

Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students
of
THE UNIVERSITY OF SCRANTON
Scranton, PA 18510

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 March 30 - April 2, 2008

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AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

President/CEO:

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Harold W. Baillie, Provost

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Standard 1: Mission and Goals

The University of Scranton has a clearly defined mission firmly grounded in the University's vision of an Ignatian education. These traditions call for Cura Personalis; Magis; and Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice. The goal of Cura Personalis refers to the development of the whole person – mind, body, and spirit. It applies not only to students, but also to the University's faculty and staff. The goal of Magis is characterized by a restless desire for excellence; the University strives to excel in all that it does, academically as well as in extracurricular and outreach activities. Finally, the goal of Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice encompasses an Ignatian worldview which emphasizes dedication to service, a concern for the common good, and a commitment to a promotion of justice; the university community is challenged to be a social force. Associated with this mission are high-level goals, while key institutional goals are found in the strategic, tactical, and operational plans that will be discussed in Standard 2.

The University's Board of Trustees revised the mission statement in 2005, and it has been embraced throughout the University. The University's mission statement is widely publicized and is an important part of how the University presents itself. The mission has provided a framework for ongoing institutional development, self-evaluation, and the formulation of the University's goals. It calls the University to a standard of excellence, yet is realistic in terms of how it will be attained. The team could not help but be impressed at how this mission permeates all aspects of the institution. Board members, faculty, administrators, students, and alumni all reference the mission in their discussions about the University and have clearly embraced it. Because of the declining number of Jesuits in the United States, the University is establishing a variety of opportunities for all employees to study and experiment with the strategies of the Ignatian pedagogy.

The University clearly fulfills this standard, and their work in this regard could serve as a model for other institutions.

Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

The University of Scranton conducts institutional planning that is systematic, coordinated, and sustained in order to fulfill its mission. It accomplishes this through a three-tiered planning model, including its strategic plan, which is developed on a five-year cycle; tactical plans, which are developed on a three-year cycle and updated each year; and operational plans, which are developed and carried out on an annual cycle.

The planning process is informed by the mission, and there appear to be appropriate interrelationships among institutional, operational, and unit-level planning. Participation in the planning process at the University is broadly based and involves representatives from all affected parts of the institution. Budgeting and resource allocation are

appropriately linked to the planning process, and financial resources appear to be distributed equitably to the various components of the University.

Finally, the assessment activities resulting from good planning are used for continuous improvement and institutional renewal. There is a clear and defined movement to link planning and budgeting processes, as described in the documents “Link Planning and Budget Processes for 2005-2010 Strategic Planning Cycle” (2007-2008 and 2008-2009). The University’s electronic annual report system, implemented in 2002-03, is a good example of how information about planning and assessment is shared.

The Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research Office (PAIRO) deserves credit for the way in which they support the planning process and share information throughout the university community.

The team does suggest that goals (in strategic and tactical plans) and objectives (in operational plans) could be written more clearly. While they all appear laudable, in many instances they are so vaguely stated as to make verification of their completion difficult.

Overall, the University has a good planning process and clearly meets this standard.

Standard 3: Institutional Resources

The team finds that the human, financial, technical, facilities, and other resources necessary to achieve the 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 the ongoing outcomes assessment.

The University of Scranton is in a solid financial situation that has enabled it to achieve the goals established in the strategic plan and operational plans. There have been multiple years of planned operating surpluses, increased enrollment, and increased expendable resources. In March 2008, Standard & Poor’s Rating Services “assigned its ‘A’ standard long-term rating to the Pennsylvania Higher Education Facilities Authorities series 2008 revenue bonds, issued on behalf of the University of Scranton” (PHEFA University of Scranton; Private Coll/Univ – General Obligation March 18, 2008). Since the University is planning significant construction in the coming years, much of which will be funded through additional bond issuances and fund raising, the team suggests that the University continue its financial modeling and evaluation of debt capacity.

The University conducts an annual budget process, and the results are communicated to appropriate parties in a timely manner so they can plan accordingly. New revenue sources are sought out, such as a summer sports camp and local use of campus bandwidth. The financial team makes an effort to control costs and increase efficiency in light of the fact that budget surpluses are designated for strategic initiatives.

The University is audited annually and received an unqualified opinion for the fiscal year ended May 31, 2007. There were no management comments of material importance.

The team commends the Information Technology staff for the outstanding improvements they have made to infrastructure, network security, technical support, access to online resources, as well as hardware and software upgrades. The staff is very well-trained and professional, and they make decisions based on priorities and available funding. The staff works collaboratively with the Library and the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTLE) to provide support for those areas. The Vice President for Planning and Chief Information Officer undertakes annual benchmarking initiatives and uses that information to develop future plans and/or to improve current operations. The Information Technology Department is also dedicated to providing resources to the local community, such as the Internet2 hub.

The Development Office has been in the quiet phase of a capital campaign, with the official announcement scheduled for April 2008. Fund raising goals are integrated in the University's financial models, particularly as they relate to future capital projects. Results of yearly advancement planning processes inform both the annual and the five-year budget models.

The University has a well-maintained campus and very little deferred maintenance. The Campus Master Plan developed in 1999 continues to be used as a guide. An annual audit of facilities is conducted, and the findings are used to plan for corrective and preventative maintenance. Focus is given to sustainability and global environmental issues, as well as to providing a safe and comfortable learning and living environment. The department will have moved to using all "green" cleaning supplies by fall 2008, and the new campus center was built to LEED standards. They also are creative in developing ways to involve students in sustainability initiatives, such as recycling contests. Current planning is taking place for a landscape master plan, a new science building, and campus boundary identification.

Standard 4: Leadership and Governance

The University has a well-defined and collegial system of governance, including written policies outlining the responsibilities of the institution's various stakeholders. The roles of the Board of Trustees, the President, University Council, faculty senate, and student senate are described in their respective constitutions and by-laws. The University has an engaged Board of Trustees, talented administrators, and a strong faculty. There are appropriate opportunities for all stakeholders to provide input into the institutional decision-making process. In sum, the University enjoys strong leadership from the President, faculty officers, Board of Trustees, and student body.

The responsibilities of the Board of Trustees are clearly described in the University's by-laws. The Board is currently comprised of 37 people, and its four committees are now organized around the themes of the University's strategic plan: Economic Strength,

Academic Excellence, Campus Community, and Civic Engagement. All trustees and officers of the University are required each year to review and sign a conflict of interest disclosure form. In addition, the trustees are actively involved in the University's capital campaign and are fulfilling their responsibilities in this regard.

The roles and responsibilities of the faculty are outlined in the faculty handbook, which is part of the collective bargaining agreement between the faculty union (Faculty Affairs Council, or FAC) and the administration. Contracts are negotiated every three years, and the handbook is revised when the FAC and the administration agree to make changes. In addition to the collective bargaining agreement, the faculty are represented by a faculty senate, and its role is spelled out in its constitution and by-laws.

Students participate in the governance process through their elected officers in the student senate. Student input is sought by the Board of Trustees, the administration, and faculty leaders. The University also has a University Council (UC) to ensure full participation by faculty, staff, administrators, alumni, and students in matters of governance. The UC's constitution and by-laws describe in detail its participation in policy-making. At the recommendation of the UC, and with the approval of the President, there is now a Staff Senate Planning Group actively working on the concept of a staff senate.

Overall, all stakeholders in the University are committed to a collegial system of governance, and they understand their roles and responsibilities in this regard.

Standard 5: Administration

The team finds that the University of Scranton's administrative structure and services facilitate learning and research/scholarship, foster quality improvement, and support the institution's organization and governance. The University's administration is organized appropriately, and its structure is depicted in an organizational chart available online. Periodic review of the organizational structure is undertaken as the institution's needs change.

The University's administrative structure is well-defined and provides leadership that supports the mission and goals. The President's membership in the Society of Jesus and his experience teaching in a selective Jesuit university have provided him with the appropriate academic background and professional training to lead. The President and Vice Presidents are committed to demonstrating the value and purpose of an Ignatian education as exemplified in the strategic plan: Pride, Passion, Promise – Shaping Our Jesuit Tradition. The administration and staff are competent and very dedicated to the institution and its students.

The President has established clear lines of authority and built a team that is enthusiastic about his leadership style and plans for moving forward. The President's Cabinet meets weekly, which allows for collaboration on institutional developments. The Vice Presidents communicate openly with their direct reports responsible for current

operations and the accomplishment of their goals. During team interviews, it was often reported that the leadership had moved from a “dominant, autocratic” management style to one of collaboration.

An outcome of the Climate Study Report (2004) was to improve communication campus-wide and administrative support in certain areas. The President and his team have also used assessment results to make important changes to staffing models, such as the addition of a Vice President for Human Resources, scheduled for summer 2008, and an Associate Dean for Assessment in the College of Arts and Sciences, scheduled for fall 2008.

Standard 6: Integrity

The University of Scranton conducts its programs and activities with integrity and supports academic and intellectual freedom in a manner consistent with its mission and vision for Ignatian education. In all of its activities, the institution represents itself truthfully and honors its contracts and commitments.

Academic freedom, intellectual freedom, and freedom of expression are central to the academic enterprise. The University values these principles and attempts to ensure that they are respected throughout the campus.

There are fair and impartial processes to address the grievances of students, faculty, and staff, and these processes are widely known. A climate of respect exists among students, faculty, staff, and administration, and all stakeholders are committed to the ideals of the University. The University’s website, catalog, and recruiting materials present the institution accurately to its various external publics.

The University operates transparently and communicates both regularly and frankly with the university community. It has developed guidelines and expectations to ensure sound ethical practices in many areas of campus life, such as the Academic Code of Honesty and the Trustee and Officer Conflict of Interest Policy.

Standard 7: Institutional Assessment

The University of Scranton has a number of documented and sustained assessment processes in place to evaluate and improve the total range of its offerings and to assure it is fulfilling its institutional mission and goals. Several factors contribute to this institutional strength. One, as stated in the Self-Study, is the University’s roots in Ignatian education, which emphasizes self-examination to fulfill goals effectively. A second factor is the work of PAIRO in supporting institutional needs for information and data. Assessment and strategic planning are informed by benchmarking and the development of strategic indicators. Another factor is the collaboration of the individuals involved in these functions. One such example is the Provost/Vice President for

Academic Affairs' and PAIRO's hiring of a technical specialist to train users of Banner (the University's data system) so that data is accessible to all.

University-wide assessments include PAIRO's use of data from annual reports submitted by various sectors of the University. Additionally, the operational guides that govern financial planning, facilities, and technology are assessed annually as to their effectiveness in support of the strategic plan, mission, and goals. An example of this is the technology benchmarking assessment. In its Comprehensive Assessment Plan (CAP) of 2004, the University identified assessment principles and a process for the implementation of the plan.

More evidence of the University's excellence is its five-year graduation rate of 80%, which far exceeds the 64% average for Selective Bachelor's/Master's Institutions. Also indicative of the University's ability to produce outstanding graduates are its 116 recipients of prestigious awards since 1972, including 11 Fulbright Fellowships, four Truman Scholarships, and six Goldwater Scholarships in the last five years.

Another manifestation of this strength in institutional effectiveness is in the transparency of data to all members of the university community; the University Planning Committee's minutes are available online, as are the minutes of the Self-Study Steering Committee. Various studies, such as the Climate Study of 2004, which was conducted by an external research group, are also viewable online from computers on campus. This openness to sharing data is a testament to the University's acceptance of its challenges and its desire to improve.

The somewhat decentralized nature of assessment activities, which could be perceived as a weakness, actually demonstrates the richness of assessment that takes place on campus. PAIRO attempts to ascertain what research is being conducted university-wide, assisting when necessary or desirable. As such, assessment is ongoing in many areas of the University. The Weinberg Library, for example, implemented the LibQual+ instrument to determine its effectiveness in serving its constituents. The Library's research serves as a model for assessment conducted formatively. The data gathered from the instrument, which address the quality of the Library's services, staff, instructional support, and environment, have been used to improve those aspects mentioned by respondents.

There are numerous instances of this application of data interpretation. For example, the Library's home page was redesigned to make the site easier to navigate; the Banner system was synchronized with the Library's software so that users need only a single sign-on; group study rooms were added to serve a need; an additional photocopier was installed in a heavy-use area; a blog was posted so that Library users can make suggestions online; and interlibrary loans are accomplished more expediently. Other suggestions made to Library staff are given due consideration, and if deemed appropriate, acted upon. One such example is that of a student who requested better lighting in one area of the Library: the Dean had the degree of lighting investigated, it was determined that brighter lights were needed, and more lighting was installed.

The Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE), under the umbrella of the Library, is a resource for both students and faculty. Among the CTLE's many offerings are a writing center, peer tutoring, accommodation for special-needs students, instructional technology support, student-faculty mentorship programs, and more. In addition, the CTLE conducts online course assessments through an internally-designed system of evaluation that accounts for faculty-identified desired learning outcomes. Other CTLE activities involve assistance to academic departments in developing their own assessment instruments and training others to use a course management system to access data efficiently. Both the Library and the CTLE should be praised for their commitment to formative assessment.

To be commended as well is the University's support for PAIRO, the locus of much of the institution's assessment activities. PAIRO's domain ranges from assisting academic programs' assessment of student learning outcomes to broader institutional effectiveness measures. It also addresses compliance with national and state regulatory agencies. PAIRO has one staff member dedicated to assessment, and it sponsors external consultants to give presentations on student learning outcomes assessment. It coordinates the assessment of the educational support units according to a regular cycle; two divisions are assessed per year. PAIRO's role involves crafting the instruments for each division's assessment and lending its expertise to this ongoing research.

It is evident that the University of Scranton holds itself accountable for both its strengths and weaknesses, and it implements initiatives that are born from various institutional studies. This is exemplified by the strategic plan having been influenced by the Climate Study. It also sees different units of the University as working in concert with one another to achieve goals. In these ways and others, institutional effectiveness, as measured through various methods and instruments, is indisputably one of the University of Scranton's strengths.

Standard 8: Student Admissions

Admissions policies and criteria are made readily available to prospective students in a variety of formats. An Integrated Marketing Plan emphasizing personalized outcome-based recruitment procedures has ensured that the admission process supports the Ignatian goal of Cura Personalis while also producing favorable admissions statistics. For example, freshman applications have doubled since 2001, while the acceptance rate has decreased, creating a more competitive admissions environment. The University has improved the diversity of its student body, but the team suggests that it should continue to monitor local changing demographics and develop recruitment strategies to continue this trend. The University's first-year retention rate averages 89%, well above the 82% national average for Selective Bachelor's/ Master's Institutions. The enthusiastic enrollment team is to be commended for blending the University's mission into policies and procedures which produce enviable quantitative results.

The individualized, highly successful recruiting process involves the analysis of multiple variables in determining admission. The team suggests that the Associate Vice President of Admissions and Undergraduate Enrollment offer to deliver a presentation explaining the admissions process to academic departments interested in better understanding it.

College policies also ensure that, once accepted, students have every opportunity to achieve their educational goals. Accurate and comprehensive financial aid information is readily accessible, and placement and diagnostic testing is required of all admitted students. Approximately 10% of each entering class is placed in an Academic Development Program to better prepare them for success; the average four-year retention rate for students who complete this program is 86%. The unique Summer Bridge Program also provides several students who would not normally be admitted the opportunity to demonstrate that they have the ability to succeed academically. Finally, the impressive CTLE provides quality academic support to all students.

To meet the needs of non-traditional students, the University restructured an existing college into the College of Graduate and Continuing Education. New methods for delivery of instruction and services have been developed to better serve this population, including off-campus classes, online courses, compressed schedules, and customized programs. Creating programs for “in demand” topics and taking advantage of web-based programs have helped enrollment in graduate programs to nearly triple in the past four years.

One area of concern the University has recognized and responded to is the treatment of transfer students. In the past, policies addressing the actual awarding of transfer credits were confusing, and information was not delivered to prospective transfers in a timely fashion. Evidence clearly exists that these deficiencies have been successfully corrected.

Standard 9: Student Support Services

Abundant evidence exists that the University offers a wide and relevant array of mission-consistent student services which are delivered by qualified professionals and which are appropriate to student strengths and needs. The procedures in place to address student needs, including those of student athletes, are equitable and supportive. Student complaints and grievances are recorded and addressed appropriately. All student records are safely and securely maintained, and policies for the release of student information are widely available.

The team commends the Division of Student Affairs for their yearly Departmental Assessment Plan. Individual goals aligned with student learning outcomes are linked to the tactical plan and describe quantitative evaluation methods. Follow-up action of results closes the loop in this impressive plan.

A large number of high-quality student activities exist for students on campus, including commendable programming sponsored by University Ministries. Especially noteworthy

are the large number of retreat opportunities and the incredible amount of volunteer service performed by students. In one year alone, 2,400 students volunteered 165,000 hours in community service locally, throughout the United States, and at several international sites, underscoring the belief that a Jesuit education is meant to form men and women “for others.” The team agrees with the University’s description of its students as “mega-generous.”

Students seem engaged in and enthusiastic about the University, and they also seem to feel safe and secure. The staff that serves them is dedicated to creating and maintaining the sense of community that is so evidently pervasive on the campus. The great morale and camaraderie of the staff has much to do with their commendable participation in innovative forms of professional development.

Students are satisfied with their residential life experience, and they are excited about the new DeNaples Campus Center. They remain concerned, however, about a shortage of recreational space. The administration is well aware of their concerns and has plans to address them in the coming years.

Abundant opportunities for co-curricular programming exist at the University. A closer examination of such potential would perhaps further enrich the excellent educational experience that students already have. The University also continues to operate four separate undergraduate academic advising centers, each with its own operating procedures and personnel. The system is inconsistent, with each model having advantages and disadvantages. Some prudent discussion might determine if the current approach to academic advising is the most effective, or if recommendations from the 2003 Academic Advising Report, which suggested coordination and consistency of advising services, need to be implemented.

As other non-traditional methods of curriculum delivery are developed at the University, it will be important for Student Affairs staff to ensure that new non-traditional students have reasonable and equitable access to the fine services they currently provide to all students on campus. Student Affairs staff should also continue their “branding approach” to alerting all University constituents regarding the wide array of services they provide.

Standard 10: Faculty

The University fulfills Standard 10 clearly and completely. The faculty at the University of Scranton, both full-time and part-time, are prepared and qualified for their positions with appropriate degrees and experience. Their dedication and devotion to the University and its students resonate. People seem to enjoy working at the University and feel a deep connection to one another and its mission. The University is to be complimented on the collegial spirit which permeates the institution.

Faculty are engaged in curriculum design and implementation. It would appear that few topics are not given faculty input, and faculty are well-represented on committees to

which they are elected by their peers. Collective bargaining enjoys support on the campus, is responsive to faculty concerns, and profits from a good working relationship with administration. The faculty union has well-articulated processes for grievances. Disputes and differences of opinion/perspective are inevitable, but they seem to be approached maturely and through deliberative structures and bodies which foster adequate communication and resolution.

Some concern exists with respect to the retirement of approximately 10% of senior faculty within the next three years. Everyone recognizes that institutional history and memory, as well as a keen dedication to service, will leave with these faculty members.

Faculty hiring, review, tenure, promotion, and even the current retirement opportunity occur within the context of a collective bargaining agreement which seems to be functioning well, affording the various constituencies opportunity for regular communication. In the Self-Study's recommendations, faculty ask for greater transparency regarding the disposition of faculty lines, especially those moved from unit to unit. The need to shift faculty from unit to unit based on enrollment trends is appropriate, but the team does agree that it should be a transparent process.

The standards for hiring, tenure, and promotion of full-time faculty are clearly articulated in the faculty handbook. An annual review process provides important feedback to new faculty, and everyone concurs that "surprises" have been avoided. On the rare occasion when the President has reversed a tenure and promotion decision, the decision has been in favor of the faculty member.

Use of part-time faculty has increased significantly in the last few years, and, without drawing conclusions about their effectiveness, the recommendations contained in the Self-Study are measured and worthy of attention. Inculcating the Ignatian educational mission, the bedrock of the university culture, is more critical as part-time faculty teach ever-increasing numbers of credits, particularly at the 100-200 levels. Establishment of the faculty specialist category may help to address this issue – certainly it appears well-intentioned – but as of this writing it is too early to draw conclusions.

Worth noting very positively is the CTLE. Middle States recognizes "linkages among scholarship, teaching, [and] student learning..." and the CTLE seems an exemplar of those linkages. It is housed and administered in a single well-appointed and staffed location, and is not incidentally attentive to assessment of its own utility and service to its various communities.

Institutional support for faculty development appears quite appropriate, ranging from proposal-driven sabbaticals (not limited to quota or percentage) to very reasonable support for professional development. In spite of this support, scholarship production seems to vary widely among schools and departments. The team suggests that the University consider putting into place a more explicit articulation of scholarly expectations and formal procedures to review scholarship productivity.

The brevity of this section is meant to communicate that, by and large, Scranton is a self-aware institution with highly competent leadership among the faculty and administration who appear to be working cooperatively for the University's primary mission – its students.

Standard 11: Educational Offerings

The University provided evidence of carefully developed, mission-driven academic content skillfully delivered by highly-qualified faculty instructors. The quality and rigor of instruction in its traditional undergraduate programs provide a substantial foundation on which its graduate courses have been built. The high quality of these educational offerings, combined with the expertise and commitment of its faculty to students, explains the deeply satisfying educational experience reported by the University's students.

The University deserves particular praise for the exceptional quality of its Library resources and information technology support. The Library ranks above the mean among Jesuit institutions in the spring 2006 LibQual+ survey of Library services. Student and faculty satisfaction with the Library staff is especially strong. The Weinberg Library's holdings of more than 400,000 volumes, plus a rich collection of printed and online journals, strongly support the academic offerings of the institution. The Library staff has made a commitment to being responsive to student needs. An example of this would be providing first-floor study space after normal Library hours during peak study times such as mid-term and end-of-semester examination periods.

The University is also commended for its technology infrastructure that supports teaching and learning, enhances students' access, and complements traditional computer labs. One such lab in the Weinberg Library is open for student access 24 hours a day. The institution was an early adopter of the Blackboard course management software. Even though the University has committed to changing platforms from Blackboard to ANGEL, the administration reports no significant problems resulting from the change.

The team suggests that the University pursue strategies to strengthen one area that offers opportunities for improvement: the inclusion of learning outcomes on all course syllabi. While the Provost reports that all majors have adopted course-related learning outcomes, the Self-Study reports that only 70% of course syllabi identify student learning outcomes. The team suggests that the University adopt measures to bring the remaining syllabi into compliance with Standard 11's provision that student learning goals, objectives, knowledge, and skills be articulated.

Standard 12: General Education

In meeting the requirements for general education and essential skills, the University of Scranton frames these requirements through the Ignatian mission. The core exceeds the

minimum requirement of 30 credit hours for a baccalaureate degree, as stipulated by *Characteristics of Excellence*; successful completion of the core ranges from 77-85 hours. The core curriculum (*Curriculum 2000*) has clearly articulated objectives. The University's policy of not designating specific courses for all of the core requirements has allowed all colleges, and not just the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), to offer courses as part of the core requirement. In so doing, the University has genuinely applied the concept of "distribution." In addition, students have greater choice and can select courses of particular interest; this, too, is in keeping with the institution's personalized approach to its students. The inclusion of 15 credits in philosophy and theology is consistent with the institutional mission and provides an opportunity for students to develop key skills and abilities.

The requirement for writing-intensive courses at different levels and the inclusion of a requirement for a writing course in the major communicate to each student the importance of writing in all educational pursuits. Several courses have been designed to allow students to achieve more than one competency in a course. This approach allows students to attempt fewer core curriculum credit hours and encourages students to see the connections among skills, values, and disciplines. The requirements for the core are clearly articulated in print and on the University's website. The importance given to the core curriculum is also communicated by the decision of many departments to assign full-time faculty, rather than adjuncts, to these courses.

The University has demonstrated awareness of the importance of improving student writing by requiring multiple writing courses. However, greater focus on developing progressive learning outcomes for all levels of writing is necessary. Although there is a requirement for a sequence of writing courses, it is unclear that the learning outcomes of the lower-level courses are built upon and further developed in the higher-level courses. Similarly, it is not clear how courses within the majors deliberately build upon and further the skills and abilities developed in general education. A review of the learning outcomes expected of students from core courses might be conducted, and all majors should consider how to expand upon and advance these outcomes at a higher level within the disciplines.

The very laudable goal of inclusion of all colleges and many disciplines in the development and delivery of core courses has led to a lack of a "home" for the core. On several occasions, faculty and administrators spoke of the need for a core curriculum review, and there was general agreement that it was unclear who owns this responsibility. The team concurs with the Self-Study recommendation that this review be carried out. A review might include consideration of the number of credit hours within the core curriculum and whether there are further opportunities to develop courses that meet more than one core requirement. A review would also allow for identification of disciplines that could become more involved in offering core curriculum courses; at least one advantage of this approach would be the greater likelihood of fewer students asking for waivers from core courses, particularly in writing, because of the lack of offerings.

Finally, it is suggested that the core curriculum be revisited with the intention of building clearly-measurable learning outcome assessments into all core courses. Not only will the University be in a position to demonstrate that students are proficient in written and oral communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, technological fluency, and other skills appropriate to general education, but the University will also be able to develop meaningful learning outcome assessment in upper-level courses that can be shown to directly build upon the skills acquired in core courses.

Standard 13: Related Educational Offerings and Activities

Distance learning offerings appear to meet institution-wide standards for quality. The new online MBA program, patterned after the University's online master's degree in education, deserves praise for applying the institution's mission as the ethical framework around which its curriculum is developed. A similar MBA program is being planned that will be based in Hong Kong. The team suggests that the growth of both MBA programs be periodically reviewed to assure that educational quality and institutional mission are maintained.

Online offerings are well thought out, particularly those offered as components of an online degree. Faculty and members of the CTLE made a decision to offer online courses using the ANGEL course management system, and support for a smooth transition to this system is in place. Members of the instructional faculty are offered support in designing online courses, and the University supports their technology needs well. Since a "personalized" approach is one of the University's brand elements, the team suggests that the University consider a strategic plan to determine where and how to grow online course offerings, giving particular attention to how the institution can offer the same personal touch to students and maintain institutional mission at a distance.

The University's online master's degree in education deserves praise for its pragmatic use of full-time faculty holding terminal degrees to design and develop courses to be delivered by adjunct instructors. The adjunct instructors are highly qualified by virtue of their field experience, but hold only a master's degree. Full-time faculty also serve as mentors to them. Since the online education master's program has grown quickly and unexpectedly to 700 students, the team suggests that the University periodically review its educational quality to assure that institutional mission is maintained.

The Admissions Office does not use a formula to determine which under-prepared students will be admitted to academic programs that fall within this standard. Instead, each file is individually read and assessed. This personalized approach is in keeping with the University's mission and has been successful in identifying students who take advantage of available resources and who fit in well at the institution. The retention rate for these students is almost equal to that of the student body at large. The team applauds the way in which Admissions uses a holistic approach to admitting students who would not normally qualify, as well as how these students are supported by the CTLE.

The University should thoughtfully consider its role in providing both credit and non-credit continuing education courses to the greater Scranton area. To date, the University has responded to industry needs and community requests. It faces competition from less expensive and more expansive offerings from local colleges and community colleges. The team suggests that the University clarify the mission of non-credit program offerings in continuing education.

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

This standard requires the University to have clearly articulated statements of expected student learning outcomes for all programs and departments that foster student learning, and a documented, organized, and sustained assessment process to evaluate how well they are doing. Although there is a university-wide awareness of the importance of student learning assessment, current assessment processes are uneven throughout the University.

The assessment processes for most of the academic programs offered by the Panuska College of Professional Studies (PCPS) and the Kania School of Management (KSOM) are prescribed by external accrediting agencies. These accreditations indicate that these programs comply with national standards for excellence, and assessment is required to earn and maintain accreditation. For example, the Education program is accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the Physical Therapy program by the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE), Business by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), etc. Therefore, these fields regularly conduct assessments of student learning outcomes to report to their external authorizing bodies. Additionally, PCPS and KSOM have each dedicated an administrator for assessing student learning.

The Weinberg Library is active in testing freshmen and seniors in information literacy and has begun to embed information literacy activities into the curriculum. These assessments are posted online and could serve as models for faculty to consider in developing their own instruments. The CTLE employs strategies to measure improvement in students' reading skills; they administer pre- and post-tests, monitor how the students are performing in class, and then provide remediation as appropriate. The CTLE also offers faculty development workshops and online training in areas related to outcomes assessment. PAIRO also serves to support student learning assessment. PAIRO dedicates one staff member to outcomes assessment, funds external consultants to train faculty, and provides individualized assistance as requested.

In the case of the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), there are few external bodies guiding programs, and there is resistance by a number of departments to developing assessment instruments. There is also confusion as to what actually constitutes learning assessment. The recalcitrance of certain programs to conduct assessment was echoed by many administrative staff and faculty, independently of one another. This seems to be accepted as a fact of the institutional culture. However, the importance that the Middle

States Commission on Higher Education places on learning assessment makes this fact a challenge for the University.

This resistance to assessment may, in part, be due to CAS not yet having a staff person dedicated to learning assessment; however, a search will begin soon with the anticipation of a fall 2008 hire, and it is hoped that this new person can overcome the resistance to assessment. Another factor may be the perception by some faculty that developing an assessment instrument is antithetical to the nature of their disciplines. One perception mentioned is that assessment takes precious time away from teaching, the faculty's primary role. Yet another impediment to learning assessment is the misperception that valid assessment measures need to be quantitative.

As an incentive for implementing assessment measures, the Dean of CAS offers those departments conducting student learning assessment additional resources in the form of faculty lines, opportunities for professional development, and funding for other useful purposes. While most academic departments have identified anticipated learning outcomes for their majors, many have not articulated assessment plans or conducted such analysis.

The other issue that hinders student learning assessment is confusion as to what constitutes this kind of assessment. As stated in *Characteristics of Excellence*, learning assessment should utilize direct measures of student learning. The actual methods of assessment are not prescribed, and can be tailored to the nature of the disciplines and resources of the faculty. The section in the Self-Study addressing Standard 14 discusses various assessments at the University; however, not all of these measure learning directly. Self-reported data from students are not considered an appropriate measure of learning outcomes in and of themselves; such an assessment would need to be supplemented with a direct measure of student learning. Surveys that question students as to their satisfaction with various aspects of their University education also do not measure learning outcomes; neither do studies of alumni employment success, nor the existence of honor societies. These types of data collection are still useful and should be continued, and they do highlight the superior quality of a University of Scranton education. However, they should not be mistaken for indicators of student learning.

It is eminently clear that the academic departments in CAS are committed to the intellectual enrichment and success of their students. There is much discussion of learning expectations within academic departments, what outcomes should be specified in course syllabi, and the guidelines of external professional associations in the disciplines.

In meeting with several of the department chairs in CAS, the team observed more misconceptions about learning assessment rather than outright resistance to it. Faculty seem to be willing to accomplish what is needed to assess student learning because of its value to students. The next step, then, might be for faculty to take greater advantage of the existing opportunities for development in learning assessment offered at the University, as mentioned above.

There are several departments in CAS that are thriving in the assessment of student learning. The following examples are not meant to be exhaustive, but merely illustrative of strength in the assessment of learning. One of these is the Psychology program; this department outlines intended outcomes, means of assessment, types of measurement, criteria for success, results or progress, and the use of results for improvement. The World Languages program uses a rubric to assess student portfolios submitted at the end of the semester, as well as a number of criteria to evaluate oral and written language skills. Another department, Physics and Engineering, uses capstone course projects and regional competitions to assess students' skills in writing, speaking, professional practice, budgeting, and knowledge of course content in the major. The Chemistry program has identified student learning outcomes and certain components of a rubric to measure these outcomes. The Sociology/Criminal Justice department uses standardized subject-area tests and a capstone experience to evaluate learning, but admits that it has much more to achieve in assessment. The History program has made advances in assessment, but it should continue diversifying the methods it uses.

A Longitudinal Study of the Academic Profile, which is undated but appears to have been completed in the early part of this decade, assesses general education using data from several externally- and internally-developed instruments. This academic profile measures reading, writing, critical thinking, and mathematics in the context of material from the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Another example of an externally-developed instrument is the Information Literacy Assessment (ILA), which was administered in 2005, with plans to administer it again in subsequent years. These instruments are true measures of learning outcomes.

It is critical that the University continue its efforts to implement student learning assessment processes within all academic programs and departments. With the high quality of teaching and service at the University, faculty and academic administrators should embrace these assessment tools as a way to affirm the good work that they are doing.