

**REPORT**

**of**

**THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
(PENN STATE)  
State College, Pennsylvania**

**by**

**AN EVALUATION TEAM REPRESENTING  
MIDDLE STATES COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION  
William E. "Brit" Kirwan, Chair**

**Prepared after a study of PSU's self study report  
and University Park campus visit  
March 22-March 25, 2015  
(plus site visits to four Commonwealth campuses  
January 2015)**

This report represents the views of the evaluation team and was reviewed by the institution for factual corrections before being considered by the MSCHE.

## I. INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

The Pennsylvania State University (Penn State), founded in 1855, is the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's sole land grant institution and its largest public university. In accordance with its land grant designation, Penn State has a broad mission of teaching, research, and public service. It was originally chartered as one of the nation's first colleges of agricultural science, with a goal to apply scientific principles to farming. The site was established with a gift of 200 acres from gentleman farmer and ironmaster James Irvin, in the very center of the state. Founding President Evan Pugh drew on the scientific education he had received in Europe to plan a curriculum that combined theoretical studies with practical applications.

Pugh and similar visionaries in other states championed Congressional passage of the Morrill Land-Grant Act in 1862. The act enabled states to sell federal land, invest the proceeds, and use the income to support colleges "where the leading object shall be, without excluding scientific and classical studies ... to teach agriculture and the mechanic arts [engineering] ... in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in all the pursuits and professions of life." The Pennsylvania state legislature designated Penn State the land-grant institution of Pennsylvania.

In the 1880s, the college expanded its curriculum to match the Land-Grant Act's broad mandate. From that time onward, curriculums in engineering, the sciences, the liberal arts, and more began to expand. In the early 1900s, Penn State introduced cooperative extension and additional outreach programming, extending the reach of its academic mission. In the 1930s Penn State established a series of undergraduate branch campuses, primarily to meet the needs of students who were location-bound during the Great Depression. Those campuses were predecessors of today's system of 24 Penn State campuses located throughout the Commonwealth.

Penn State began offering advanced-degree work in 1922 with the formation of the Graduate School. By 1950 the University had won international recognition for investigations in dairy science, building insulation, diesel engines, and acoustics, and other specialized fields.

A college of medicine and teaching hospital were established in 1967 with a \$50 million gift from the charitable trusts of renowned chocolate magnate Milton S. Hershey. In 1989 the Pennsylvania College of Technology in Williamsport became

an affiliate of the University. In 2000, Penn State and the Dickinson School of Law merged. In 2015, two Penn State law schools, known as Dickinson Law (in Carlisle, Pennsylvania) and Penn State Law (on University Park campus) will be in operation. Penn State's online World Campus graduated its first students in 2000 and now enrolls nearly 11,000.

With its 24 campuses, Penn State boasts that there is a campus within practical commuting distance of every Pennsylvania citizen. They include:

- Abington
- Altoona
- Beaver
- Berks
- Brandywine
- Carlisle
- DuBois
- Erie
- Fayette
- Great Valley
- Greater Allegheny
- Harrisburg
- Hazleton
- Hershey
- Lehigh Valley
- Mont Alto
- New Kensington
- Schuylkill
- Shenango
- University Park
- Wilkes-Barre
- Williamsport (The Penn College of Technology) is counted as a campus but is an affiliate of Penn State
- World Campus (online education)
- Worthington Scranton
- York

The University comprises 18 colleges or divisions:

- Agricultural Sciences
- Arts & Architecture
- Smeal College of Business
- Communications

- Earth and Mineral Sciences
- Education
- Engineering
- Health and Human Development
- Information Sciences and Technology
- College of the Liberal Arts
- College of Medicine
- College of Nursing
- Eberly College of Science
- Schools of Law
- Schreyer Honors College
- The Graduate School
- Pennsylvania College of Technology
- Division of Undergraduate Studies

Penn State offers over 160 baccalaureate degree programs, 76 associate degree programs at selected campuses and over 160 graduate degree programs, including doctorates and both academic and professional master's degrees. It receives over \$800 million in total research support (of which approximate \$501 million comes from federal sources). The university raised over \$2 billion for private support in the capital campaign, which ended one year ago.

## **II. NATURE AND CONDUCT OF THE EVALUATION TEAM VISIT TO PENN STATE UNIVERSITY**

A team of peer evaluators, chaired by University System of Maryland Chancellor William E. "Brit" Kirwan, visited the University Park campus March 22-March 25, 2015. Prior to the visit, Chancellor Kirwan had a preliminary visit to the University Park campus in November 2014; and several members of the evaluation team visited other Penn State campuses prior to the March visit. Those campuses included Dickinson Law in Carlisle, Hershey Medical Center, Mont Alto, Harrisburg, Altoona, New Kensington, Berks, Brandywine and the program in Florence, Italy.

Besides Chancellor Kirwan, the team included:

- Bryan Andriano, Executive Director, Global and Experiential Education, School of Business, The George Washington University
- Barbara Bender, Associate Dean for Academic Support and Graduate Student Services, Rutgers University
- Marin Clarkberg, Director, Institutional Research and Planning, Cornell University
- Matthew Goldstein, Chancellor Emeritus, CUNY
- Michael Halleran, Provost, College of William and Mary

- Dawn Morton-Rias, Professor and former Dean, College of Health Related Professions, SUNY Downstate Medical Center
- George Otte, University Director of Academic Technology, CUNY and Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, CUNY SPS
- Charles Robbins, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, Dean of Undergraduate Colleges, SUNY at Stony Brook
- Michael Ryan, Former Director of University Accreditation and Assessment (ret); Emeritus Professor, SUNY Buffalo
- James Sheehan, Vice Chancellor of Administration and Finance, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
- Mary Ann Swain, Professor, SUNY at Binghamton
- Katie Ryan, senior advisor to Chancellor Kirwan, assisted the team.

Prior to the visit, the team reviewed materials provided by Penn State's Self Study Committee, including, but not limited to:

- The comprehensive institutional self study report
- Supporting Data Documents
- Supporting institutional information materials

During the visit, the team met with the following groups and individuals who were scheduled:

- Nicholas Jones, Provost
- Eric Barron, President
- Middle States Steering Committee
- Leaders in the undergraduate education program
- Trustee leadership
- University Council on Engaged Scholarship
- Administrative Council for Undergraduate Education Assessment Coordinating Committee
- Provost's Staff
- Leaders in the Graduate and Professional Education Program
- Senate Officers and Chairs of Standing and Special Committees
- Council of Academic Deans
- Leaders in the Co-curricular Learning Outcomes Program
- General Education Task Force
- Undergraduate student representatives
- Graduate student representatives
- World Campus leaders
- Global Program leaders.

In addition, the team requested several other meetings that had not been scheduled originally, including

- Members of the University Staff Advisory Council

- The newly appointed chief ethics and compliance officer and members of the University Ethics and Compliance Council
- Budget officers
- Vice President for Student Affairs
- Those who oversee student learning outcomes assessment
- Those who oversee financial aid
- Institutional data personnel
- Representatives from the facilities office

Team leader, Chancellor Kirwan, also had a one-on-one meeting with President Barron.

During the visit, the team noted that the campus was still feeling the effects of the very public issues surrounding the football program three years before. Although not a focus of the team's review (except in the areas of governance and administration), the topic was frequently raised by those interviewed.

### **III. COMPLIANCE WITH REQUIREMENT OF AFFILIATION**

Penn State meets all ten requirements of affiliation for accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

### **IV. COMMENDATIONS**

The team noted institutional strengths and aspects worthy of commendation within a discussion of the fourteen (14) standards (Section V).

### **V. STANDARDS 1-14**

#### **MISSION & GOALS: STANDARD 1**

*The institution's mission clearly defines its purpose within the context of higher education and indicates whom the institution serves and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's stated goal, 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.*

**Conclusion:** The University appears to meet this standard.

#### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

- The university has a well-developed statement that clearly articulates its mission as a multi-campus, public research and land grant institution with

responsibilities for education, research and service to the state and nation.

- Through an ongoing collaborative planning process involving multiple constituencies, the university has developed a well-articulated and widely communicated strategic plan with seven broad goals tied directly to its mission. Efforts are underway to develop a new plan covering the period 2015 to 2020.
- The institution's well-defined mission and goals make clear its support for scholarly and creative activities at all levels and for its educational responsibilities.
- The university regularly collects data and makes findings public on the institution's performance toward meeting its goals.

### **Significant Accomplishment**

- The land grant philosophy is embedded in the university's mission and results in a university well integrated into the economic and cultural life of the state.

### **Suggestion**

- Given the change in senior leadership at the institution, the process for developing a new strategic planning process was delayed but is now in full force. The campus community is anxious for the plan to be completed expeditiously; the team suggests that it should be a high priority for the institution.

## **PLANNING, RESOURCE ALLOCATION, AND INSTITUTION RENEWAL: STANDARD 2**

*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 maintain institutional quality.*

**Conclusion:** The University appears to meet this standard.

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

- The strategic planning, self-study and budget processes rely on robust data sources, critical analyses of the environment and emerging needs, and broad constituent input, as well as other vital strategies to identify and develop innovative initiatives designed to meet mission sensitive and evolving needs.

This is evident in the development of Innovation Park (start-up incubator), the World Campus, hundreds of diverse educational offerings across all disciplines, and credential ranges (non- credit bearing certificates to doctoral degrees). The commitment to the Land Grant Mission and significant forward progress has been unwavering, in the face of increased public scrutiny.

- The campus enjoys a substantial operational and development budget and utilizes processes to facilitate innovation and growth while maintaining exceptional core operations. The top down/bottom up hybrid administrative structure allows for implementation, growth and assessment of mission sensitive priorities while preserving and fostering unique, community focused initiatives at the Commonwealth campus level.
- The organizational structure incorporates input from all facets of the institution (leadership, faculty, staff, students, alumni, trustees and the community) in the identification and development of new initiatives.
- Findings from the first ever campus Information Technology Assessment and early recognition of the potential benefits of emerging technologies have resulted in systematic improvements and modernization of many aspects of service delivery as is evident in the development of the World Campus, transition to LionPath, and improved HR assessments, among others.
- The increase in a global focus and the subsequent creation of the World Campus, with the requirement for increased information technology and instructional design intelligence, have driven changes in instructional design and business intelligence across all educational units. The impact of this innovation transcends the approximate 11,000 students enrolled in the World Campus. This growth initiative has helped inform thinking around instructional design, scholarship and development endeavors, which impacts all students. It has also created a substantial revenue source that supports other new initiatives and spurs new innovations.
- The administrative and governance structures facilitate collaboration, communication and shared expertise, across all campuses and units. This enhances the university's ability to assess the effectiveness of planning, resource allocation and renewal.
- The pride and commitment to the history and envisioned future of the institution are evident in the collaborative planning process that engages the input from faculty, staff, students and other constituencies with an understanding of their respective roles.



- Penn State, University Park and the Commonwealth campuses, are economic engines for the local communities in which they are housed and the Commonwealth, at large.

### **Significant Accomplishment**

- The institution is to be commended for maintaining, even enhancing, its highly ranked education, scholarship, research and athletics programs in the face of declining fiscal support from the state and recent legal and public relations challenges.

### **Suggestions**

- The University should do more to promote the innovative initiatives evident at the Commonwealth campuses.
- In the development of its new strategic plan, the University should make clear its commitment to link the resource allocation process with the priorities of the strategic plan.

### **INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES: STANDARD 3**

*The human, financial, technical, physical 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.*

**Conclusion:** The University appears to meet this standard.

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

#### *Fiscal Resources*

- Penn State is currently fiscally sound and manages its resources well as evidenced by the following:
  - Between 2010 and 2014 net assets increased from \$4.98B to \$7.68B, unrestricted net assets increased from \$1.77B to \$3.18B, and endowment increased from \$1.47B to \$2.29B;
  - Research expenditures increased by \$33M in 5 years to \$813M;
  - Sustained bond rating of Aa2 with benchmarks above Moody's median for Aa1 institutions;
  - Regularly produces annual operating margins of 9.9%.

- Penn State has engaged in cost reductions and risk avoidance measures to enable the effective and efficient use of the resources it has available including:
  - Audits at varying levels (including institutional) which indicate effective internal controls;
  - Borrowing to cover some costs of facilities renovation. Two independent debt capacity studies confirmed that the proposed borrowing is prudent, with debt service projected at <2% of operating expenses, a nationally conservative level;
  - Change from defined-benefit to defined-contribution retirement plans;
  - Saving \$650,000 annually in landfill tipping fees by recycling 65% of its waste
  - Consolidating or eliminating over 40 academic programs as a result of a systematic assessment;
  - Reducing energy use (BTU/square feet) by 26% at University Park and 18% at all campuses since 1997;
  - Creating over 1,000 Innovation and Improvement Teams.
  - Changing policy to transfer the intellectual property (with faculty approval) to the industry sponsor of the research based on an analysis that the grants for sponsoring research exceed projected future revenues from licensing of intellectual property arising from the industry-sponsored research.
  
- The changes noted above came about through data-based assessments of existing conditions and, when combined, have released >\$25 million in recurring funds for other mission related purposes.
  
- Penn State is heavily dependent for its general operating budget on tuition and fees. The number of high school graduates in the state is declining. Penn State's strategy for sustaining enrollments in the future is multi-faceted and includes:
  - Setting and monitoring Commonwealth enrollment goals;
  - Maintaining recruitment centers in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh;
  - Enhancing recruitment of international students;
  - Increasing retention of students who have enrolled;
  - Increasing outreach to dropouts to re-enroll (regardless of age);
  - Growing the World campus aggressively;
  - Increasing need-based financial aid;
  - Maintaining a Spanish-language website for prospective students.

*Use of Resources in Support of Educational Mission*

- Penn State provides ample resources to faculty in support of their teaching and to enhance the learning environment for students.
  
- The institution has allocated significant resources to its academic mission

- IPEDS data –instructional expenses as a percent of total core expenses have increased from 38% in 2006/07 to 41% for 2011/12 – 4<sup>th</sup> among CIC institutions
- The institution provides for the development of faculty as teachers through the Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence and the Office of Teaching and Learning with Technology.
- Faculty Development Unit within the World Campus helps faculty become expert in online teaching and to support scholarly life for virtual or remote faculty.
- The Center for Online Innovation in Learning has grant funds for those who wish to experiment with how technology can enhance the learning environment. The Center distributed \$450,000 to researchers from 11 colleges and 6 campuses in 2013-14.
- The institution invests in technology at both University Park and the Commonwealth campuses as a means to enhance teaching and the learning environment for students:
  - Digital Learning Coordinating Council directs resources to support quality in online teaching.
  - Penn State joined *Unizin*, a nonprofit technology consortium that provides a “common digital infrastructure. . .to share lesson plans, syllabi, research and more via content sharing and storage services.”
  - State of the art equipment and facilities exist for students who want to create media product such as videos or podcasts.
  - All of the general-purpose classrooms at University Park and 97% of those on the campuses have “permanently installed instructional technology” that allow faculty to move between classrooms easily.
  - The institution also provides a wide range of other media/equipment services, including the recording of classroom presentations -- \$7.5M investment over 10 years.
  - Substantial library resources including a website specifically designed and reserved for serving students at a distance.
  - The development of *iStudy* , a set of online tutorials for covering important topics like academic integrity, how to be a successful student (tips on studying, effective communication, active reading) statistics, and personal matters (test anxiety, and career planning).
  - University Libraries is in the process of hiring, in collaboration with World Campus, a World Campus Librarian and a World Campus Instructional Designer to assist in multiple ways to foster quality in online teaching and access to resources for online students. The new *Ask a Librarian* service aims to provide excellent online reference service. A dedicated IT professional supports this team.

## *Facilities*

- Penn State has a well-established 5-year capital planning cycle; plans are reviewed and updated every 2 years. The Board recently approved a \$2.7 billion capital program for 2014/15-2018/19. This Plan focuses on constructing new buildings to meet space needs related to growth in enrollments and research, renovating older buildings that no longer support 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching and research, and updating campus infrastructure (water treatment plant and chilled water distribution, mechanical systems, roofing, fire and life safety systems).
- Allocations for this cycle include: 63% to be spent on Education and General projects; 18% for Auxiliary and Business Services; 16% for Hershey Medical campus; 2% for energy saving projects, and the small remainder for Intercollegiate Athletics.
- New capital projects arise from enrollment and research projections and the attendant growth in faculty and staff.
- Needed capital improvements arise from a rigorous assessment of buildings using Sightlines Facilities Metrics (external criteria).
- Between 2010 and 2014 new value of the physical plant increased from \$650M to \$2.47B.
- Tours of Commonwealth campus buildings showed a commitment to preservation and renewal of these facilities, including repurposing them for appropriate use.

## *Information Technology (Support) Systems*

- Over the last few years Penn State has worked toward improving its information support systems to better enable the institution to achieve its mission. Campus assessments that existing systems were inadequate were the bases for decisions to invest in new technologies. The two largest investments include:
  - LionPATH – to replace the student information system, making it more flexible and accessible in a mobile age -- \$65M in capital & an increase of \$3M/yr in operating costs. This investment was a direct result of a strategic goal. To accompany LionPATH Penn State launched *Talisma*, a student prospect management system, which will interface with LionPATH and *MyPennState* portal for applicants and services to students who have been admitted.
  - Penn State hired Towers Watson, a leading consulting firm in HR transformations, to help design a new enterprise human resources information system. Aims for the new system include greater customer focus, standardizing HR practices around known best practices,

implementation of more self-service availability, reduction in duplication, greater efficiency, and ensuring accountability. The new system is in Phase II of development. Major features of the HR system are a new job delineation and compensation structure that specifies the knowledge, skills, and characteristics required for job and pegs compensation to current market salaries for the same or similar positions.

### **Significant Accomplishments**

- Increase in endowment from \$1.47B to \$2.29B since 2010.
- Assessment and planning processes for facilities and IT.

### **Suggestions**

- Penn State should continue its efforts to foster thematic, interdisciplinary work that advances knowledge and makes use of localized geographic resources and opportunities.
- The institution should implement a policy of flexible, open laboratory arrangements for faculty in all the sciences and engineering academic units when refurbishing or constructing new buildings unless the characteristics of the research require independent closed spaces.
- The university should utilize data on faculty and staff hires, initial salaries, salary increases, start-up costs, promotion and exit interviews to better inform and motivate the institution's efforts to increase diversity by gender, race, and ethnicity.

### **LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE: STANDARD 4**

*The institution's system of governance clearly defines the roles of institutional constituencies in policy development and decision-making. The governance structure includes an active governing body with sufficient autonomy to assure institutional integrity and to fulfill its responsibilities of policy and resource development, consistent with the mission of the institution.*

**Conclusion:** The University appears to meet this standard.

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

- The university has in place:
  - A clearly defined system of governance, based on the charter establishing the university, approved by the Board of Trustees with accompanying bylaws and standing orders that delineates the responsibilities of the Board and

President.

- A rich and comprehensive array of student advisory councils for the university and for the individual colleges and Commonwealth Campuses that have systematic means of providing input to the university administration on critical issues facing the students.
- Notable changes to the University's governance documents over the past three years include:
  - The Governor and President of the university serve as non-voting members of the Board. (Previously both were voting members);
  - Term limits for elected Board members of 12 years;
  - Establishment, effective July 1, 2015, of full voting positions on the Board of Trustees for a student and an academic member;
  - The Chief Ethics and Compliance Officer has a reporting line to the Board;
  - An increase in the number of Board committees to seven, which includes a Committee on Legal and Compliance and a Committee on Audit and Risk;
  - An evaluation process for the President that is nearing completion, which is under the leadership of the Committee on Compensation;
- The university also has
  - An active and engaged Faculty Senate that operates in a collegial fashion with the Administration;
  - A staff council that is playing an increasingly important role as an advisory body for the Administration;
  - Multiple student government organizations with systematic means of input on critical issues.

### **Significant Accomplishment**

- In response to the significant challenges Penn State faced several years ago, the Board and institution have taken impressive strides to bolster accountability, improve governance processes and enhance board effectiveness.

### **Suggestion**

- With the arrival of the new president, considerable progress has been made toward a more systematic role for the University Staff Advisory Council in the development of institutional policies. We encourage continuation of these efforts to ensure greater empowerment of the staff in university affairs.

### **Recommendation**

- The institution should provide evidence that the evaluation processes for the Board, the President and the Senior Officers have been completed and are in

place.

## **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.*

**Conclusion:** The University appears to meet this standard.

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

- Penn State's administration is experienced and appropriately sized and exhibits the characteristics called for in Standard 5.
- The Chief Executive Officer of the University, Eric Barron, has been in position since May 12, 2014, and appears to be exceedingly well suited to the position. Prior to his appointment as the President at Penn State, he served as President of Florida State University. Prior to his appointment at Florida State Dr. Barron served for 30 years in a variety of academic and administrative positions. Dr. Barron reports to a Board of Trustees consisting of 38 members.
- The President has a team of experienced administrators with the appropriate skills, training, and backgrounds to provide effective leadership in a complex institution. The Executive Vice President and Provost as well as the Senior Vice Presidents and Vice Presidents all have significant experience
- The Pennsylvania State University is a large organization by any measure with multiple campuses across the state serving over 90,000 students. It appears that the administration is appropriately sized to effectively manage the level of complexity inherent in an institution of its size.
- The Faculty Senate is an integral part of the Governance structure of the University. With 200 faculty, 20 administrators, and 26 students it provides broad multi campus representation.
- The University has a table of organization that clearly defines the responsibilities of the administration, beginning with the Board of Trustees down to functional levels of each division.
- University policy AD 14, Academic Administrative Evaluation establishes a level of review of Academic Administrative Officers and operations. The purpose of

the policy is, in part, “to provide assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the operations of that office and its incumbent leadership for the purpose of improving the function of the office.” This policy, however, does not extend to the non-academic offices and administrators.

### **Significant Accomplishment**

- The team applauds the establishment of the Academic Program and Administrative Services Review Core Council to control costs and generate efficiencies as prescribed in Goal 7 of the Strategic Plan. Since 1992-93, Penn State has realized recurring cost savings, budget reductions and internal reallocations over \$305 million.

### **Recommendation**

- The university should institute an administrative evaluation process/policy that would apply to the non-academic departments and administrators similar to the Academic Administrative Evaluation, Policy AD 14.

### **INTEGRITY: STANDARD 6**

*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.*

**Conclusion:** The University appears to meet this standard.

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

- The university has developed and displays on its website relevant policies related to integrity and intellectual freedom.
- Appropriate policies and training programs are in place for faculty and staff to address issues of conflict of interest and reporting requirement pertaining to human subject regulations.
- The university has a strong statement on academic freedom, and all evidence suggests that it upholds this value fully.

### **Significant Accomplishments**

- Creation of a high-level Office of Ethics and Compliance, with a strong focus on



both the ethical underpinnings of the university's rules, policies and expectations for adhering to them and development and implementation of university-wide training in this area.

- Adoption by the president, after appropriate review, of a code of ethics and conduct.
- More generally, the team notes that the university seems to have emerged from a horrific and traumatic event (the "Sandusky scandal") with a deep commitment to developing a culture of integrity throughout the organization.

### **Suggestion**

- The plans to conduct a periodic "ethics survey" should be followed up—with appropriate responses to the findings. The team urges the university to continue the impressive but nascent work of inculcating a campus-wide embrace of ethical behavior throughout all dimensions of the institution. We believe this effort has the potential to become a national model of best practice.

### **INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT: STANDARD 7**

*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.*

**Conclusion:** The University appears to meet this standard.

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

- Strategic planning at Penn State is embraced in two distinct but related forms: 1) a formal, institution-wide Strategic Plan and 2) a unit-specific strategic planning process in which more than forty unit executives submit strategic plans to the Provost. Both processes occur on a five-year time line, and the unit-specific process precedes the university-wide by one year. Because the unit-based processes occur first, the university-wide plan reflects some of what the unit-specific plans have put forth, but unit plans are developed contemporaneously with the earliest discussions in the university-wide planning process and thus can anticipate some of the general thrusts of the university-wide plan. Both strategic planning processes are facilitated and monitored through the Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment, an office that is also focused on the analytic use of data to support strategic planning.
- Penn State's most recent institution-wide strategic plan, *Priorities for Excellence*, charted a course from the 2009-10 academic year through 2013-14. While there is no institution-wide strategic plan in place during the current academic year,

the President and Provost have articulated clear institutional priorities for the future and have charged a strategic planning committee to develop the next formally articulated plan for Penn State. A set of metrics was developed for *Priorities for Excellence*, and there is complete confidence that these metrics will be evaluated and adapted in accordance with the new plan.

- At the time of our visit, unit-specific strategic plans were available on-line (<http://www.opia.psu.edu/plans>) for nineteen budgetary units at University Park (including some administrative units, such as finance) and for sixteen of the commonwealth campuses. The unit plans are both highly individualized, reflecting the different natures of the many units at Penn State, and consistently structured according to directives from the Provost's office. Following these directives, all plans include an articulation of how progress will be assessed.
- Data relevant for institutional improvement is widely available to units across the university. An unusual diversity of central offices—including the Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment, the enrollment management functions within the Office of the Vice President and Dean for Undergraduate Education, and the Institutional Reporting section within the Budget Office—produce analyses that are used to guide strategic decision-making within specific functional areas and that are sometimes available more widely. In addition, the separate colleges and campuses independently access data, generate reports, and use institutional information to inform strategic planning and decision-making. Relationships between data-producing units are sufficiently collaborative such that apparent inconsistencies across shared reports and/or errors are resolved without much ado or rancor.
- While it is clear that the university's decision-making processes are data-informed, the specific analyses that are used and the ways in which the data are evaluated in these decision-making processes are not always well understood across the university. Decisions that impact resource allocation-decisions are often interpreted by campus constituents as discretionary rather than data-driven. Many at Penn State consider this opacity to be an institutional strength, making it possible to have relationships across units that are more frequently characterized by collaboration than by competition.
- The appetite for data at Penn State is met through diverse approaches, including multiple centralized analytic units, and analytic experts located within functional areas where they can immediately and directly respond to on-the-ground decision-making processes. These analysts enjoy highly collegial and mutually supportive relationships, facilitated in part through an active Institutional Research Interest Group that convenes on a monthly basis.

## **Significant Accomplishments**

- Penn State has a demonstrated commitment to strategic planning processes that are built upon the construction and use of appropriate metrics and indicators, both at the overall university level and at the level of the planning units.
- Like much of the administrative work at Penn State, the work of institutional assessment is characterized by both decentralization and cheerful collaboration. Penn State is to be commended for its culture of collaboration as it bears on the important work of institutional assessment and data-informed decision support.

### **Suggestion**

- The University should make more transparent how strategic planning processes and the associated outcomes relate to decisions relevant to resource allocations.

### **STUDENT ADMISSION AND RETENTION: STANDARD 8**

*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 students' educational goals.*

**Conclusion:** The University appears to meet this standard.

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

- Penn State enjoys a robust applicant pool of highly qualified candidates from the Commonwealth, United States and abroad.
- Penn State has strong domestic and international student recruitment processes and utilizes flexible admissions criteria at the Commonwealth campuses. The Reserved Spaces Program facilitates access for students with special talents and abilities who may possess the credentials expected for first year admission to University Park. Commonwealth campuses rely on flexible admission criteria in the recruitment, selection and enrollment of diverse students at the local level. These initiatives, among others, aid in the consistent achievement of enrollment targets and facilitate the recruitment and enrollment of well-qualified candidates.
- The University offers a wide array of centrally funded scholarship programs reflective of diverse constituencies and educational disciplines. 21% of undergraduate students received institutional scholarships prior to the launch of the Provost's scholarship in 2013. Students may combine scholarship awards with federal and local financial aid packages, and other available resources, thus expanding student access to a Penn State education.

- The University new student orientation program and First Summer initiatives are two of many creative programs designed to ease student's orientation and transition to the undergraduate educational experience. These, coupled with faculty mentorship initiatives, tutoring services and extensive on line and in person student advisement programs, within departments and colleges as well as across disciplines, aid students in their achievement of educational goals.
- Early exposure programs such as ASPIRE at Penn State Berks and LEAP (Learning Edge Academic Program), among others, introduce students to varied aspects of academic and social life and facilitate student success.
- President Barron is attentive to fiscal variables that impede student persistence to degree and on time graduation. His commitment to reducing student debt is laudable and evidenced by the development of a low-cost First Summer enrollment program.
- The organizational structure of the Division of Student Affairs and related specialized departments facilitate student access to required accommodations and individualized services.
- Students enjoy a wide range of intellectual, research, service, industry and leadership opportunities that are linked to their fields of study and interests. These experiences provide real world skill development, enhance the undergraduate experience and facilitate student success.
- The institutional research capacity provides opportunity for analysis of student demographics and key outcome indicators.
- The University established the Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity in 1990 and has been recognized for its efforts to recruit and retain diverse students.

### **Recommendation**

- Enrollment and completion rate of under-represented minorities is a high priority at Penn State. However, African American student enrollment at the University Park campus hovers around 4%, markedly below national averages and the graduation rate for African-American students on the University Park campus is approximately 70%, as compared to approximately 86% for the general student body. The team recommends that the University, consistent with its own priorities and values, place a high priority on the development of new strategies and initiatives to expand and enhance the enrollment and graduation of diverse students, including most especially African American students.

## **STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES: STANDARD 9**

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

**Conclusion:** The University appears to meet this standard.

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

- From a global perspective, the student affairs and student support services are well organized and in keeping with Penn State's mission. The multiple offices and programs are designed to foster student development and complement students' academic programs.
- The staffing and organizational model meets institutional needs. With 21 student affairs departments, and staff on all the campuses, including services for the World Campus students, the quality and depth of the student life program has an important and positive impact on the nature of the student experience.
- With more than 4,000 educational programs attended by more than 200,000 people, Penn State should be proud of its offerings. Designed to meet the myriad needs of students on multiple campuses, the co-curricular offerings strengthen the student experience and enhance students' persistence to the degree. The students with whom the team met were very positive about the programs in which they participated.
- The new student orientation program, designed collaboratively by Student Affairs and the Office of Undergraduate Education, will help to build multiple bridges for students as they adjust to the University. The programs that are designed to promote alcohol safety, sexual assault awareness, respecting difference and how to meet the norms of academic integrity will further prepare new students to meet the University's expectations.
- Based on our visit with student services staff and underscored by comments from students, it is clear that the staff is dedicated to helping students reach their personal, developmental and academic goals.
- The diverse needs of both undergraduate and graduate students are considered and programs and support systems are appropriately designed to meet the developmental needs of multiple cohorts.

### **Significant Accomplishments**

- Penn State employs a highly professional and committed staff in student life and student support services and dedicates resources to support the Student Affairs Research and Assessment (SARA) functions.
- The University is extremely transparent in communicating web-based guidelines for faculty and staff regarding their access to student requirements and the institutional expectations for the protection of student records.
- Penn State's Libraries have notable innovative services. From the creation of orientation programs to acquaint students with their services to adapting their spaces to foster collaborative learning environments, the Library staff is highly committed to meeting the educational and academic resource needs of the Penn State community.
- The University established the Athletics Integrity Office and an Athletics Integrity Council, thereby creating an organizational model for the appropriate and ethical administration and implementation of a contemporary NCAA Division I sports program.

### **Suggestions**

- Penn State has the systems and procedures to address the issues that arise in student life and, specifically, in the fraternity/sorority system. If not already in place, the team suggests that the new commission, recently appointed by the president, consider the development of orientation and student development programs to educate students regarding the norms for acceptable and ethical behaviors in the Penn State community.
- The University should expeditiously implement the recommendations from the recently published Sexual Assault Report.

### **FACULTY: STANDARD 10**

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

**Conclusion:** The University appears to meet this standard.

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

- The university's faculty has the requisite credentials and experience.
- The fundamental decisions of tenure and promotion are carried out at the local level with final review by a university-wide body advisory to the Provost/President. The standards for tenure and promotion are identical for

every school and campus, but different expectations for meeting these standards according to the faculty member's school or campus.

- Achieving faculty diversity is a shared commitment, with deans/chancellors working with the central administration to advancing this goal. Funding for "opportunity" hires is provided in part through new funds from the provost's office.
- Faculty seems to have adequate support for carrying out their research mission, with start-up funds provided jointly by the provost's office, dean and department/institute.
- Based on conversations with the deans and provost, the university is highly successful in recruiting and retaining high-quality faculty amidst fierce competition from the nation's leading universities.
- Academic freedom is central to the university's ethos, and the faculty is free to pursue research, publish their findings and express their views.

### **Significant Accomplishments**

- Penn State has a truly distinguished faculty.
- The breadth and quality of its doctoral programs is impressive. This quality is evidenced in the most recent rankings of the National Research Council, where many of its programs were rated among the very finest in the nation, including programs in Anthropology, Plant Biology, Kinesiology and Spanish.
- Research activity at Penn State is carried out at a very high level, with the common metric of annual extramural research funding in excess of \$800M.

### **Suggestion**

- Based on comments from various constituents, the administration should make more systematic use of data to ensure equity in salary, research space and start-up funding.

### **EDUCATIONAL OFFERINGS: STANDARD 11**

*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 skill, for its educational offerings.*

**Conclusion:** The University appears to meet this standard.

## Summary of Evidence and Findings

- Penn State offers a wide variety of degree programs – over 160 undergraduate majors and as many graduate degrees.
- The learning goals and objectives are published widely, not just through the web pages for the many programs, but in those resources bearing on all undergraduates (e.g., 1<sup>st</sup>-year, general education, and co-curricular learning outcomes).
- The shared curriculum of the multi-campus University makes for a multi-level course and curriculum approval process that allows ideas for new courses and programs to originate with the faculty and to proceed through the levels with appropriate consultation and finally approval.
- The approval process assures initial “fit” but does not suffice to assure that it is maintained; concerns about curricular “drift” resulted in the report of the Joint Committee on Curricular Integrity ten years ago. In consequence, curricular review and approval is primarily the responsibility of the University Faculty Senate Committee on Curricular Affairs, though the integrity of ongoing educational offerings also depends on the assessment of learning goals as overseen by the Administrative Council for Undergraduate [ACUE] Education Assessment Coordinating Committee.

## Suggestion

- As important as the assessment of learning outcomes is to Standard 14 (Assessment of Student Learning), it is – and must be acknowledged as – no less important to Penn State as its chief means of ensuring curricular integrity in a uniform curriculum. In particular, after courses have been created and approved, it is explicitly the University’s one means of monitoring and preventing curricular “drift.” Thus, this is an additional reason why learning outcomes assessment across the entire university and its Commonwealth campuses must be given a high priority.

## GENERAL EDUCATION: STANDARD 12

*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 competency.*

**Conclusion:** The University appears to meet this standard.



## **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

- The Penn State General Education program requires all undergraduates to complete 45 credits – approximately one third of their degree in required general education courses.
- The General Education requirements are clearly defined and available on the web as well as in the undergraduate bulletin and other official documents including orientation and advising materials.
- There is one General Education program that all Penn State students must follow regardless of their campus location.
- A study group was formed in 2010 to review the current program. A task force was jointly charged by the University Faculty Senate chair and Provost in 2013 to develop a new model of general education for Penn State. This has been an inclusive transparent process that considered many models. The task force has coalesced on one model, which will be presented to the University Faculty Senate in April 2015. If the motion is passed, implementation is targeted for students admitted for the Fall 2017 semester.
- There does not seem to be any outcomes assessment of the general education curriculum. While they have introduced a pilot utilizing the Critical Thinking Assessment Test (CAT), this is not a suitable proxy for assessing the impact of the General Education curriculum.

## **Suggestion**

- The committee suggests the Provost direct the Administrative Council for Undergraduate Education Assessment Coordinating Committee to include an assessment of the learning outcomes of the General Education curriculum as part of its ongoing work.

## **Recommendation**

- Once a new General Education Curriculum is in place, an active assessment component must be included to ensure that the outlined learning outcomes are achieved.

## **RELATED EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES: STANDARD 13**

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

**Conclusion:** The University appears to meet this standard.

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

- Penn State is engaged in many mission-associated activities that are defined by their delivery, location, and focus in the state of Pennsylvania, abroad, and online. These activities include a suite of support services for under-prepared students, certificate programs that build off of existing academic programs, a rich offering of digital courses and degree programs, and activities that enhance the global engagement of all members of the university community.
- Procedures exist for all new students in baccalaureate and associate degree programs to be evaluated to identify fit for college-level study. Robust offerings of non-credit and remedial courses, as well as support services, exist for students who may not enter Penn State academically prepared for college-level work.
- The over 300 certificate programs offered by Penn State are nested within programs and schools that have established approval, review and assessment processes within those units. These programs are mission-aligned as they allow for outreach to new populations across the state and globe.
- The ‘one university, geographically dispersed’ model allows the university to realize its land-grant mission through the operation of instructional sites that permit access to varied communities and constituencies.
- The World Campus places Penn State in the top-tier of virtual institutions. Procedures, policies, and innovations from this unit have impacted and renewed schools and programs across the university.

### **Significant Accomplishments**

- The team commends the strong commitment throughout the university that ensures access to high quality programs and services at all instructional locations and with all delivery modes. These include, but are not limited to, such services as the University Library, research support, student affairs programs, and Office of Global Programs.

### **Suggestions**

- The committee applauds the University for further exploring strengths and differences of individual campuses and urges the continuation of this process.

### **Recommendation**

- Since the assessment of learning in certificate programs is an expectation, the Provost's Office must ensure and give evidence that these assessments are occurring, as required by university and Middle States policies.

#### **ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING: STANDARD 14**

*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.*

**Conclusion:** The University appears to meet this standard.

#### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

- Penn State's assessment system includes student admission, entrance to major, retention requirements, criteria for program completion and graduation, and post-graduation assessments, as well as embedded assessments of student learning outcomes.
- Penn State administers post-admission diagnostic and placement tests to determine appropriate placement in foundational courses. Penn State has evaluated the effectiveness of these tests and has implemented changes to improve student outcomes. In October 2013, the Task Force on Prior Learning Assessment reviewed practices and policies relating to the conferral of credit for prior learning. The findings of the review have indicated some disparities in prior learning assessment across colleges and campuses.
- From 2009 to 2013 the strategic planning process requested all units to detail plans with regard to baccalaureate program assessment. In 2010 the Administrative Council for Undergraduate Education (ACUE) Assessment Coordinating Committee was established to provide vision and oversight to the assessment of baccalaureate programs, including general education. The Assessment Coordinating Committee operates within the realm of undergraduate education and is focused on undergraduate programs. Graduate education, certificate programs, and non-academic student learning outcomes (such as might be relevant to units within student affairs) are beyond the scope of this committee's work and therefore do not benefit from the considerable experience and expertise that has been cultivated through the committee's work.
- Beginning in academic year 2011/12 each baccalaureate degree program was requested to provide a statement of learning objectives, data collection summary and analysis, lessons learned, any resulting programmatic changes, and an assessment plan for the next academic year. In 2012/13, 186 reports were

reviewed by members of the Committee, a representative from the University Faculty Senate, and an assessment consultant from the Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence. These plans and reports were evaluated to identify strengths and weaknesses relating to the collection of evidence of student learning. The ACUE Assessment Coordinating Committee and the Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence provide support and guidance to the units for Penn State's assessments efforts.

- Statements of expected student learning outcomes are present at the college and program level. Responsibility for implementing program assessment rests with the associate deans in their respective academic units.
- As of academic year 2013/14, all proposals for new baccalaureate degree programs are required to include learning objectives.
- Regular course and teaching evaluations have provided informed feedback to enhance course delivery and curricular development.
- In 2012, Penn State piloted the Critical Thinking Assessment Test to assess students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Efforts are presently underway to expand this pilot program.
- Penn State also utilizes a variety of indirect assessment methods, including national and local surveys to obtain measures of learning success and inform program revisions. Penn State has elected to discontinue participation in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) for a variety of reasons. Penn State has modified the Student Satisfaction Survey to a new Student Experience Survey with the objective of gaining better insight with regard to student engagement and learning.
- In an effort to strengthen graduate programs at Penn State, feedback on informational sessions, workshops, and exit surveys are conducted.
- Strong assessment efforts are associated with Penn State's externally accredited professional programs, which enroll a significant number of Penn State students.
- Although some student learning assessment information is shared and discussed with appropriate constituents, greater accessibility could foster collaboration between units and better serve to improve teaching and learning.
- Course syllabi are required to have stated course objectives.

## **Significant Accomplishments**

- The creation and efforts and of the ACUE Assessment Coordinating Committee, which exemplify Penn State's commitment to the assessment of student learning outcomes.
- The development of a robust and meaningful relationship between the assessment efforts and the assessment expertise of consultants from the Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence
- Penn State's commitment to academic excellence and student success, which is evident across the institution. The collaborative efforts for the achievement and assessment of curricular and co-curricular goals for student experience and development are exemplary.

### **Suggestions**

- The team suggests that Penn State consider a framework for ensuring that consistency in the evaluation of prior learning and awarding of credit be realized across Penn State's colleges and campuses and that these efforts be periodically reviewed and evaluated.
- The team suggests that Penn State continue to monitor and evaluate the new Student Experience Survey for providing useful insight into student engagement and learning.
- The team suggests that Penn State facilitate accessibility of assessment information and results to appropriate constituents and stakeholders and promote more extensive communication of assessment activities and findings.
- The team suggests that Penn State consider an appropriate mechanism for the recognition of exemplary efforts with regard to assessment activities and initiatives. The team believes that it is important that recognition come from the highest levels of the university in order to reinforce the value and significance of these activities to the institution.

### **Recommendations**

- The last decennial review identified shortcomings with regard to student learning outcomes assessment, which required an interim response by the institution. Nonetheless, the team finds that the institution still has more work to do in this area. The team recognizes that the challenging period the institution has been through and the recent changes in institutional leadership are understandable reasons why the learning outcomes assessment process has not been fully implemented for all programs. With new leadership now in place, the

Team recommends that, building on the considerable progress and accomplishments that have been made by the ACUE Assessment Coordinating Committee, Penn State place a very high and urgent priority on bringing all programs into full compliance with the MSCHE Standard for learning outcomes assessment. Simply put, Penn State must articulate statements and means of assessment for expected student learning outcomes for all programs and at all levels, undergraduate and graduate, certificate and non-credit programs.

- As noted earlier, the team recommends that Penn State develop and articulate learning objectives and appropriate assessment measures for the general education curriculum.
- In sum, the Team recommends that Penn State implement appropriate governance, support and reporting structures that ensure all units are assessing student learning across the university, including undergraduate and graduate education, certificate programs and non-credit student learning outcomes.

## VI. SUMMARY OF COMPLIANCE

- Based on a thorough review of Penn State's self study document and supporting materials and meetings and interviews with campus constituents, the team has thoroughly summarized its findings in Section V of this report. The team came away from its visit with a very positive sense Penn State's academic quality, commitment to excellence in all its endeavors, and its resolve to meet the MSCHE standards for affiliation and accreditation in full.
- **The team has made eight recommendations:**
  - **Standard 4:** The institution should provide evidence that the evaluation processes for the Board, the President and the Senior Officers have been completed and are in place.
  - **Standard 5:** The university should institute an administrative evaluation process/policy that would apply to the non-academic departments and administrators similar to the Academic Administrative Evaluation, Policy AD14.
  - **Standard 8:** Enrollment and completion rate of under-represented minorities is a high priority at Penn State. However, African American student enrollment at the University Park campus hovers around 4%, markedly below national averages and the graduation rate for African-American students on the University Park campus is approximately 70%, as compared to approximately 86% for the general student body. The team recommends that the university, consistent with its own priorities and

values, place a high priority on the development of new strategies and initiatives to expand and enhance the enrollment and graduation of diverse students, including most especially African American students.

- **Standard 12:** Once a new General Education Curriculum is in place an active assessment component must be included to ensure that the outlined learning outcomes are achieved.
- **Standard 13:** Since the assessment of learning in certificate programs is an expectation, the Provost's Office must ensure and give evidence that these assessments are occurring, as required by university and Middle States policies.
- **Standard 14 – 3 recommendations:**
  - The last decennial review identified shortcomings with regard to student learning outcomes assessment, which required an interim response by the institution. Nonetheless, the team finds that the institution still has more work to do in this area. The team recognizes that the challenging period the institution has been through and the recent changes in institutional leadership are understandable reasons why the learning outcomes assessment process has not been fully implemented for all programs. With new leadership now in place, the team recommends that, building on the considerable progress and accomplishments that have been made by the ACUE Assessment Coordinating Committee, Penn State place a very high and urgent priority on bringing all programs into full compliance with the MSCHE Standard for learning outcomes assessment. Simply put, Penn State must articulate statements and means of assessment for expected student learning outcomes for all programs and at all levels, undergraduate and graduate, certificate and non-credit programs.
  - As noted earlier, the team recommends that Penn State develop and articulate learning objectives and appropriate assessment measures for the general education curriculum.
  - In sum, the team recommends that Penn State implement appropriate governance, support and reporting structures that ensure all units are assessing student learning across the university, including undergraduate and graduate education, certificate programs and non-credit student learning outcomes.
- The report also contains numerous **suggestions** – made in a spirit of collegiality and genuine helpfulness for Penn State's continued progress toward its strategic priorities.