Chapter 1
Dear Sue, Steven, and Bruce,

Thank you so much for having coordinated and directed this very critical task.

I attach some comments regarding Chapter 1 and Chapter 4, the latter limited to governance, senate, etc, given my long experience in this area, including my current service as chair of the senate. As a member of UPPC, I have also contributed to input regarding Chapters 2 and 3, which John Delano should be forwarding to you. Other chapters are addressed by appropriate councils, and you should be getting their reports directly from the chairs.

Greetings,

Michael

Dr. R. Michael Range
Chair 2009 - 2010 University Senate

Some comments regarding the draft of the MSCHE Self Study Report
12/07/09

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

First, two minor inaccuracies:

p. 7: “As documented in Chapter 4, Institutional Effectiveness and the Assessment of Student Learning” Either this should be changed to Chapter 5, or else some other change in the numbering of chapters should occur.

Feedback addressed as follows:

- Fixed. Chapter 5 it is.

p. 8: “Interim President Philip appointed Susan D. Phillips, then Dean of the School of Education, to serve as Interim Provost in November 2007, filling the provost’s vacancy after Dr. Herbst left. In Spring 2009, Dr. Phillips was appointed Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs.” The dates are not accurate. The appointment of the Interim Provost was in January 2008, while the appointment to Provost was in January 2009.

Feedback addressed as follows:

- Interim appointment changed to January 2008 (university announcement by President),
  appointment to provost changed to December 2008, per official appointment letter (campus announcement was in January 2009).

The introduction does a good job in recounting the trajectory of UAlbany and the changes that have occurred during the last ten years or so. One notable exception is the decline in the national rankings of UAlbany, with the drop from Tier 2 to Tier 3 having occurred during this period. This
development poses significant challenges which I believe the Self Study needs to address, and which certainly should be listed among the major challenges facing UAlbany in the coming decade. We would be in excellent shape indeed if our challenges would be limited to “First and foremost is the need to update our Mission Statement, which was originally developed in 1992. Similarly, the University needs to develop a new strategic plan......”, “Another general challenge confronting the University is our need to build upon current effort to enhance assessment efforts.”, and others, listed on pp. 10 – 11.

Feedback addressed as follows:

- The Middle States self-study guidelines, and the approved charge questions that our self-study needs to address, do not focus on US News or other rankings, but on internal campus processes and procedures that help the campus to meet accreditation standards. The validity of US News rankings (including both the data used and ranking method) has been highly criticized in the higher education literature, and UA has never formally discussed a need to aspire to any particular rankings in its planning or resource allocation processes – regardless of whether we happened to be Tier II or Tier III. Nevertheless, the more general substantive point is highly germane to the self-study, namely, the importance of assessments of the quality of the University across multiple domains, including but not limited to faculty scholarship, graduate programs, and undergraduate education. Various chapters address these issues and provide recommendations. As noted in the final chapter (“Epilogue”), it is anticipated that the self-study document will inform the Strategic Planning process as the University sets its priorities.

Given all the areas of strength and improvement listed on p. 8 (“significant capital investments and infrastructure improvements; a strong collegial faculty and staff; a strong emphasis on and refocused commitment to undergraduate student success; and academically driven athletic success are noted as areas of strength in this self-study document. Perhaps the most distinctive strength of the University at Albany is its collection of academic programs.”), the decline in national rankings needs to be acknowledged candidly, relevant factors that have been identified should be carefully discussed in appropriate chapters (with a summary and references in the introduction), and some potential responses to improve the situation should be proposed. I believe that this would be consistent with the recommendation by the MSCHE, quoted in the Conclusion of the Introduction, that the self study report “is most useful when it is analytical and forward-looking rather than descriptive or defensive, when it is used both to identify problems and to develop solutions to them, and when it identifies opportunities for growth and development.”

Feedback addressed as follows:

- See response to prior point above.