

Report to
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students
of
Hunter College
of the
City University of New York
New York, NY 10021

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September 2004

Introduction

Hunter College is to be commended for its outstanding Periodic Review Report and the very inclusive process that produced it. The report provides a comprehensive update on the progress the institution has made since 1997. Recommendations from the final Middle States team report and the institutional self-study are adequately addressed. In fact, most of the recommendations have been implemented; implementation of the remainder of them is underway.

In addition to serving as the basis for this mid-cycle Middle States assessment, the report has been designated by the institution as "an important planning document". As such, hopefully, it will be used as a resource in Hunter's ongoing self-study, evaluation and planning processes.

The Periodic Review Report's Data, Information and Analysis

The Institution's Major Challenges and Opportunities

The 1997 Middle States team report expressed concerns regarding Hunter's revised admissions criteria and their possible impact on the successful matriculation of community college transfer students and on the diversity of the Hunter student body. In 2000, major City University of New York (CUNY) policy changes raised academic standards and eliminated remediation at senior CUNY institutions for all but SEEK and ESL students. Given the commitment to its longstanding mission of access and excellence, Hunter is challenged to maintain the diversity of its student body as it raises standards.

Skills immersion workshops, ESL classes, tutoring for SEEK students and other academic support activities have been initiated to help students pass the CUNY skills tests. In addition to establishing the Hunter science high school and summer science institute and a residential Honors College, programs are offered in collaboration with New York City high schools and community colleges in an effort to enhance the pool of applicants prepared for college.

Between fall 2000 and fall 2003, the mean SAT score of the freshman class rose 76 points. More applicants are being admitted without conditions and demand for the summer and January skills immersion workshops has declined. A dean for diversity and compliance has been appointed to seek out qualified minority students and develop programs and activities to assist, retain and graduate them.

There have been numerous administrative changes since the 1997 site visit, including the appointment of a new president in 2001. Yet, in the midst of continuous administrative turnover, Hunter has been able to make substantial progress in responding to issues highlighted in the final Middle States team report and the Hunter self-study.

The president has been in office for three years and has had time to settle in and assemble her administrative team. Hunter College now has the opportunity to operate in a stable administrative environment. Administrative stability should greatly facilitate Hunter's continued efforts to move forward.

Hunter College has managed its affairs very well during a period of budgetary difficulty. The improved financial outlook resulting from increased tuition revenue, external funding and successful fundraising may present opportunities for Hunter to advance some of its operating and capital priorities.

The Institution's Response to Recommendations from the Previous Team Report and Institutional Self-Study

Hunter was challenged to critically examine its services to students "to provide additional outreach to students and increase the retention of the students." This challenge was accepted, and the Office of Student Services (OSS) was reorganized and appropriately staffed with all units providing services to students along the continuum from recruitment to graduation placed under one vice president. The result has been a more integrated process for the recruitment, admission, registration and advising of students and for the distribution of scholarships.

In the process of restructuring OSS, team concerns regarding the admissions process, as related to the central administration and facilitating timely matriculation of new and continuing students, have been addressed. The administration is encouraged to move forward with a commitment deposit from accepted students or something similar to what has been devised for transfer students so that preparation can be made for students planning to enroll.

The Middle States team expressed concerns regarding what it perceived as a lack of attention to academic advising on the Hunter campus. A standing committee has now been formed to plan an integrated approach to advising. Though this work is not finished, improvements to date include better communication with academic departments, staff development for faculty advisers, and systematic assessment of services. The college is purchasing an automated degree audit/advising system and is developing an e-advising service. On-going advocacy at a senior level is needed for advising.

In response to team recommendations, efforts have been undertaken to improve support for transfer and at-risk students. The transfer credit evaluation process has been streamlined, and the transfer student orientation has been changed to a small group format. The initial orientation is followed up with advising sessions at mid-semester to provide additional information and guidance for the students. The Center for Student Achievement works with at-risk students in a semester-long program of individual consultation and assessment. Special workshops are provided to help at-risk students adjust to college life, manage their time, and strengthen their study skills. Their academic progress will be tracked as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of the various support services.

In response to the concern about the need for increased support for graduate and professional students, the president is engaged in fundraising for this purpose. Assistantships and fellowships for master's students have been increased.

The Middle States team raised questions regarding the viability of the plethora of small programs offered, primarily in the School of Arts and Sciences. Though efforts are underway to improve enrollments in these programs, consideration should be given to discontinuing those programs which hold little or no appeal today for Hunter students. Savings so realized might be reallocated to support recently approved new programs.

Replenishing faculty, essential to maintaining Hunter's quality of education and to ensuring the availability of courses, has been an institutional initiative. Progress made since 1997 demonstrates the level of commitment to this matter. That junior faculty receive release time and competitive start-up packages to initiate their research programs is commendable.

There has been attention, also, to team concerns regarding the diversity of the faculty and the need for it to be more closely aligned with that of the student body which mirrors the population of New York City. Almost 40% of the new faculty appointed in the fall of 2003 were members of minority groups. Currently, more than a quarter of Hunter's faculty are minorities; this represents a gain of 2% over the past five years.

Both the Middle States team report and the Hunter self-study recommended strategies to counter the impact of budget cuts on library funding in order to support the needs of the students and the faculty research program. In conjunction with both the collection and personnel, limited resources have been allocated to areas of greatest need. Greater use has been made of technology for public and staff use. Greater use is being made of electronic resources to "close the information gap".

Though library funding is not yet at the level recommended by the self-study, with support from central administration, the student technology fee and external fundraising, the Hunter libraries have been able to upgrade and expand student computer laboratories, enhance their instructional programs and increase access to services.

The development of a comprehensive institutional technology plan that could address infrastructure as well as the needs of the students, faculty and administration was recommended by the site visit team and the institutional self-study. The Office of Instructional Computing and Information Technology, under the vice president for administration, was organized to address academic and administrative technology needs in a coordinated manner.

Since 1997, the network infrastructure has been upgraded and Internet 2 and wireless computer access are available. Blackboard has been adopted as the course management system for asynchronous course delivery. Web-based technology training and services and distance learning in videoconference medium are available, also.

In 2002, a student technology fee was imposed to improve technology services to students and faculty in support of teaching and learning. A campus-wide advisory committee has outlined the goals and objectives to be achieved via this funding and make recommendations regarding the expenditure of the funds.

Implementation of the plan has resulted in an increase in the number of public access computers and smart classrooms across all campuses, an upgrade and expansion of student computer laboratories and information systems for student use, technology-assisted language support, email service for students with forwarding to preferred email addresses and technology training. Equipment for instructional laboratories and appropriate technology for centers and services that directly support student life and learning are provided, also.

The Middle State team report recommended the completion and implementation of the facilities master plan in order to assess and address the campuses space needs. Concerns were expressed, also, regarding the lack of classroom space and the condition of various facilities. Development of a revised master plan was initiated during the 2002-2003 academic year; this plan involves the redesign of existing space and the acquisition of new properties.

Planning is underway for a new science building to be located near the main campus and a new visual and performing arts center in lower Manhattan. This has been made possible through funding in the CUNY capital budget. The periodic review report notes that facilities deficiencies identified by the site visit team have been addressed. Additionally, major infrastructure upgrades have been completed since 1997 including roof replacements, a new power plant, HVAC system, alarm systems, and emergency generators.

Current Enrollment and Financial Status and Projections

Enrollment at Hunter College increased about 6% between fall 1997 and fall 2003. However, despite the increased enrollment target set for the CUNY system, Hunter will maintain its enrollment at the current level of 20,500 headcount. The institution is still operating under space constraints, and the question of optimum size will be revisited when the new buildings are completed.

In the interim, an increase in full-time equivalent enrollment (FTE) is planned. This will be achieved, in part, by increasing graduate enrollment, which represented 23.41 % of total head count in fall 2003, to 25% of total head count through targeted growth in selected programs. Additionally, increased student course loads will increase FTE. The impacts of recently renovated space and new faculty hires are already being realized in improved course scheduling and increased course availability. Also, a system which tracks enrollment in all course sections is enabling the institution to schedule the courses students need and to drop low enrollment courses, where appropriate. and add additional sections of high demand courses.

Hunter College's state budget appropriation is tied to enrollment. Given the decision to hold headcount enrollment at current level, the state allocation will not differ appreciably over the next five years. However, trading on Hunter's commitment to academic excellence and community service, its administration is aggressive in its pursuit of additional public funds, both state and city, in support of operating and capital needs. The college has been equally successful in its fundraising activities with corporations, private donors and its alumni.

CUNY Board actions are resulting in additional tuition and fee revenues. The technology fee, initiated in fall 2002, is averaging \$2.5 million annually in restricted fee revenues. It is projected that the 25% tuition increase, approved by the State legislature with the intention of reducing CUNY's state appropriation, will add \$18 million to tuition revenues, starting in FY04. Also, Hunter has received approval to institute differential tuition in two graduate programs to meet special program needs. This will increase total tuition revenue by \$400,000 and \$300,000 in FY04 and FY05, respectively.

During the period covered by this report, external funding increased 64%, with all schools showing substantial increases in grant and contract activity. Given the strength of Hunter's faculty and the profile of faculty being recruited, there is potential for continued growth in this area. And, to the extent that Hunter is successful in increasing its indirect cost recoveries, there will be additional funds for enhancing the research infrastructure and providing research support for junior faculty and students.

In FY03, CUNY began mandating productivity savings resulting from efficiencies achieved in administrative operations, for reinvestment in academic programs. Savings shifted to academic programs in FY03 amounted to \$1 million. This practice will provide an ongoing source of additional support for instructional programs and research.

The Current Status of the Institution's Outcomes Assessment Processes

In response to self-study and site team recommendations, a college-wide assessment plan has been developed and accepted by the president after review and input by the constituents of the college. The plan is essentially a framework for establishing an ongoing and iterative process that will take place at the college, school, program and course levels. It is organized around college-wide academic programs, undergraduate and graduate programs and the student experience outside the classroom. Existing assessment activities will operate within this plan; and as the plan is implemented, new assessment activities will be added. Outlines are provided to assist in the development of the unit assessment plans in the three categories. An implementation timeline is provided, also.

Numerous conferences, workshops and programs have been held to prepare the campus community for assessment. Such activities will continue to be scheduled periodically as implementation of the plan progresses. Capabilities of the Institutional Research Office have been expanded to support the assessment effort.

Examples of the use of assessment results to modify programs and services are described throughout the report. Chapter three describes examples in each of the categories of the plan.

The Linkage between Institutional Planning and Budgeting Processes

In conjunction with its Master Plan, CUNY issues a set of performance targets to its institutions each spring. From these, each institution determines its performance goals and targets for the ensuing academic year. At the end of the year, a report detailing the extent to which they achieved their performance goals and targets is submitted to central administration.

The budget allocations for the year are tied to the performance goals and targets. Hunter has aligned the timeline for the assessment plan with their strategic planning cycle to achieve an integrated planning and budgeting process. The financial management system is being organized to strengthen budget monitoring and to facilitate resource allocation in support of Master Plan goals.

Conclusion

In the midst of continuous administrative turnover and under conditions of fiscal constraint, Hunter College has made significant progress since the 1997 Middle States Association visit.

- A facilities master plan has been developed and the recommended facilities improvements and infrastructure upgrades have been completed. Planning is underway to address the facilities capacity issue also.
- 67 new faculty have been hired, and an additional 25 are scheduled to be appointed in fall 2004
- The Office of Student Services has been reorganized to ensure the coordinated delivery of information and services to students with special attention to the needs of transfer and at-risk students.
- A college-wide assessment plan has been developed and existing assessment activities will be incorporated in the plan. The timeline for implementation of the plan has been aligned with the institution's strategic planning cycle to achieve an integrated planning and budgeting process.
- The Office of Instructional Computing and Information Technology has been established to oversee technology planning and services. Increased use of technology in support of teaching and learning, administrative operations, and the collection and management of data is reflected throughout the institution.