective communication practices, particularly with respect to administrative requests for information and data and the rationale behind the resulting decisions.”

### Standard 6: Integrity

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

The institution meets this standard

### 1. Strengths, significant accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovation practices

The SUNY College at Oswego has an established tradition and culture of providing high-quality education at the bachelor and master levels across the arts, sciences, humanities, business, and teacher education. The Priorities of the Provost reflect the elements of Oswego’s Strategic Plan. These priorities and the Plan inform the priorities and plans of the College of Arts & Sciences, the School of Business, the School of Education, the School of Communication, Media and the Arts, and the related educational programs and supporting units. The Plan is clear, plain, and simply stated – and widely understood on the campus.

The cohesive culture of support for Oswego’s educational programs and its undergraduate and graduate students is immediately evident in the faculty, the staff, and the administration of the College. The students find support for their personal educational goals from many faculty members, including many of those who devote themselves to advising many students at various stages in their academic programs. It is a mark of excellence that many students find advice and support from faculty outside of their major as well as inside their academic unit. Students also find valuable support from the integrated Compass Center where they have a one-stop shop that can provide advice in many areas of their college life.

Mentoring of faculty by faculty is expected and has become the norm. Mentoring of students beyond the basics, mentoring for completion of their academic program and for the planning for their professional lives by faculty members and by established offices in larger academic units are serving many students very well.

The recently introduced Early Grant program for newly hired faculty members will enable those who participate in it to spend the summer before they begin their teaching career at Oswego to prepare grant applications for submission at the beginning of their career in the College. Such an investment – and other investments in new faculty members – will greatly benefit the College and its academic programs.

There has been a significant increase in the number of adjunct faculty members during the last five years while the number of full-time faculty members has remained essentially constant. It is notable – and praiseworthy! – that the full-time faculty are quite concerned about the low rate at which adjuncts are currently paid for teaching courses and that they support a significant increase for their adjuncts. This is another element of the cohesive faculty culture devoted to making Oswego's educational programs better.

Faculty members have a primary responsibility for handling cases of academic dishonesty. They should file electronic reports to the associate dean who, in turn, will inform the Judicial Office when a student has more than one reported violation. Violations of copyright, generally by downloading copyrighted works from the internet, are handled by the Computer support group with notification to the Judicial Office. Educational programs for students who violate the rules are routinely imposed. Violations in the Residence Halls are also handled in conjunction with the Judicial Office. While the Self-Study reports a substantial increase in disciplinary hearings by the Judicial Office, much of the increase reflects a more comprehensive approach to managing the instances requiring such actions.

In our discussions with faculty members, it appears that there is a good working relationship between the faculty governance activities centered in the Faculty Assembly and the union representatives and their activities where their interests overlap.

## **2. Suggestions**

As the academic quality of the College increases, the expectations of faculty members, staff members, and students also increase. The academic department is an important operating level of the College, and the requirements for leadership of the departments increase as these expectations increase. Consideration of the resources allocated to departments and the decision-making responsibilities and powers of the chairs of these academic units should receive review with a view towards enhancing the effectiveness of chairs and program directors in carrying out their responsibilities.

There have been significant improvements in the mentoring of faculty members at Oswego but there are instances of some lackluster and less than optimum mentoring that suggest that further improvements in mentoring are needed. While some faculty members easily find additional mentors, or more useful mentors, on their own, each College or School should consider ways to

increase the effectiveness of the mentoring of faculty members – perhaps through the efforts of an experienced and effective mentoring guru.

On the whole, student advisement receives high marks from students and faculty alike. But where advisement fails, the consequences for students can be significant – affecting their future educational program and, in some cases, leading to students leaving the College. Continuous improvement processes need to be maintained and, in some cases, better uses of some faculty talents for other needed purposes may need to be found.

It is apparent that many faculty members prefer to handle cases of academic dishonesty themselves without fulfilling the requirement to file an electronic report. While the motives may have a pedagogical basis, the failure to file an electronic report may lead to multiple unreported violations by a student that should be addressed through Oswego’s adopted policy regarding academic honesty. The policy is designed to be corrective with regard to the student who violates it and the College should encourage the variant faculty culture to support the full implementation of the policy.

While Oswego has a well-defined retention policy for full-time faculty members, it does not have a similar policy for retention of adjunct faculty members, an increasingly important teaching component of the College. Consideration of such a policy or set of guidelines would benefit the College and, perhaps, lead to attracting a greater variety of talented adjuncts.

#### **Standard 7: Institutional Assessment**

*The institution has developed and implemented an assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals and its compliance with accreditation standards.*

The institution meets this standard

##### **1. Strengths, significant accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovation practices**

SUNY Oswego employs a planning and assessment process that is typical to institutions of higher education. Progress toward the institution’s objectives is reviewed on an ongoing basis by the President's Council, composed of senior leaders on campus, and the President. These reviews are conducted in both individual meetings and an annual retreat. The reviews are based on key performance indicators, operational statistics in areas such as admissions, enrollments, and instructional workload, and survey results on many topics. Senior leaders are expected to produce annual reports documenting the progress of their areas. The president is then responsible for reporting on progress to the College Council, the SUNY version of a Board of Trustees, and SUNY system administration on an annual basis. The institution devotes significant effort to assessing his institutional effectiveness. It is also important to note that Oswego’s status as a member of the SUNY System requires a significant level of accountability through reports to the System.

The list of assessment project reports is both extensive and diverse and includes examples from across the campus; there was even a survey of campus constituents about the Middle States self-study process to identify strengths and weaknesses that was used to guide the work of creating

the self-study report. There are some 60 or so studies done over the last seven years. Examples include:

- Participation in large-scale national studies about student learning and engagement such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE).
- Use of national studies to measure satisfaction with campus dining halls and the college bookstore fielded by the National Association of College and University Food Services and the National Association of College Stores.
- Numerous campus-based research projects on areas such as buildings, student orientation programs, faculty orientation programs, the library, residential programming, student affairs programs.

## **2. Areas for commendation**

SUNY Oswego is to be commended both for creating and sustaining an organizational culture that expects assessment and allocating resources to support widespread data-gathering efforts in support of evaluation of its programs and processes.

## **3. Suggestions**

Share information about the significant effort that is expended toward assessing institutional effectiveness widely with the Oswego community. Require all division heads, deans, and their direct reports to disseminate a clear and concise document listing objectives and links to the institution's strategic goals at the beginning of the year and update that document to describe the progress made at achieving those objectives at the end of the year. The end-of-year report should be the basis for the next year's objectives document, thus closing the assessment loop to support institutional effectiveness. The new format used by Academic Affairs Annual Goals document in 2011-2012 provides a good model for such a document. It clarifies how the year's accomplishments of the division are linked to the institution's goals and objectives.

Use the same organizing principles for all statements of goals, objectives, and assessment of results. This will be vitally important as Oswego updates its 2007-2011 Strategic Plan to be consistent with the SUNY System's strategic plan, *Power of SUNY*. Using the same language and organizing principles will help to ensure that the work of the System, Oswego, and the divisions at Oswego are all contributing to institutional effectiveness. The new format for Academic Affairs Annual Goals document in 2011-2012 is a very successful step in that direction.

### **Standard 8: Student Admissions and Retention**

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

The institution meets this standard.

#### **1. Strengths, significant accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary /innovative practices**

SUNY Oswego has developed a comprehensive admissions program consistent with the institution's mission and its location. The admission policies are equitable and the information

provided to prospective students gives an accurate picture of the institution. The printed material and information on the institution's website is clearly presented and easy to understand. Financial aid programs and policies are in place to provide appropriate financial assistance to students. The Registrar's Office is engaged in providing the information necessary for the institution to best utilize its classroom facilities and to assist students in meeting a range of academic deadlines to ensure that students are able to register and to graduate on schedule.

Recognizing that high school graduates in the region would decline in future years, the institution developed a comprehensive plan to maintain enrollment and improve the overall composition of the student body. Through a combination of recruiting efforts in down State New York, the use of merit scholarships, improved facilities, and targeted enrollment, the institution increased the applicant pool, reduced the acceptance rate, improved its SAT profile, increased the diversity of the student body, and improved its yield rate among students with higher selectivity indexes.

Part of the enrollment plan focused on increasing student retention and graduation rates. To accomplish this, faculty and staff worked collaboratively to create a more student-centered learning environment at the college. They reduced class sizes, developed a set of first-year learning experiences, improved the number of fulltime faculty teaching first-year students, improved academic advising, developed retention programs in residence halls, added faculty mentors to some residence halls, improved orientation, improved academic advising, expanded community service programs, and focused more of their efforts in residence life on building community among students. Other areas of the college contributed to this effort by engaging students in active learning through activities such as student clubs and organizations, leadership programs and student services.

The college recognizes that stability in future enrollment will require continued vigilance in their focus on student learning and on the support services available for students. The faculty and staff are now engaged in an effort to increase the number of international students, which they hope will contribute positively to their enrollments and to their diversity.

## **2. Areas for commendation**

SUNY Oswego is to be commended for its success in increasing the diversity of the student body; students from underrepresented groups increased by 42% since 2001. Given the institution's rural location in a region with limited racial diversity, this increase is significant and is deserving of commendation.

## **3. Suggestions**

Oswego's bucolic rural environment appeals to many people. However, the isolation of the campus and its often challenging winter environment offers a significant lifestyle departure from the experience of students from the lower counties of New York State, particularly for students from the metropolitan areas of New York City. The institution recognizes that its distance from some of the population centers of the State is a contributing factor to attrition. The college would benefit from studying this issue more carefully with a focus on either better informing

students of some of the issues students may encounter in this shift or by developing a focused support structure for these “at risk” students.

The current efforts to expand enrollments by recruiting more students from East Asian countries is likely to add another set of challenges to the college’s effort to increase retention. With an increase in the number of international students, the institution will need to expand a wide range of on-campus services and programs to support the needs of these students during periods of the academic year when the institution would normally close. Dining services, recreation, student housing, health services, and duty schedules for student affairs professionals and other educators will need to be realigned to accommodate a population of students that is likely to remain on-campus while other students and most campus services have historically closed. The financial impact of increasing the number of international students should be evaluated in light of union labor contracts requiring overtime or vacation time salary adjustments, and extended hours of operation not currently budgeted.

Members of the faculty expressed concern about instructional support services to assist students with writing and math skills. To address this concern, the institution is in the process of strengthening its tutoring and related academic support programs. The success of these new strategies should be evaluated after the first two years of operation to determine if the changes adequately addressed the concerns of faculty.

SUNY Oswego has a number of first generation college students but no data was immediately available on the retention and graduation rates of this sub-population of students. Targeting these “at risk” students for special support and mentoring programs may help higher percentages of these students to complete college at Oswego.

### **Standard 9: Student Support Services**

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

The institution meets this standard

#### **1. Strengths, significant accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary /innovative practices**

SUNY Oswego is a residential campus with approximately 60% of its fulltime students living on-campus in college owned and operated residence halls. To accommodate the various lifestyle needs of undergraduates, the college provides a range of housing types including traditional residence halls, suite style buildings, and apartments. These facilities are attractive and well maintained. The residence life program was comprehensive and consisted of professional trained residence life staff, graduate assistances, and student staff. Tutors/mentors are provided in some first-year halls. Educational programming, community building programs, and residence hall student government were all in place. First-year students who do not live at home with parents are required to live in residence halls for two years; transfer students are required to live in residence halls for one year. The institution makes exceptions to this policy for non-



traditional students. Students who live in residence halls are exempt from increases in the cost of housing if they remain in residence halls for consecutive years. The overall positive influence of the residence life programs had a direct effect on student satisfaction and retention as measured by an institutional satisfaction survey. The institution's policies for the management and administrations of residence halls are consistent with contemporary standards and best practices for housing and residence life programs.

Student conduct, FERPA, Title IX, student grievance, campus crime reporting policies and procedures are in place and are accessible to students in the student handbook and on websites. The college has an academic integrity policy which is supported by a number of faculty, academic administrators, and student affairs educators. The institution has a sophisticated emergency notification system which is tested regularly. The institution maintains appropriate records and uses a variety of educational ways to address issues of student misconduct.

Counseling services with clinically trained and licensed counselors were in place to provide students with emotional support, psychotherapy and crises intervention as needed. Like many institutions, the increasing complexity of the psychopathology of students with emotional and mental health challenges, taxes the institutions resources. The rural location of the institution limits the availability of psychiatrists to assist students who need psychotropic medications. Appropriate services for students with special ADA needs were in place and information about these services was easily available to students.

Student co-curricular activities and the level of student involvement were high. The number of student clubs and organizations exceeded what one would normally find at an institution of the size of Oswego, and the variety of recreational programs, club sports, intramurals, and campus programs were extensive and showed variety. A student government was in place to represent students and the institution provided students with good facilities and academic support for their student newspaper, radio station, and TV station. Students were given responsibility for the allocation of student fee money for programming and to support student clubs. The high percentage of residential students and the limited non-alcohol related recreational options available in town kept students focused on college sponsored programs and activities which supported increased levels of student involvement on campus.

Students reported that they knew multiple faculty and student affairs educators well enough to ask them for a letter of recommendation if needed. Faculty and student affairs educators talked affectionately about students and students expressed similar feelings of caring for the faculty, staff, and administrators at the college.

Athletic programs are appropriate to the size and interests of the students. Appropriate coaching, NCAA rule monitoring, Title IX compliance, and training techniques were in place. Surveys done with student athletes indicate that the students are satisfied with the support they receive from Athletics. Concern was expressed about the quality and location of athletic facilities and several students and staff suggested that consideration be given to improving the student athletic facilities and relocating them to the "main" campus.

## **2. Areas of Commendation**

The student affairs educators and faculty exhibited a genuine ethic of caring about students and students expressed similar feelings about them. The relationship among student affairs educators, enrollment management professionals, and faculty showed strong positive relationships and a sincere effort to engage as partners in creating a student centered learning experience at SUNY Oswego. Oswego deserves commendation for creating a cooperatively coupled organizational climate dedicated to student learning and committed to working together for the best interests of students.

The Compass program includes academic advising, career services, community service/service learning, first-year programs, transfer student programs, experiential learning programs (internships and co-op experiences), and leadership programs for students. Combining these functions helps all students, but particularly “undecided students” to be more intentional and purposeful about their academic work and their overall educational experience. Although each of the functions associated with the Compass programs contributes in unique ways to the life of students, the Compass program as whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The coordination, collaboration, and focus on the whole student experience provide students with a place they can turn for assistance from admission to graduation. A large number of students participate in community service/service learning programs. These programs not only help students build a sense of community, and teach altruistic values, but also help the institution meet its public service mission. The college deserves commendation for creating this innovative and student-centered approach to helping students successfully navigate the college experience.

## **3. Suggestions**

Like many areas of the college, student affairs departments collected information about students including assessments of their services and programs. Although there is clear evidence that some of this information has been used to change services and programs, the extent to which this happens is unclear. Some of the studies did not provide comparison data with national or SUNY system information when it could have been used. Although the collected information was interesting, the lack of a standard for comparison made the data difficult to interpret. Similarly, small sample sizes for surveys raised questions about response bias. The institution would benefit by a greater reliance on standardized measures, the wide distribution of the results within departments, and a plan to address areas where student responses indicate a need for attention.

The student affairs division is aware of the “survey fatigue” that students experience by being constantly surveyed by multiple offices seeking information. They have a plan to combine several separate surveys into one student affairs survey or to link “critical” questions to the survey conducted annually by residence life and housing. Implementation of this plan would be useful.

Student affairs educators adopted three learning outcomes associated with CAS Standards and developed learning rubrics for students in some student staff positions. Expansion of the number of learning outcomes and learning rubrics is planned and should be implemented. Appropriate assessment should be included in this plan.

### Standard 10: Faculty

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

The institution meets this standard

#### 1. Strengths, significant accomplishments, significant progress, exemplary/innovation practices

SUNY Oswego has an active engaged faculty composed of 319 full-time faculty and 213 part-time faculty. While the number of full-time faculty has been stable over the past five years, the number of part-time faculty has grown modestly as the institution has tried to increase its proportion of small classes. 42% of the full-time faculty is women, and 19% are members of minority groups. 88% of the full-time faculty has doctorates or other terminal degrees. The slow growth in part-time faculty and the compensation of the part-time faculty are matters of concern to the institution and subjects of campus discussions, particularly in light of increasing financial pressures on state institutions in New York. New faculty hires are vital resources for any institution, and Oswego has a formal mentoring process to aid newly hired faculty.

Processes for reappointment, tenure, and promotion of full-time faculty are a function of SUNY System and Oswego institutional policies. The SUNY Board of Trustees addresses appointment, evaluation, and promotion issues in *The State University of New York Policies of the Board of Trustees* and Oswego has a clear statement of local criteria in its *Criteria for Faculty Personnel Decisions*. The decision making process, based on the *Criteria*, begins with a faculty committee in the faculty member's department, moves to a faculty committee in the division, then to the school dean, the Provost, and the President. Consistent with the mission of the institution, teaching effectiveness is the highest priority, but research and service are also important criteria. Support for faculty professional development and to assist the faculty in achieving Oswego's objectives is widespread; but as in many public institutions in today's economic environment, it is not always able to meet all of the needs. So, for example, funds for faculty travel have fluctuated over the past five years. However, funds are available and the Office of International Education and Programs funds international travel to further Oswego's goals in the strategic areas of World Awareness and Solutions. Funds are also available to support curriculum innovation, student-faculty collaborations, and as required matches for external grants. There is also reassigned time from teaching available to help faculty devote additional time to their research and a new program to bring just-hired faculty to campus before the beginning of their first academic year to develop a grant proposal that will spur their research agenda.

There are also institutional structures to help faculty to achieve teaching and research success. The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) supports faculty in their efforts to win external grants. External grants totaled \$3.3 million in 2011. The Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching supports instruction through such methods as workshops, discussions, and learning communities on assessment, civic engagement, and technology in teaching. The library offers a wide variety of resources—print, electronic, and human resources in the form of library faculty with subject specialties—to support faculty's teaching and research work. Resources for technology, including support for distance and new blending learning instructional formats, is available from Campus Technology Services.

As a whole, SUNY Oswego's policies and processes are clearly intended to provide support for faculty to succeed in their roles as teachers, scholars, and contributors to the institution's success.

## 2. Areas for commendation

The SUNY Oswego faculty exhibits an outstanding level of commitment to their students and their roles as teachers and mentors. There is a palpable faculty—and institutional—culture that celebrates student success as its core value.

## 3. Suggestions

Share best practices in the implementation of reappointment, tenure, and promotion policies and processes across departments and schools. SUNY System and SUNY Oswego personnel policies and processes guide personnel decisions, as they should. The work to implement those policies and processes—both by faculty and administrators—vary by department and school; that is also appropriate. However, sharing best implementation practices will help faculty evaluators and candidates across the campus to make consistently fair and accurate decisions about their colleagues.

Explore creating a standard format for student evaluations of faculty and courses to provide a common rubric for faculty personnel decisions.

Investigate appropriate adjustments to faculty workload, personnel policies and processes, and departmental resource allocations as more faculty begin to work in areas that span multiple departments and schools in line with the college's strategic interdisciplinary work.

### **Standard 11: Educational Offering**

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

The institution meets this standard.

## **1. Strengths, significant accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovation practices**

Oswego has had – and continues to have – a well-merited reputation for excellence in its broad range of undergraduate academic programs and in the more limited number of master's degree programs it has chosen to offer.

Oswego's Strategic Plan and the Provost's Priorities in implementing the Plan have led to a series of initiatives that are raising the quality of the overall academic program. Notable is the World Awareness and Engagement initiative which is giving students opportunities to engage in an increasing array of academic programs and activities outside the United States, and has led to an increasing number of faculty-led Study Abroad opportunities.

In the vicinity of Oswego, a program to improve language training in the schools benefits the greater community and the schools support the training of the next generation of teachers.

The recent development of the Summer Scholars program enables talented undergraduate students to do research and other creative work with faculty members for ten weeks during the summer with a \$4,000 stipend and a residential scholarship. These very promising students are likely to become some of Oswego's outstanding graduates and distinguished and influential alumni.

The Metro Center initiative in Syracuse has received much praise and shows much promise in bringing its targeted educational programs to the surrounding area. The combination of evening courses and on-line educational opportunities should benefit the local region.

A broad program of co-op opportunities for students has recently been launched in a limited number of majors, providing benefits both to the cooperating businesses and institutions and to the enterprising students who will take advantage of this program. Already many students do internships and in many cases, the opportunities for the somewhat longer periods for students in co-op positions will lead to significantly greater advances in the "real world" education of the students and greater positive impacts in the host entities.

As is increasingly common in American higher education, Oswego has placed an emphasis on interdisciplinary programs and educational opportunities. It is recognized that many important and intellectually exciting areas lie at the intersections of established disciplines. Both students and faculty members are interested in making advances in these areas. Faculty line requests and requests for faculty sabbaticals that demonstrate solid promise in strengthening interdisciplinary programs receive favorable treatment – in accord with the College's Strategic Plan.

## **2. Suggestions**

There is a commendable effort both to develop new academic programs and to modify and improve existing academic programs. With a large School of Education program preparing the next generation of teachers, there is an understandable dependence on academic content in the College of Arts & Sciences in particular. So the number of graduates in each of the academic programs in Arts & Sciences is itself not an accurate indication of the size or importance of the department offering that content. But the production of majors in these departments does carry significant resource requirements if the academic quality of these programs is to be maintained. Oswego should consider guidelines for the consideration of continuing or terminating degree programs when the numbers of degrees become so small that the quality of the degrees is suspect; the overall quality of Oswego's academic programs may require closing some degree programs in the future.

While the emphasis on interdisciplinary work is in consonance with the Strategic Plan, faculty members and programmatic initiatives in these areas can encounter challenges with regard to resources and the priorities in the academic units in which the faculty members and the programs reside. Sometimes these challenges are worked out in advance between cooperating deans but there are real challenges – particularly for new or recently hired faculty members – which may require consideration of more formal joint appointments with well-defined responsibilities for accountability and for resource support.

### **Standard 12: General Education**

*The institution's curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, and technological competence.*

The institution meets this standard.

#### **1. Strengths, significant accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovation practices**

According to the self-study, additional documentation, and campus interviews, the Team concluded that the State University of New York at Oswego (SUNY Oswego) exceeds the SUNY mandated General Education (GE) requirements by offering its students many opportunities including the infusion of GE in course offerings in the majors. It also meets the standards of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education including Oral and Written Communication, Scientific and Quantitative Reasoning, Critical Analysis and Reasoning, and Technological Competence. As of 2011 over 300 courses were listed as core and or options for meeting GE requirements in basic skills, knowledge foundations, human diversity, and intellectual issues. SUNY Oswego requires an average of 42 credits of General Education field for its students to graduate with a Bachelor's degree. Expected student learning outcomes for each of the listed courses are clearly well articulated.

A sample of the GE course syllabi reflects expected student learning outcomes that address competency areas in the Middle States Standards of Excellence and more, to reflect the State University of New York's and SUNY Oswego's commitment to preparing students for their majors in the areas of communication, critical thinking, problem solving, communication, global competency and personal development. In addition, GE knowledge and skills are not limited to basic level GE course offerings but extend beyond the two years of study into the junior and senior years. The unique upper level GE "intellectual issues" multidisciplinary courses provide students opportunities for more integrative learning to prepare them for lifelong learning and as effective real world problem solvers.

The flexibility of allowing students to meet GE requirements with courses taken overseas and/ or Advanced Placement credits where appropriate, provides students the opportunity to graduate in a more timely manner. However, the College has clear policy about GE courses including a schedule for waiver examinations, where some GE courses may be substituted by a successful test outcome, and the sequencing of some GE courses may be required to ensure student success. For example, students are required to demonstrate Math proficiency first before taking upper level Math courses. Such transparency speaks well of SUNY Oswego's integrity as a higher education enterprise.

The Team was especially impressed by SUNY Oswego's engagement initiatives that promote citizenship among students, faculty, and the community. For example, a large sustainability fair held each year brings together a large number of students, faculty and the community and students participate in such activities as a simulation of global decision making about global

issues (e.g., making decisions about climate change) that prepares them for their roles as future global leaders. The Team is also encouraged by the level of SUNY Oswego's commitment to ensuring that its GE course offerings continue to be strengthened. A position of Director of General Education has been created and filled to coordinate the General Education component of programs and in 2010 the Faculty Assembly's creation of the Taskforce on Designing General Education of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (GE 21 Taskforce) underscored the importance of the inclusion of Oswego's advanced writing plan, multi-disciplinary perspectives and integration of GE in majors. The GE curriculum review required by SUNY Board of Trustees demands that these reviews are conducted on a five-year cycle.

Campus interviews with faculty indicated that a significant number of them would like to review GE curriculum that has been in place since 2007, especially the credit hour requirements (i.e., reducing the GE requirement to 30) to strengthen major offerings. Anecdotal comments from students did not indicate any strong feelings about the GE credit hours. They noted that GE courses often influenced their chosen majors, and that the variety of choices was appreciated, the classes gave them an appreciation of other fields, and meeting the GE requirements did not impede their degree progress.

The Team supports the establishment of the GE 21 Taskforce to conduct a thorough review of the current GE curriculum. This will ensure that students acquire the competences they need to be successful in their majors and it will help maintain a proper balance in credit hours between the GE curriculum and the majors.

### **Standard 13: Related Educational Activities**

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

The institution meets this standard.

#### **1. Strengths, significant accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovation practices**

Based on a review of the *Self-Study*, other institutional documents including--the strategic plan, college catalog, website, materials related to internships, international studies, online learning, etc.-- and other location site visits, the Visiting Team reached the following observations, findings, and conclusions related to this standard:

##### *Basic Skills*

There is strong evidence (i.e., small or non-existent achievement gaps in retention and graduation rates) that students not fully prepared for college-level work are identified and that appropriate support services are provided. Examples of support programs that produce very positive results are highlighted below. (See **2. Areas for commendation**)

Increases in the demand for tutoring services and disability accommodations are occurring, but are being managed at the present time.

### *Experienced-Based Learning, Distance Education and Online Learning*

The College has established policies and procedures for internships, co-ops, study abroad, and online learning that are consistent across departments and schools, and it assesses such learning experiences at the course / experience level. There are numerous opportunities for students to engage in service learning experiences, which may be awarded credit, as well.

The same identity verification system is used for students accessing online courses as is used for students accessing the online portion of hybrid courses (i.e., the Banner student information system). One must bear in mind that many of the students accessing the online learning management system are taking face-to-face courses or hybrid courses, or sitting for proctored exams where physical identity verification occurs. In situations where the course is totally online, faculty members are experimenting with technologies (e.g., cameras and personal videoconferencing software) to ensure the student's identity.

### *Additional Locations and Other Instructional Sites*

Courses and programs (in part) offered at other locations or sites are developed, approved, reviewed, and assessed in the same manner and processes as their campus-based counterparts. A visit to the Syracuse Metro Center site found classrooms ranging from small conference / seminar rooms to reasonably sized lecture halls which are all configurable in a variety of ways that makes the space conducive to diverse teaching and learning styles. The technology used (instructors stations, whiteboards, smart classrooms) is comparable to the technology used on campus as are the library resources available online or in electronic forms.

### *Information Literacy*

The campus acknowledges a need to make the assessment of information literacy and library services (for all students) more granular in order to improve both student success and library services.

### *International Programs*

SUNY Oswego has a remarkable number of undergraduate students participating in study abroad programs. Twenty percent of graduating seniors have a study abroad experience, a 102% increase in study abroad participation in the past decade. There are opportunities to participate in over 80 study abroad programs in 30 countries. As part of the evaluation, the Chair visited one of the largest programs offered, in Barcelona, Spain. The visit took place November 22-24 2011.

The visit included an extended conversation with Dr. Pedro Guardia Masso, Director of the program, who provided an extensive history of the program, and a detailed overview of the academic offerings. Students can choose to participate for the full year, either fall or spring semesters, or a summer session. The summer program is geared towards language instruction,



while the academic year program offers a much wider variety of courses. As part of the visit, the Chair attended classes both in English and Spanish, at all levels of proficiency. SUNY Oswego students take those courses with students from all over the world, mostly from European countries. Students take a language placement exam upon their arrival in Barcelona, and are placed according to the results. Advanced students take all their classes in Spanish, while lower-level language students can take some of their courses in English. In addition to language courses, the chair attended a class on the history of Spain since 1975 (after Franco's death) (intermediate language level), and class on the Spanish Economy after Spain joined the European Union (advanced language level). All courses are offered by University of Barcelona faculty members. Syllabi and course materials are available on the web. In the opinion of the evaluator, the visited courses meet all academic requirements.

All classes meet at the University of Barcelona, centrally located in the city, and a campus of historic importance in Spain. Universidad de Barcelona is the second largest in the country, and is Spain's leading Research University. Thus, its library and ancillary resources are more than adequate for the needs of the Oswego program. The classrooms visited all had appropriate technological resources for teaching. Students live in "Residencias", private residence halls. The program has a faculty member who is responsible for the supervision of the living facilities. The chair visited one of the Residencias, where Oswego students lived together with students from different parts of Spain.

As part of the evaluation, the Chair met with all Oswego students for dinner and for a private conversation. The overall student feedback was very positive. They felt that the administration in Barcelona was helpful, classes were challenging, and they all loved the city. The program meets their academic and social needs.

## **2. Areas for commendation**

SUNY Oswego is to be commended for:

- An EOP that has funded enrollment of 322 students and boasts an impressive freshman-to-sophomore retention rate of 82 percent, consistent with that of the college as a whole. EOP students are represented in student leadership, Residence Life and Housing Office staff, Admissions Office staff, student orientation staff, and academic programs such as McNair and CSTEP as well as in honor societies. 80% of McNair students go on to graduate school.
- The piloting, assessment, and subsequent implementation of requiring midterm grades for all lower division courses. The initial assessment indicated that students were more likely to make midcourse corrections that resulted them remaining in good academic standing.
- The degree to which the COMPASS program coordinates first-year experiences, academic advisement, and other support services into a truly integrated program that creates a "culture of student success". This initiative also serves an excellent example of successful collaboration between faculty and administration and between academic and student affairs.
- Being ranked first or second among 12 comparable SUNY schools in student surveys with regard to opportunities for community service and availability of internships.

Seventy two percent of seniors report being engaged in internships, field experiences, practica, service learning, or volunteer service. This integration of classroom experience and engagement opportunities was a significant factor in being recognized by the Carnegie Foundation as a community-engaged campus.

#### 4. Suggestions

- Implement the Self-Study Recommendations addressing these concerns, namely:
  - “Evaluate the growing demand for ... disability and tutoring services in relation to the College’s resources...”
- Find ways to overcome the challenges preventing the collection and tracking of longitudinal data to assess student information literacy over an extended period.

#### **Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning**

*Assessment of student learning demonstrates that, at graduation, or other appropriate points, the institution’s students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals.*

The institution meets this standard

#### **1. Strengths, significant accomplishments, significant progress, or exemplary/innovation practices**

Based on the self-study and other information from supporting documents, as well as interviews with Members of the General Education Council (GEC) and the Assessment Advisory Committee (AAC), and other stakeholders of the assessment process at the State University of New York at Oswego (SUNY Oswego), the Team has concluded that significant progress continues to be made on assessment of student learning since the last Middle States decennial reaffirmation of accreditation in 2002 and most recently, the Periodic Review Report of 2007. The Team notes that each academic department at SUNY Oswego has responsibility for developing and implementing assessment plans for both General Education competence assessment and assessment of student learning outcomes at course and program levels.

Since the Periodic Review Report (PRR) of 2007, the College has undertaken a number of important steps to strengthen the supporting structure for the assessment of General Education and programs including the creation of the position of Half-time Assessment Coordinator. The Assessment Coordinator reports to the Director of Institutional Research and Assessment and is responsible for coordinating and documenting program assessment results from departments. The Assessment Coordinator is a member of Assessment Advisory Council. The appointment of an Assessment Coordinator is an important strategic move for the College since best practice demands that faculty should become fully involved if the assessment process for student learning is to be meaningful and effective.

### ***General Education***

The Team notes that SUNY Oswego assesses the four competences specified by the Middle States of *oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, and technological competence*, using clearly articulated expected student learning outcomes and holistic rubric (i.e., Exceeding Expectations, Meeting Expectations, Approaching Expectations and Not Meeting Expectations). An assessment of Critical Thinking in 2009-2010 shows that 72.28% of the 635 students assessed met or exceeded expectations on identifying, analyzing, and evaluating arguments as they occur in their own and others' work; and 71.74% did so on the second student learning outcome of developing well-reasoned arguments. Since it is possible that students may score highly on some dimensions than others (i.e., identifying than evaluation of arguments), a holistic scoring rubric might misrepresent student performance and thus weaken the utility of the results as a basis for making changes for continuous improvement in students learning in General Education. Besides, clear criteria for assessment upfront will identify in advance what level of performance will trigger a need for improvement.

Assessment of Information management indicates that 70% of the students assessed met or exceeded expectations in performing basic operations of personal computer usage; and understanding the use of basic research techniques. And yet faculty members were satisfied with student performance on the first learning outcome and not the second. It is not clear what assessment criteria was set in advance for assessing this competency. Since each department coordinates its own General Education process there is bound to be great variability in processes which is a reflection of differences in departmental assessment approaches. The General Education Council needs to provide proactive guidelines to departments on General Education. A careful mapping of competences with a few integrative General Education courses such as capstone courses for each competence area and an appropriate assessment tools and criteria upfront will help reduce complexity and enhance the meaningfulness of the assessment results. This notwithstanding, there are compelling examples of assessment data being collected, analyzed, and used to inform change especially in General Education under the General Education Council.

SUNY Oswego has worked successfully with the General Education Assessment Group (GEAR) created by the State University of New York Board of Trustees (SUNY BoT) in designing and implementing a comprehensive General Education curriculum with an equally comprehensive outcomes assessment plan for GE courses. This plan assesses 16 basic areas of General Education knowledge, skill and competency areas with over 300 GE courses. The Team agrees with the need for the GE curriculum review by the Taskforce on Designing General Education for the Twenty-First Century (GE 21 Taskforce). A mapping of critical student learning outcomes will facilitate the justification and or streamlining of the curriculum.

### ***Major Field Assessment***

The Team notes that as in the case of General Education, responsibility for assessing students courses in their majors rests with the 28 departments although the Interim Provost and Vice President has the ultimate responsibility for assessment. An institutional assessment organizational system that includes faculty participation is in place to ensure a sustained

assessment process for improving student learning that has support from both the administration and faculty. A half-time Assessment Coordinator, and the Director for Institutional Research provide professional support to all departments as well as taking responsibility for summarizing departmental reports for dissemination to both internal external stakeholders. In addition, there is an Assistant Dean for Accreditation and Assessment for the School of Education. These individuals work closely with departments and faculty in the school or department on designing and implementing assessment processes that align with the college's mission and clearly articulated expected student program learning outcomes, and assessment methods and analyses that provide clear evidence of what students know, think, and can do at the conclusion of their chosen major/program. The Team applauds SUNY Oswego for its continued support of faculty professional development in assessment initiatives by providing necessary resources for both on- and off-campus workshops. This is confirmed by its commitment of more than \$70,000 per year to this activity over the past two years in support of faculty development initiatives on assessment.

The Team believes that SUNY Oswego has made good progress on assessment of student learning from 2007 when it was said to be in its infancy. The institution clearly demonstrates that assessment results are being used for continuous improvement of student learning. It is not surprising that programs with professional accreditations (i.e., Business Administration and Accounting [AACSB], Education [NCATE], Art [NASAD], Music[NASAD], Chemistry, [ACS], and Theatre) are further along with creating a culture of assessment as they can adapt their assessment plans and data collected for meeting such accreditations to meet the Middle States' assessment of student learning requirements effectively. The Art Department has identified learning outcomes for its five programs—Bachelor's Degrees in Studio Art/Graphic Art, Bachelor's Degree in Art History, Bachelor's Degree in Studio Art, Bachelor of Fine Art Degree in Graphic Design and a Master's Degree(s) in Studio Art and Graphics Design. All these programs have clearly articulated learning goals and selected the portfolio, comprehensive examinations or project paper as tools for assessing student learning. The Music Department has articulated five learning goals for its students and offers a capstone course that is assessed using a term paper on a theoretical analysis, and an audition of student performance using a principal instrument that is juried. Grades are awarded on a competency testing basis and that students must achieve a score of 80% on the assessments to demonstrate mastery. However, the Team notes that use of grades unless they are accompanied by a rubric can undermine the usefulness of results for continuous improvement of student learning.

Other examples of progress in non-professionally accredited disciplines at undergraduate level include but are not limited to Anthropology, Geology, Economics, Global and International Studies, Human Development, Modern Languages, and Philosophy. For several of these programs, SUNY Oswego demonstrates that it is closing the loop by using assessment results to enhance lower level courses. The development and use of a capstone course or experience enables the programs to focus on program level assessment, rather than the assessment of students in every course (i.e., course-based assessment). Development and use of capstone courses, internship experience with a project paper and or comprehensive final examinations as well as vendor developed testing tools will wean programs from the complexity of course based assessments. Student outcomes assessment by professional accreditors should be seen as a

source of data and information for providing evidence and not as a substitute for meeting Middle States standards.

There is strong evidence that clearly articulated assessment plans are used in assessing student learning in professionally accredited programs such as business, and education at the Master's Degree level. In the MBA program a Major Field Test developed by the Education Testing Service has been/is being used and in 2009 students who took this test showed strong performance across the five major areas of Marketing, Management, Finance, Managerial Accounting, and Strategic Integration. This enables SUNY Oswego to compare its students' performance using national norms and consequently, adds value to the MBA in addition to the Association for Advancement of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accreditation. However, more progress is needed for developing and implementing strong assessment processes for all other master's programs at SUNY Oswego. The Team further agrees that the system of sharing assessment results should be improved to ensure that program decisions are based on assessment results, rather than hunch.

## **2. Suggestions**

The Team suggests that SUNY Oswego make effective use of assessment results from capstone courses/experiences that provide opportunities for students. These courses allow students to master competencies in General Education, critical knowledge or skills in General Education, and/or their majors for program level assessment instead of using assessment data collected from assessments of numerous courses at different levels. This will reduce complexity of assessment processes for programs and facilitate use of results.

The Team also suggests that the Assessment Advisory Committee should be more proactive about providing advice and guidelines to departments for continuing to develop and fine-tune their assessment plans. The Assessment Advisory Committee should also encourage departments to develop and utilize analytical rather than holistic rubrics for assessing artifacts to facilitate use of results for continuous improvement.