Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, and Students
of the
UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY
State University of New York
Albany, NY 12222

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 14-17, 2010

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This report represents the view of the evaluation team as interpreted by the Chair, and it goes directly to the institution before being considered by the Commission. It is a confidential document prepared as an educational service for the benefit of the institution. All comments in the report are made in good faith, in an effort to assist The University at Albany. This report is based solely on an educational evaluation of the institution and of the manner in which it appears to be carrying out its educational objectives.

[please see next page]

AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

University at Albany President: Mr. George M. Philip

University at Albany Chief Academic Officer: Provost Susan D. Phillips

University at Albany University Council: Vice Chairman Daniel C. Tomson, ESQ

I. Context and Nature of the Visit

The University at Albany (UAlbany) is one of the four major "University Centers" of the sixty-four institution State University of New York. It has over 13,000 undergraduate students and nearly 5000 graduate students. It occupies three campuses in the Albany metropolitan area (the "Uptown Campus," the "Downtown Campus," and the "East Campus" just across the Hudson). It has no branch campuses, but offers business programs at Saratoga Springs, NY. Its Carnegie classification is "Research – Very High Research Activity." It offers Certificate/Diploma, Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral programs, and it has distance education programs.

UAlbany or its predecessor institution has been a member of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) since 1938. Its accreditation was last reaffirmed in 2005. Our Team's current visit was a part of the University's regular decennial reaccreditation process. The Self-Study design/model was "Comprehensive."

The University began the decade since its last decennial reaccreditation with relative stability in its senior leadership. That changed in 2004 when President Karen R. Hitchcock departed. Since then UAlbany has been led by six presidents, interim presidents, or "officers in charge." During that same period it has had five provosts or interim provosts. According to the Self-Study report, a contributing factor in this leadership instability was "a time of significant fiscal difficulty in the New York public sector," during which the office of Chancellor of the SUNY System was occupied by five different individuals. Happily, the volatility at the top of UAlbany's and SUNY's leadership teams appears to be past, with the recent appointments of a president, a provost, and a chancellor. Though neither the state's financial situation nor its political turbulence has similarly improved, there is good reason for optimism at UAlbany.

Considering these circumstances over the past decade, the degree to which the university has managed to maintain progress in academic development and improvement is laudable, even surprising. Our Team found the Self-Study report to be an exemplary description of an institution's successful efforts to keep moving forward, despite facing very difficult challenges. We were particularly impressed by the objectivity and candor of the report. It states "The University of Albany therefore embarked on this process with an explicit goal of being honest with itself." We believe those who worked on the report succeeded in attaining that goal. Both the report and the decade of institutional progress it describes are a credit to the commitment and dedicated work of its students, its faculty, its staff, and its leaders.

II. Affirmation of Continued Compliance with Requirements of Affiliation

Based on a review of the Self-Study report, interviews, the certification statement supplied by the institution, and/or other institutional documents, the Team affirms that the institution continues to meet the requirements of affiliation in *Characteristics of Excellence*.

III. Compliance with Federal Requirements; Issues Relative to State Regulatory or Other Accrediting Agency Requirements

Based on a review of the Self-Study report, certification by the institution, other institutional documents, and/or interviews, the Team affirms that the institution's Title IV cohort default rate is within federal limits. The institution also meets relevant requirements under the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008.

IV. Evaluation Overview

The UAlbany and SUNY circumstances described above have developed against the background of important concurrent changes in the socio-economic and technological environment of the U.S. These include:

- Widespread recognition of significant changes in U.S. business and industry, from heavy reliance on the design and manufacture of hardware and software to an increasing emphasis on provision of all manner of sophisticated services. This is accompanied by rapid change in the nature of careers and of the workforce, and thus in the necessary educational preparation of both those about to enter that workforce and of those already in it. Our education system, P-20, must figure out how best to prepare students for careers that do not yet exist, and to re-prepare "adult" students for continued success. "Lifelong Learning" has become a common term, as has the acronym STEM.

- The demographic character of the U.S. population is steadily changing, leading to a demand for better performance in the education of groups of citizens who have not traditionally been well represented in higher education, but are now important components of our future workforce.

- U.S. primacy in the preparation of highly educated professionals and skilled workers is being challenged globally. International data on the comparative performances of American K-12 students and those in other countries show our students ranking well behind those of other industrialized nations. There are now more Chinese learning English than there are Americans speaking English. And, the portion of American citizens having access to broad-band Internet services places us seventeenth among all nations. It is increasingly realized that we must shift our educational sights from preparing our students for lives in a familiar America to preparing them for success in a fiercely competitive international socio-economic and political environment.

- The invention of the printed book caused the historical necessity of a close spatial and temporal contact between teachers and learners to become optional. We have become used to "learning by reading the book," but we have not yet fully comprehended the educational implications of the current information technology explosion, arguably the greatest since the invention of printing. Online and "asynchronous" learning is booming. About 4.5 million U.S. college students took at least one online course last year. One of the most important characteristics of online programs is that both their faculties and their students can be anywhere, any time. (For example, consider Team member Stella Porto.

She is a professor and a program director at the University of Maryland University College, headquartered in Adelphi, MD. Note her mailing (and work) address.)

We note these trends because they form the background for UAlbany's strategic planning for its next decade. They can – and must – help shape its design for its future. The University finds itself at an extraordinary conjunction of events. It has achieved stability in leadership, and so has the SUNY System. Its faculty and administration have conducted an exemplary Self-Study, with a report which analyzes and presents a candid and honest picture of the University's current character. It has in progress the development of a strategic plan which is due for completion within several months. The SUNY System is also creating a strategic plan which is expected to be completed on a similar time scale. These plans will likely shape the evolution of an important higher education institution which the Team believes has the potential to become a leader, both in New York and nationally. Our Team hopes that this report can make useful contributions to that effort.

The University's Self-Study was organized in a manner that melded several MSCHE standards in several of its chapters. Our Team has elected to organize its report in the conventional standard-by-standard format. Our observations and suggestions are reported in each standard area.

V. Compliance with Accreditation Standards

Standard 1: Mission and Goals

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

Based on a review of the Self-Study report, other institutional documents, and interviews with students, faculty, staff, and administration, the Team believes that UAlbany has a present mission and goals which are well articulated and generally reasonably well understood by most members of the University community. (The present mission and goals statement dates to 1992.)

The President and Provost shared with members of the Team a draft of a new mission and goals statement which has been developed by the committee working on the development of the strategic plan. While it is currently being widely discussed on the campus and will not reach final form for several months, the Team finds the draft a very promising new mission and goals statement.

- *Suggestion*

While the UAlbany already has a recently adopted "brand," the Team believes that the University would do well to focus some attention on establishing for itself a new, distinctive, and perhaps even unique, brand which would resonate across New York, both on and beyond the

campus, and across the U.S. higher education community. A simple, succinct, and powerful mission and goals statement would be a very valuable tool in establishing such a brand. The present draft statement appears to be a step in that direction and is to be commended. (Though it is difficult for academics to resist creating a sophisticated and subtle statement delineating all the ifs, ands, or buts, we urge that the institution concentrate on developing a simple but evocative brand description, something of the sort sometimes described as an "elevator statement," i.e., one that can be recited to a state legislator while in an elevator moving between floors in the state capitol.)

Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

Based on a review of the Self-Study report, other institutional documents and interviews with students, faculty, staff, and others, the team developed the following observations relative to this standard:

At the time of the writing and submission of the Self-Study report, the new mission statement, core values, and strategic goals were not yet finished, but a current draft was presented when the Team met with the Provost and the Interim Vice President for Finance and Business during our visit. The new mission, core values and strategic goals have not yet been formally disseminated to the University community nor ratified by the various governing bodies. The development of the new mission and goals is unconventional in the sense that it is subsequent to the completion of the Self-Study, whereas the more conventional approach has the development of mission and goals preceding the Self-Study.

Nevertheless, the new mission statement, core values and strategic goals appear to capture the essence of the University and its purpose in a brief statement that is "bumper-sticker like" in its brevity. The new draft mission statement is: *Expanding knowledge and transforming minds to shape the future of our community and our world*. The new strategic goals and their objectives address the rigor and quality of undergraduate and graduate education; integrate more fully the academic and co-curricula experiences; add to and reconfigure the physical infrastructure; engage the alumni and the community; advance the discovery and scholarship (i.e., research) undertaken by students, faculty, and staff.

According to the University's strategic planning timeline, the current strategic effort began in December 2009 with a "kickoff" event that featured a review of emerging trends in higher education, followed by a retreat for the Strategic Planning Committee. A later series of meetings involved information gathering, environmental scanning and stakeholder analysis. The last retreat, held in February 2010, led to the creation of the most recent draft mission statement, core values and strategic goals. The University intends to complete the process by formulating action plans toward the development of its strategic plan and submit it for presidential approval by May 15th.

The many changes in the presidency and other senior leadership positions have adversely affected the goal-setting and planning processes at the University at Albany. However, a review of planning initiatives over the last decade clearly shows that the University engaged in much planning. Its most recent planning initiatives, the 2005 Compact Planning initiative and the 2006 SUNY Mission Review II, were particularly impressive because the former sought to link planning with resource allocation and the latter delineated the goals of University in a wide range of areas. A 2005 Institutional Assessment Plan helped the University set student learning and institutional effectiveness goals and outlined their subsequent assessment. Unfortunately, the Compact Planning process lost momentum with the passing of President Hall, but other planning initiatives have arisen, such as the Going Forward Plan. It is not surprising that planning at the college and school levels has been described as "episodic and uncoordinated."

By its own admission, the University has not substantially linked its resource allocation with its strategic plan and has in recent years engaged in incremental budgeting. While it desires to link it resource allocations with its strategic plan, it claims that the budgetary constraints and management turnover precluded the implementation of this type of budgeting. There is a genuine desire of many at the University to move beyond the current budgeting process and to pursue more deliberate allocation of resources and institutional renewal, as promoted by Compact Planning and Selective Investment and the most recent Going Forward Plan.

The Team notes several important parallel planning initiatives: On a roughly similar time frame, SUNY Central is completing its Master Plan and UAlbany will review its plans in light of the SUNY plans. The Self-Study reports that the University under the leadership of the new President established a President's Budget Advisory Group (BAG), a step in developing a new campus-wide financial plan. The Provost then established a second advisory group (BAG2) to review the priorities and budget situation for units in Academic Affairs. The University is about to begin work to develop a multi-year facilities plan to support the outcomes of the strategic planning efforts, building on the 1998 Facilities Master Plan.

The Team views the following as notable strengths:

- The University has made substantial progress in its most recent strategic plan and it looks promising.
- The new University mission statement makes significant progress toward identifying the uniqueness of the University (i.e., what it is and what it aspires to be).
- The University has begun to address the right balance or mix of undergraduate, graduate and research programs via its mission and goal statements.

The Team notes the following weaknesses and challenges:

- The University must complete the strategic plan, and it needs to operationalize the goals and objectives and "close the loop" in the planning process.
- The University must engage the entire University community in the development of its strategic plan and keep them well informed throughout the development process and into its implementation.

- The allocation of resources is not yet linked to the University strategic plan.
- Turnover in senior management positions, including deans, has hampered strategic planning at all levels with some individual exceptions.
- Reduced state funding and the general economic downturn have adversely affected strategic planning and linkages to resource allocation.

The Team finds particularly commendable the work of the Self-Study Committee in producing an honest and comprehensive assessment of the University. This type of appraisal will serve as the basis for substantive change and improvement in development of Albany's strategic plan and allocation of resources. The Team also noted as especially commendable the President's evident personal leadership in the development of the strategic plan, particularly his intervention to include among strategic goals increased international experience for undergraduates and investment in green infrastructure for the campus.

- *Recommendation*

We recommend, in the light of the many important events now in course at UAlbany and in its state and national environments, that its next Periodic Review Report be focused on the University's soon-to-come new strategic plan and its implementation outcomes during the next five years.

Standard 3: Institutional Resources

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

Based on a review of the Self-Study report, other institutional documents, and interviews with students, faculty, staff, and others, the Team developed the following observations relative to this standard:

In spite of recent reductions in operating budgets, the university appears to have at least adequate resources to fulfill its mission at this time. As noted in the Self-Study report, the University has continued to diversify its sources of revenue, including auxiliary enterprises, research grants and the University of Albany Foundation.

General state tax support as a percentage of total revenues under state control has declined over the decade, from 24% of the total budget to 16%. This rather stark decline is a result of years of bad news about direct State support, and good news about substantial increases in external funding for research. Public research universities in many other states have experienced similar trends. It is unlikely that they are temporary. That means that unprecedented adaptation responses will be necessary at UAlbany and elsewhere.

Despite reductions by the State in operating budget, the capital budget and judicious use of the maintenance budget have permitted continued improvements to the campus facilities. The campus facilities appear to be well maintained. The University reports that it has developed a system of prioritization to address upcoming maintenance needs. This is commendable and particularly important because a significant portion of the Uptown Campus buildings were built at the same time and are coming due for renovation and repair all at the same time.

- *Suggestion*

The Self-Study report repeatedly notes that, if UAlbany is to fulfill its potential and its ambitions, new resources and revenue streams must be identified. However, realistic plans to locate such streams do not yet appear to have been developed.

External funding to support research is one very important type of revenue stream. The UAlbany has been very successful in increasing its external research funding in recent years. However, anyone familiar with the economics of research universities understands that research is not a profit-making business. Indirect cost recoveries on federal research grants, for example, never actually cover all of the indirect costs required to support a substantial research enterprise.

Another very important potential revenue stream for UAlbany is private giving. Public universities, particularly those whose origins lie in "normal schools" whose older alumni are teachers, are unaccustomed to imagining themselves as recipients of substantial financial gifts. However, the American higher education world is increasingly populated with public research universities which have developed very effective advancement capabilities. Some have even joined the major private universities in mounting successful billion-dollar fund-raising campaigns. UAlbany would be well advised to begin preparing to join this august group.

The Team believes that the UAlbany has the potential to attract substantial annual giving from its alumni and substantial gifts from both corporate and foundation donors. We therefore suggest that the University undertake the development of the institutional capacity to seek such giving. This will require both the growth of its skilled advancement leadership and staff, and the engagement in the effort of the entire academic leadership, as well as entrepreneurial faculty. This will include the President, the academic officers (dean and department chairs) who know best the University's 'outputs' of stimulating, talented students and exciting research, and creative and entrepreneurial faculty. These persons need to be helped and supported to play an appropriate role, under careful leadership, in cultivation of corporate and individual funding sources. Some deans and entrepreneurial faculty at UAlbany already do so. They, as well as colleagues at other institutions (including privates) might provide advice and encouragement.

Standard 4: Leadership and Governance

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

Based on a review of the Self-Study report, other institutional documents, and interviews with students, faculty, staff, and others, the Team developed the following observations relative to this standard:

The most salient factor in the leadership of UAlbany is that the institution at long last has – in President Philip, with his unique background, and Provost Phillips, with her deep experience at UAlbany – a permanent top administration to end the constant turnover of the previous half-dozen years. After a year in place, they are clearly taking hold. During the Team's visit, a vigorous work product began to appear from the strategic planning process that follows from the Going Forward document of December, 2009. The completed plan is to include specific action plans, devised by dedicated task forces, for each individual goal – thus allowing the university to 'close the loop' on the process in ways that have not always occurred in the past.

In these early stages, senior leadership is helping to move the institution beyond the honest self-assessment of the Self-Study toward thoughtful change, with substantial 'buy in' across the University community. The effort to date is thoroughly commendable! UAlbany is ready to leave its recent history behind and focus on the future, both building on its long-term strengths and developing further its exciting recent connections with regional industry. At the same time, the Team commends the senior management and the deans who have kept the institution not only functioning well but moving ahead on many fronts during the turnover since 2004.

- *Suggestions*

If the Team sees a weakness in the leadership and management of academic programs at UAlbany, it is the short terms and minimal incentives provided for department chairs. Those of us with long experience in research universities believe that, for development and focus on strengths within departments, the most important factor is a faculty member willing to take on, and when necessary assert, leadership over colleagues in such matters as curriculum change, new faculty recruitment and development, actual use of information gained from assessment (close the loop), and sometimes fundraising. Good deans rely on such knowledgeable and energetic people. Departments often find them a source of morale. In our experience, when there are any unallocated resources available, well-led departments glean more than their share.

Chairmanships are not only important administrative jobs, they are hard. To accomplish much, a chair needs a term of at least five years (two terms of three years are an alternative). To reward such sacrifice of time for their own research, reasonable stipends based on department size and complexity, and reasonable released time from teaching are necessary. We suggest that, even in the current challenging financial circumstances, the administration carve out the resources to make conversations about enhanced chairmanships a reasonable possibility.

Communication is an important responsibility of leadership, and the Self-Study report's introduction notes elements of transparency and even simple information as an area needing work at UAlbany. In various ways the team confirmed that some members of the community do not have – or, equally problematic, believe they don't have – access to various documents, procedures, data sets, etc., that would make their work easier to accomplish. The Team suggests one way to address this never-wholly-resolvable problem: a webpage of timely planning documents, important SUNY rules (e.g., how to design and submit a proposed major), and recent survey results modeled on the site created for the Middle States visit. Such an online library would need to be selective and, if possible, searchable. Its very existence should get wide publicity. The Team supports the recommendations of the Self-Study for expansion of existing websites – e.g. putting school/college bylaws on line – with due attention to the possibility of information overload that reduces functionality.

External governance

The role of the SUNY System in the policies, practices, and finances of the institution is large. The close proximity of the System office to the UAlbany campus does not appear to make communications much easier. Many members of the community, filling many roles, expressed to the Team unhappiness about dealing with 'red tape' and bureaucracy that seems to go beyond what is predictable in such relationships. Yet, System officers see themselves as helping the campuses. Those who know the new Chancellor, Nancy Zimpher, have high hopes for some streamlining.

External governance of course includes the role of the state government beyond the SUNY System office. The Team was informed about the *The Public Higher Education Empowerment and Innovation Act* now under consideration by the legislature. We applaud this initiative and strongly hope it will be passed and signed into law. It would be an enormous positive step toward bringing the management authorities and practices of UAlbany and the SUNY System into accord with those of most of the nation's leading public university systems. (In several of them, including California and Michigan, their flagship universities have constitutional autonomy, but that is probably too much to expect in New York just now.)

- *Suggestion*

The Team was informed that the University has a Director of Governmental Relations. We suggest that consideration be given to including SUNY System relations in the Director's portfolio and that the Governmental Relations staff have responsiblity for getting to know well

the System's people and regulations and for acting as a contact point and facilitator for campus faculty and staff who need assistance in managing an initial encounter with a System- or State-related process.

An interesting and clearly underutilized part of the UAlbany governance structure is the University Council of distinguished graduates and community leaders, both from Albany and New York City. Its official remit, at present, is rather narrow. Meeting with some Council members, the team learned that the Council has recently been expanded in numbers, and they are ready and willing to do more to help UAlbany. We see many ways in which they can do so, including assuming a major role in the University's advancement activities. The Self-Study recommends that their charge be formally expanded, and that a Chair/Vice-chair structure be added. We encourage those steps -- by the SUNY System and the Governor, as may be necessary. We also suggest consideration of recruiting more women to the Council.

Internal governance

UAlbany has apparently been served well by the 'mixed model' of the University Senate that incorporates all constituencies and gives voice to many members of the community. The Team particularly commends the tenure and promotion procedures that are overseen by the Senate before cases move to the Provost and President. They meet the highest professional standards of the academy.

- *Suggestions*

The Self-Study report raises questions about the Senate's efficacy in dealing with some matters, and the Team heard of issues that have arisen repeatedly without achieving closure. The number of councils that are the operational arm of the Senate is high, and some meet with great frequency. The Self-Study report notes that some agendas appear to be dominated by administrative issues. Given the multiple, high demands on the time of faculty in any research university (and more will be demanded at UAlbany as a result of the strategic plan), the Team suggests that – once the planning process is complete – time and thought might usefully be spent on possible streamlining of the Senate governance structure, especially the 'nuts & bolts' aspects, to allow time for discussion of major intellectual issues (such as the brief conversation about interdisciplinarity that the team held with Senate Council chairs). The Team supports serious consideration of the possibility, raised in the Self-Study report, of executive sessions or separate meetings for faculty. Given that UAlbany is now focusing sharply on its future, not a past that was quite different, we suggest that the Senate reconsider carefully adding Emeriti faculty to the Senate, as well some mechanism for providing a voice for junior faculty in Senate affairs.

The Team would also suggest that some attention be given to formally clarifying and defining the roles and authorities of the Senate. The UAlbany Senate shares with its counterparts in many other major universities a structure that entirely appropriately includes some student and administration members, while remaining a body in which the faculty predominate. In most such university senates, it is recognized that the senate's primary role is in academic matters, like academic program approval, while its role in administrative matters is to provide advice and

counsel to the administration based primarily on faculty views. Occasionally a university senate embraces the view that it is a co-equal branch of university governance analogous to the United States Congress. That is usually a recipe for conflict and dispute to be avoided at all costs! (For instance, see recent events in Washington.)

Standard 5: Administration

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

Based on a review of the Self-Study report, other institutional documents, and interviews with students, faculty, staff, and others, the Team developed the following observations relative to this standard:

The University has a President that was duly appointed by the SUNY Board. He brings a number of years of experience as an active member and Chair of the UAlbany Council.

The senior academic and administrative personnel seem energetic , engaged and appear to work well together.

The University organization chart delineates clear reporting lines for the various vice presidents and their staffs.

Although budget reductions have reduced the number of personnel, there appears to be adequate staff with sufficient skills to carry out the mission of the university

There appear to be good working relationships between and among the administration, the personnel covered by collective bargaining units (this includes faculty) and the University Senate.

Standard 6: Integrity

The institution meets this standard.

Based on a review of the Self-Study report, other institutional documents, and interviews with students, faculty, staff, and others, the Team found no evidence that the operations of the UAlbany are conducted in any way lacking in integrity.

Standard 7: Institutional Assessment

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

Based on a review of the Self-Study report, other institutional documents, and interviews with students, faculty, staff, and others, the Team developed the following observations relative to this standard:

"Assessment" has become a watchword in higher education. It is not an issue without controversy, but it has become widely accepted as a necessity, witness its presence in two MSCHE standards. UAlbany has undertaken early initiatives in both institutional and student assessment (see Standard 14 discussion below) and has made notable and commendable progress in both areas. When it comes to institutional assessment the Team found that further work is desirable. Some administrative units appear not yet to have developed regular and thorough assessment mechanisms.

Three general characteristics should be integral to all assessment systems.

First, it should be generally understood that assessments can and should be both "formative" and "summative." The first is perhaps the most important. The principal purpose of any assessment designed to discover how an organizational unit is performing should be to assist those responsible in improving its performance, as measured against the objectives defined in the strategic plan. A primarily summative assessment can help institutional leadership in identifying those units most in need of help and improvement, but a good formative assessment can show what help is needed and how that improvement can be accomplished.

Second, the participants in the assessment of an organizational unit should include representatives of all sectors of the University community which are served by that unit. For example, a student services unit assessment should rely heavily on the views of those students it serves. The faculty, perhaps represented primarily by the University Senate, should be appropriately involved in the assessment of all University units, both academic and non-academic. It should be noted, however, that the word "appropriately" here does not extend faculty (e.g., Senate) purview to the performance assessment of individual administrative staff, nor to the direct management of the unit. These are the responsibilities of the relevant University leadership authorities, both for academic and non-academic units. The Senate's proper role is to assist and to provide faculty advice in the conduct of the assessment.

Third, the ultimate purpose of assessment is actual change leading to improvement. Therefore, it is imperative that the University build into its institutional assessment system a universal expectation to "close the loop**."** That is, every assessment project should demonstrably lead to actions to respond to the improvement needs revealed by the assessment.

- *Suggestion*

The Team suggests that in the course of implementation of the strategic plan now being developed, attention be given to the establishment of formal assessment systems for all administrative units, including post-assessment closing-the-loop.

Standard 8: Student Admissions and Retention

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

Based on a review of the Self-Study report, other institutional documents, and interviews with students, faculty, staff, and others, the Team developed the following observations relative to this standard:

The University has a three-part goal to increase the incoming student profile while increasing diversity and also stabilize enrollment. These sub-goals may be in conflict with each other to some extent. The university should separate these points into separate measurable goals with targets.

Enrollment of new students of color has increased from 20% to 30% over the past ten years. Most impressive part is the fact that, on average, in the last academic year, the first-year retention rate for students of color was 87.8%, while the overall first-year retention rate was 83.7%. The national first-year retention rate for all students is 76.5%, and for persons of color, 75.8% (Consortium for Student Retention Rate Exchange, 2006).

First-year advising seems to be working well for students at UAlbany. Entering students are given class schedules based upon faculty and student discussions during new student orientation, thereby providing more interaction time for the advisor and student to discuss career and major choice issues.

Many students report that where advising needs to be improved is in the academic departments. The quality of the academic advising experience is uneven at best among departments. There are tools available for students and faculty to assist the student in their academic planning, such as DARS and degree mapping. The University should examine the options available (upgrading

DARS vs using PeopleSoft 9's audit package or other options) and provide the most up-to-date and most effective degree audit system for students as possible.

The University seems to be struggling with how to establish enrollment goals/targets. It also is struggling with the tug and pull between the desire of some to be a major research university and a university primarily committed to undergraduate education and learning. This struggle is one that the University should take on, determine the direction it wishes to go and get the University community as a whole on board. This is important so that the Admissions office will focus its efforts to recruit and admit the type of student the University will need to become the institution it wishes to be.

The Honors College is having a positive impact on perception – if only among the academics on campus. However, the anecdotal and "feeling" evidence should be corroborated by serious assessment, so that appropriate resources are provided for its support and marketing for maximum impact.

The University should examine how financial aid and merit scholarships are used to bring in the best and brightest students, and how the funds are used for retention of the best students. The Self-Study report itself states that more funds should be made available for the University Scholars program. This should be pursued.

Transfer students seem to be served fairly well, with the transfer evaluations being done prior to students coming to transfer orientation so that the advisors are better able to serve them. This program was done in pilot mode and is working effectively, and thus, it should be rolled out for the entire transfer population.

There seems to be a bottleneck in online enrollments for the few courses that are offered online, despite a growing student demand and a growing number of students who are not served in that modality. Some students seem to underestimate the need for time and self-discipline in online courses.

- *Suggestions*

Close the loop, by examining and analyzing the data collected in all assessment activities, particularly with regard to the findings of the Retention Committee, and then using the findings to improve programs and services.

There seems to be little planning for the changing demographics of higher education, particularly in New York State. The student body of the future will be composed of many more non-traditional students. The recruitment and selection of adult students who no longer fit the mold of the 18-year-old entering resident freshman will require different approaches. This should be a focus of planning for enrollment management by the entire University.

The University should reexamine its planning for online courses. Their increased use could help avoid scheduling conflicts and impediments to graduation. Improvement of the advisement

procedures when students enroll in online courses should be considered in order to increase students' success in completion of online courses.

Standard 9: Student Support Services

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

Based on a review of the Self-Study report, other institutional documents, and interviews with students, faculty, staff, and others, the Team developed the following observations relative to this standard:

UAlbany provides support services for its students that are comprehensive and effective. Students have indicated that most services are responsive and are very concerned with students. The general consensus among students is that both the education and student services are good and affordable. The staff are good and care about students. UAlbany students state that the campus is diverse, which they view as a real strength of the institution.

Student Services (Student Success) assessment activities are very robust, with a five-year history. The division uses the national standard for assessment, Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS), as one of the major methods it uses for data collection. Several departments are also using the Educational Benchmarking, Inc. (EBI) for residence life and for the Student Center. These assessment tools and the information they collect are used to improve programs and services.

Safety and security on campus seem to be effective and have provided a campus with crime that is relatively low in comparison with similar campuses in urban areas. Off-campus safety is an area that has needed attention and has received it. The safe corridor is a cooperative venture among the UAlbany, the Albany police, and the College of St. Rose. It is designed to improve safety for students who go to the taverns, bars and businesses along the corridor in downtown Albany. The crime rate in the area, while increasing in the short term, has been reduced by 40% since its inception.

The level of involvement of students in the student judicial affairs process has been a very positive aspect of the resolution of student behavior issues. The office of Conflict Resolution and Civic Responsibility, which handles such issues, uses a philosophy based on a quasi-restorative justice model. The student learning outcomes for this department and its services have been determined and are being measured. Rates of recidivism are low with students who have gone through the process.

The use of the CAS standards across the Division of Student Success, the additional use of EBI in some areas, and the *StudentVoice* survey system in others, are excellent approaches within student affairs departments. The Division and its departments are using the data collected to analyze and modify programs and service. That is, they are closing the loop. Beginning in the

summer of 2009, units within Student Success were asked to conduct a self-study designed to identify strengths and weaknesses in individual units. The outline used to perform the self-study is based on the Book of Professional Standards 2006, published by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS). Many units completed a self-study exercise in the summer of 2005, in anticipation of the University's compact planning efforts. Units are to complete a self-study every five years, on a rotating basis, beginning in the summer of 2009. This Division's efforts are commendable in its approach to assessment and to utilizing the findings to improve services and programs.

Students are governed by an effective organization, the Student Association, with committed student leaders. Leaders receive a stipend, but the stipend is not out of line with those in peer institutions. The students are dedicated and spend a great deal of time providing for the quality of student life on the campus. They are responsible for allocating the $2 million student fee budget and it appears that they do so with efficiency, fairness and follow appropriate funding strategies.

Student programming seems to be meeting the needs of the students on campus. The Great Dane late night programming efforts are keeping students on campus, though the corridor still seems to attract large numbers of students during the Thursday to Saturday evenings.

The STEPS program, using the *Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students* (BASICS) approach, is an effective alcohol abuse prevention program that has won national awards as a best practice. This innovative effort, a $200,000, 18-month grant funded by the Department of Education, developed by the Division of Student Success, and particularly the Department of Counseling Services, is a model that is being emulated on campuses across the country and is highly commended by our Team.

- *Suggestions*

Academic advising in the major departments is uneven and should be a stronger focus of the campus so that students are best served.

Student comments about frustrations with securing health center appointments, particularly via telephone, suggest that the university should address this issue and consider implementing an on-line health center appointments system.

Standard 10: Faculty

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

Based on a review of the Self-Study report, other institutional documents, and interviews with students, faculty, staff, and others, the Team developed the following observations relative to this standard:

UAlbany has a strong faculty that is generally committed to the University's dual goals of "expanding knowledge and transforming minds." There are many examples of faculty creativity and entrepreneurship related to both goals. These include a very impressive growth in externally funded research (from $60 million in 1991-92 to $118 million in 1998, and to $240 million in 2006-07) and the creation of major new academic initiatives, e.g., the College of Nano Science and Engineering and the Cancer Research Center. These units will inevitably help to shape UAlbany's future in important ways.

The faculty tenure and promotion process is multi-layered, peer-reviewed, and fair. There is a relatively high success rate of candidates who decide to apply for tenure in their fifth year. This indicates the presence of effective and competitive new-faculty recruitment practices.

Faculty participation in the shared governance of the University appears to be substantial, effective, and relatively free of conflict. SUNY has a System-wide faculty union whose involvement in the affairs of UAlbany appears to be generally constructive and supportive.

UAlbany added 112 full-time faculty positions between 1998 (546) and 2008 (658). This is a remarkable achievement in light of the funding constraints of that decade. However, during this period, the percentage of total student FTEs taught by full-time faculty decreased from 54.3% in 2003 to 44.5%, and the percentage of general education courses taught by full-time faculty is 35.1%. These numbers are relatively low compared with those in some of the University's peers.

- *Suggestions*

The balance between the number of full-time tenure-track faculty and non-tenure-track contingent (adjunct) and part-time faculty is a vexing issue in almost every higher education institution. On the one hand, full-time faculty constitute the fundamental academic foundation of the institution. On the other hand, both financial circumstances and, even more important, the present rapidly evolving environment of higher education described in Section IV above, demand the kind of institutional and programmatic flexibility and adaptability that adjunct faculty can provide. This is particularly true in professional areas like teacher education, public policy, law, and the health professions. It is not irrelevant to note that such programs have long required students to have "clinical" or "internship" training provided by non-tenure-track faculty and mentors who are practicing professionals in those fields.

The Team suggests that, as part of the implementation of its Strategic Plan, the UAlbany should continue to devote explicit attention to this issue, as it is already doing. The Provost's multi-pronged effort called Career Leadership and University Excellence (CLUE) and The Institute for Teaching, Learning, and Academic Leadership (ITLAL) are both promising new initiatives and should be vigorously pursued. Further efforts might include examining ways to establish rational goals for the balance between full-time and part-time faculty, recognizing the appropriate differences among disciplines, departments, and schools. It might include considering ways to more fully engage/utilize non-tenure-track faculty in all aspects of the University's functions, including academic program development and even shared governance. Consideration should be

given to helping part-time faculty feel more of a personal stake in the success of the University and its students, using longer term relationships, improved salary rates, and public recognition for exceptional performance.

Most faculty in research universities like the UAlbany learned how to do research in rigorous PhD programs in similar institutions. They learned how to be faculty members, including how to teach, simply by emulating their own faculty mentors. Few were actually formally trained to be professors. That was probably adequate preparation to be a traditional faculty member in the twentieth century, but this is the twenty-first century, when being an effective faculty member in the swiftly evolving higher education world described above in Section IV requires a new level of intellectual and professional adaptability and agility.

An example: There now exist "physics education research programs" in the physics departments of a couple of dozen major research industries. These conduct real research on how physics should be taught better. Several actually award PhDs for research on the teaching of physics, not the doing of physics. However, the challenge to get this new knowledge learned and commonly used by all physics professors remains unmet, to put it mildly.

Another example: The new technologies of online learning are nontrivial to learn and use. Institutions with comprehensive online programs find that traditional faculty need intensive training extending to the equivalent of many full-time weeks of training. How are busy hard working faculty members to get that?

The Team suggests, therefore, that UAlbany devote serious attention to developing and enhancing institutional mechanisms devoted to assisting and supporting its present faculty – and those of its students who will join the nation's future faculties – to become the new kind of faculty the twenty-first century demands. Lifelong learning is increasingly being recognized as crucial to the continuing success of all professionals. That is as true for professors as it is for any profession.

Standard 11: Educational Offerings

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

Based on a review of the Self-Study report, other institutional documents, and interviews with students, faculty, staff, and others, the Team developed the following observations relative to this standard:

UAlbany offers the large range of academic programs to be expected of a university of its size, scope, and ambition – perhaps more. Distinctive programs that relate to Albany's role in the state capital, including both public administration and policy-making, are especially characteristic of the institution's graduate enterprise. Programs appear to be, on the evidence available to the team, thoughtful in design and execution. We commend the care with which the

academic offerings – and the explicit educational goals they fulfill – are evaluated, a care amply demonstrated in the Self-Study. In particular, a sampling of external reviewers' comments on program reviews conducted over the last half-dozen years reveals candid, and often complimentary, assessments. In at least one instance (reported in the Self-Study report), however, reviews detail inadequacies that might well lead to consequences which, in a time of turnover in senior leadership, have not been addressed.

The university is demonstrably aware of the need for timely renewal in curricula and in teaching styles to meet changing needs and take advantage of new opportunities and technologies. Through ITLAL a range of support services for instructors who wish to refresh their teaching is available, and participation appears to be growing. The Self-Study is not well equipped to report on departments' efforts to update their major, minor, and graduate curricula. The Team hopes that, with good leadership, such development will periodically occur.

The University has given careful attention to developing, in classroom instruction and by other means, an appreciation for diversity in its many dimensions, including global citizenship. The sharp emphasis implied in the proposed new brand is commendable. The best demonstration of the university's commitment is their choice to add to the SUNY General Education requirement additional rubrics of Global and Cross-Cultural Studies and U.S. Pluralism and Diversity, and to require a second semester of a foreign language, rather than just the first semester required by the SUNY General Education requirements.

Among the many available avenues to multinational education available, the strong study abroad enterprise at UAlbany has begun to receive appropriate inquiry. One worthy goal would be helping students themselves reflect on what they have gained from their experiences abroad, thus 'closing the loop' on the assessment of study abroad that the Self-Study report sensibly recommends.

The advantages of a research university are made available to students through participation in faculty research, mentoring in the Honors College, co-authorship on publications when appropriate, and an annual university-wide conference. We commend these efforts to introduce students to the creation of new knowledge, and – as time and energy permit – encourage their expansion.

Given the university's location, internships – primarily, though hardly exclusively, for undergraduates – are an obvious opportunity for experiential learning and career decision-making, as many UAlbany faculty and administration recognize. Students reported to the Team anecdotally that internships can be difficult to locate, a matter that the Team cannot assess. If it does not exist, a central 'bank' or log of past internships (and perhaps students' impressions of them), possibly under the career counseling program, might be considered – acknowledging that sometimes learning what one does *not* want to pursue long-term is a useful outcome. Another opportunity for facilitating such contacts between students and employers might be found in the University's enhanced efforts to engage its alumni more strongly in fund raising and other means of support.

In 2005 the University Senate passed a bill on Undergraduate Advising and Mentoring, based on extensive study by a Task Force. Evidently, its thoughtfulness was not translated into action: from a number of sources – including honest reporting in the Self-Study – the team learned that the quality of academic advising for undergraduates at UAlbany still leaves much to be desired. The Degree Audit Reporting System (DARS) is a significant achievement, but some students appear to find it opaque, so that human interpretation is necessary. Fortunately, the Office of Undergraduate Education appears to provide welcome assistance when requirements become a barrier to graduation.

The Self-Study recommendation that the university now conduct a "comprehensive assessment of departmental advising" is sound as far as it goes. We believe that strong leadership is necessary to ensure that a few effective models are selected, then established (close the loop) in all departments with undergraduate programs. Until that happens, the many efforts at focusing on students' learning and success elsewhere in the university will be undermined.

The Self-Study report notes that proposals have repeatedly been made to make minors for undergraduates optional, rather than required. The version currently on the drawing board – which requires a number of advanced courses sufficient to assure academic rigor, the argument offered in favor of required minors – seems to the Team worthy of full consideration in order to allow flexibility for second majors, study abroad, and other desirable aspects of individual students' curricula.

At UAlbany, as at most research universities, graduate education is largely the province of departments or interdisciplinary programs. The Self-Study report expresses a collective concern, however, for the role of graduate students in undergraduate teaching, including the natural tension between their teaching obligations and their own programs of study and research. These issues deserve continuing conversation. The Team commends the initiative of the Dean of Graduate Studies in designing a voluntary certificate program for graduate students, creating a portfolio of their training, experience, and competence in teaching as part of their career development.

Standard 12: General Education

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

Based on a review of the Self-Study report, other institutional documents, and interviews with students, faculty, staff, and others, the Team developed the following observations relative to this standard:

The General Education program prescribed for UAlbany's undergraduate students has been established, in outline, by the SUNY Trustees as required for all New York students. UAlbany has articulated the system-wide outline with its own learning outcomes and specific courses in a

way that is intellectually rigorous across all four years. The faculty and academic administrators have set a pattern of 'double-counting' that makes sense, reduces the proportion of the curriculum limited to general learning, and integrates it well with majors and minors. While the Team was visiting, a recent change in the SUNY General Education prescription became widely available. We encourage UAlbany to take full advantage of the greater freedom now allowed to enhance the institution's distinctive form of general learning.

A serious issue is the availability of courses – indeed, outright shortages – necessary to fulfill the General Education requirements each semester, in a pattern that allows degree completion in a timely fashion. Given the complexity of this problem under SUNY System regulations, UAlbany academic administrators are addressing it in a responsible way. Flexibility made possible by new rules, and by waivers for individual students' programs, are promising solutions. This issue will of course require continuing attention.

Unfortunately, the Team did not include a professional librarian qualified to assess in detail the UAlbany libraries' collections and plans. The academics on the team, however, honor the intent of the libraries to make a variety of online services, both open-source and fee-paid, available to the university's scholars in all disciplines.

The Self-Study task group responsible for this standard and also several previous standards did a thorough job of assessing needs for change and development. Additional recommendations, drawn from the Self-Study report, that the Team finds especially worth UAlbany's attention:

- Inclusion of learning goals, and perhaps intended outcomes, on many if not all undergraduate syllabi.
- A review of the employment conditions for adjunct faculty: hiring practices, orientation and mentoring, evaluation, the potential for differentiated titles to recognize longer-term contributions.
- Continuing attention to classroom and instructional technology, to the degree that resources permit AND sound pedagogy requires; adequate infrastructure to deliver A/V is an obvious priority.
- Careful study of departments' roles in upper-level writing-intensive courses with the exception of fields like mathematics and statistics; training of faculty unfamiliar with the nature of modern writing instruction should precede an expansion of this effort to disciplines unfamiliar with the demand. (One Team member noted that a mathematics colleague of his frequently observes that "You can't do mathematics unless you can write." So perhaps mathematics and statistics should not be excluded.)
- Exploration of "different models for delivery of the information literacy and oral discourse requirement" – including, if the system permits, non-course/ classroom models.
- Analysis of the hardships facing students in highly sequenced majors or combined programs.

- A forum for discussing online teaching, including advantages, 'best practices,' and thoughtful training of potential instructors.

New intentions laid out in the draft of strategic goals within the current strategic planning process raise many points related to undergraduate educational offerings that – if they were completed and formally approved – would bear directly on the Team's assessment of these standards. In general, they move in an admirable direction. Even in this intermediate stage, two objectives draw our attention:

- "Increase the rigor of undergraduate education" proposes several quantifiable metrics; it does not include faculty's raising of intellectual rigor by seriousness and volume of reading or amount and demands of undergraduate writing.
- "Identify and invest in our strongest doctoral programs" does not include an unfortunate but, under some contingencies, predictable consequence: disinvest in weaker and/or less sought-after programs with less qualified students.

Standard 13: Related Educational Activities

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

Based on a review of the Self-Study report, other institutional documents, and interviews with students, faculty, staff, and others, the Team developed the following observations relative to this standard. The subject programs include all the offerings by the institution that fall outside of its regular academic offerings at graduate and undergraduate level. The focus is to assess the adequacy of such offerings with the institution's mission, the rigor of academic quality expected given the different groups served and the vision of the institution when it comes to expanding the service it provides to its stakeholders.

Basic Skills

Under Basic Skills, we include the following programs: Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Progam (CSTEP), Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP) and Intensive English Language Program (IELP).

Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)

- The EOP offers outstanding support to those who qualify to be part of this cohort. The EOP supports the sense of community, helping students succeed and become role models for incoming new students.
- The Pre-College Residential Summer Program is extensive and effective in having students ready to start their studies.

- EOP measures its effectiveness following students throughout their time in the institution until they graduate. Such measures have clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of the program.
- Given economic circumstances, the EOP is not being funded at a level that responds adequately to the demand for their services, having to limit the number of students that can actually take part in the program.
- The schedule of the Pre-College residential summer program for EOP might be in conflict with family vacation plans, and families might not have enough understanding of its importance.

- *Suggestions*

- EOP might want to consider developing technological (online) capabilities (knowledge and infrastructure) in order to provide broader and more effective services, such as: placing tutors available online through online scheduling as well; develop web tutorials and self-help materials, which can be enhanced with help from students; develop social networking to keep sophomores and more advanced students connected to their cohort and uspport other cohorts.
- Graduates with training in instructional design and distance learning might be good candidates to serve as technical and instructional supporters of technology-based initiatives to support EOP (as the ones mentioned earlier).

The Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (CSTEP) and the Science and technology Entry Program (STEP)

- CSTEP provides support to underrepresented students in STEM. It fulfills a twofold need by supporting students, who would most likely not have an effective opportunity to succeed academically; as well as reinforcing the importance and the interest for STEM.
- The activities promoted through CSTEP highlight several of the highest aspirations of UAlbany, connecting several departments and combining teaching with research.
- STEP follows the same mission as CSTEP but preparing students to enter college. This is definitely an important service of UAlbany to the community within the State of New York. Both programs have demonstrated great success and effectiveness in their efforts.

- *Suggestion*

- Both CSTEP and STEP should consider expanding their access as much as possible and assess the use of technology-based means to do so more effectively and efficiently.

Intensive English Language Program (IELP)

- IELP performs an important service to the institution, both for international students coming to UAlbany, as well as students for whom English is a second language and who

are underprepared to take on assignments, despite their knowledge in several other subject matters.

- The institution offers a variety of options for students to attend IELP programs, with different levels of intensity and duration.
- Using 'English only' policy is an important part of effectively learning another language. Final assessment is done using external well recognized examinations. There are periodic assessments as well to determine progress.

- *Suggestions*

- Comparative assessment should be done to determine if IELP students are in fact succeeding when they leave the program and enroll in regular courses.
- The University might want to consider the use of social networking and web 2.0 tools to provide continuous development of written English for non-native speakers. There could be some sort of partnership between this initiative and the writing center.

Experiential Learning

University Internships

- The University demonstrates explicitly the value it places on internships and how these can contribute significantly to learning.
- Given its location in the capital of New York State, the University has been able to establish important partnerships with local organizations providing sustainable internship initiatives.
- Internships can be a major aspect in students learning experience that will help in the transition to the job market.
- Information about available internship opportunities is not always easily visible, according to input from students, especially because such opportunities are created from different venues and sources.

- *Suggestions*

- The University should consider a common centralized and widely available venue to diffuse information about internships, so it is easier to reach interested students.
- Students need to be made aware through orientation on where to find and also propose internships which can enrich their learning experience.
- Tracking the internships with greater details will help advise other students and avoid those opportunities that are not as successful as others.

Community and Public Service Program (CPSP)

- CPSP programs are a hallmark for UAlbany, representing lifelong learning opportunities to the community through the School of Social Welfare.
- It provides a significant number of community service opportunities for students in the Greater Capital Region, serving a large number of students and a large number of local organizations.
- CPSP is exemplary in "nurturing of a lifelong commitment to civic engagement," integrating classroom learning with career goals.
- CPSP programs require students to complete a quality assurance survey, which is then used to assess the success of the program. This initiative should certainly serve as an exemplar to be adopted by other units of the University.

Non-credit offerings

Professional Development Program, Rockfeller College

- This is a well established program, with traditions in the school and an international reputation, representing an exemplar for this kind of endeavor to the entire nation. Once more, here is an example of one of the areas where UAlbany shines, with its strong connections of service in the State of New York.
- The program has explored different modes of delivery and is successful in servicing the working adults with greater flexibility and convenience. The program also provides a variety of different instructional activities to an ever wider spectrum of professionals in the public sector. This large portfolio makes PDP exemplary in keeping pace with the advances and changes in the job market.
- PDP represents also an example of success for self-sustaining endeavors in the University and should be considered an exemplary case.
- The PDP programs have all been identified as quality learning initiatives by all stakeholders.
- Careful assessment is done in all programs and data are used as feedback to enhance the existing programs and help create new ones. This is a good example of "closing the loop."

- *Suggestions*

- The PDP should move forward as an exemplary model for the University as it deals with harsh economical times and finds its way of becoming more enterpreneurial and independent from government funding.
- In its online offerings, PDP utlizes the LMS Angel, which will eventually be changed to Blackboard. PDP should discuss with those involved in the Blackboard administration in order to find a way to extend the Bb licenses used by the school in order to support PDP online programs as well.

Center for Public Health Continuing Education, School of Public Health (CPHCE)

- In the same way as PDP, CPHCE programs are a hallmark of service to the community offered by UAlbany. CPHCE's local and global outreach is commended as an example of quality education and training of the public workforce in the field of public health.
- CPHCE utilizes evaluation mechanisms that support the quality control of its offerings.

Distance or Distributed Learning

- UAlbany offers single courses online at graduate and undergraduate levels, as well as a few full graduate programs online from the School of Education.
- The necessary infrastructure is in place when it comes to online education (Blackboard is the adopted LMS). The University has demonstrated that it understands the importance of training and preparation for online teaching and offers extensive instructional support in the development of courses for faculty teaching online. The training includes aspects of course development and online pedagogy.
- The staff that is responsible for the instructional design and faculty support is knowledgeable, although not sufficient to handle growth in that area.
- The institution is well equipped to serve distance learners when it comes to several of its support services.
- However, UAlbany has a significant demand for online learning which has not been widely met given the lack of prior planning and staff.
- The institution lacks the required coordination and planning in order to make sure that everything is in place when faculty decide to offer courses online.
- Policies and procedures are not yet in place in order to make it clear to stakeholders all the required steps and time necessary to offer quality courses online.
- Departments do not seem to be coordinated in the planning of future online offerings, and therefore the centralized supporting staff can be overwhelmed with unplanned inquiries and requests.
- The insititution does not have coordinated ongoing support to the dynamics of course delivery. In order to grow this area, this kind of monitoring and quality assurance will have to be in place.
- The institution seems challenged when it comes to providing adequate orientation for students who want to take courses online.

- *Suggestions*

- There is a need for a coordinated effort on planning for future offerings considering the existing demand of online learning.
- The University also needs to assess how it compares with its competitors when it comes to its online education offerings. This assessment is essential in order to keep the institution up-to-par with others and continue to attract the growing population of adult students for whom online learning is essential to lifelong learning.

- The University needs to focus on thinking strategically in the area of distance learning, despite its main mission of traditional on-campus education. There are demographic trends that show that institutions will need to be prepared in the use of the Internet for new forms of learning as this technology becomes pervasive at all levels, including in secondary education sectors.
- The University should consider developing an orientation for students who wish to study online in order to improve retention and quality, avoiding misleading information about what online education requires in terms of time and effort.
- The University should assess all the required support services needed to serve the distance learning population, in order to be ready to serve these distinctive groups.

Study Abroad

- The Office of International Education (OIE) provides a wide array of opportunities for students to study abroad and earn credits towards their programs.
- Policies and procedures are established in order to determine the suitability of the offerings in other countries. The SUNY System provides significant support to such activities, overseeing and regulating the offerings abroad. Such activities are a result of well established partnerships with foreign institutions.

- *Suggestion*

- Study abroad programs and opportunities are potentially numerous, but also costly. They should be carefully analyzed and judged before being incorporated into the University's array of study abroad programs.
- Study abroad could be enhanced with more promotion coming from departments and colleges and its leadership, helping eliminate some of the existing barriers for students' participation.
- In the same way as for internships the availability of information should be looked at as an area of possible enhancement. A centralized source where students can find all they need to benefit from the existing programs.

University in the High-School (UHS)

- This is one of the other initiatives of the UAlbany that deserves commendation for its important service to the local communities of the State of New York. This partnership between the College of Arts and Sciences and several secondary schools throughout the state allows students to earn college credits while they are still in high school. This initiative improves graduation rates and supports students who are advanced in their studies.
- The strong partnership between schools and the University is definitely exemplary when it comes to the quality of its staff, faculty, academic offerings and staff development.

- The support from the SUNY System is an important aspect of the success of this program.
- This initiative certainly works as a great way to attract advanced students to the institution.

- *Suggestion*

- UHS might consider offering its programs online to these and other secondary schools, expanding its outreach.

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

The institution meets this standard.

- *Summary of evidence and findings*

Based on a review of the Self-Study report, other institutional documents, and interviews with students, faculty, staff, and others, the Team developed the following observations relative to this standard:

In general, the UAlbany has done an exemplary job of developing systems for assessing itself and its students. It has been in the assessment business a long time, beginning before many universities came to understand that there is a connection between their quality and the demonstrable academic performances of their graduates. To quote from the Self-Study report,

"In 1968, UAlbany became one of the first institutions in the nation to undertake a systematic evaluation of all graduate and undergraduate programs on a regular cycle. After a decade of individual program reviews leading to the strengthening, merger, and termination of many Albany programs, the University in 1978 launched a series of student-cohort studies that placed the campus in the forefront of assessment research. These assessment efforts, which have been conducted on a continual basis ever since, have given the University a rich array of evaluative databases, including student opinion surveys, cohort studies, and alumni studies."

The Team commends the University on the breadth and depth of its present assessment activities. These are described in detail in Chapter 5 of the Self-Study report, accompanied by recommendations for improvement in Appendix 5.1 of the report. Our Team strongly endorses these recommendations and hopes that they will be implemented as the University pursues the application of its new strategic plan.

Here we simply reiterate in the context of student learning assessment a point we made earlier. We hope that the University will view the purpose of its student learning assessment as primarily formative, and use it to develop program improvements that will improve its academic and

student success programs. Always remember that it is essential to "close the loop." As Goethe wrote, "Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do."

VI. Summary of Recommendations for Continuing Compliance and Requirements

The Team recommends, in the light of the many important events now in course at UAlbany and in its state and national environments, that its next Periodic Review Report be focused on the University's soon-to-come new strategic plan and its implementation outcomes during the next five years.

We have made various suggestions throughout the body of this report. We hope the University might find them helpful as it advances into its future.

One final observation: Together with all other higher education institutions, the University at Albany faces a future full of unprecedented challenges created by a rapidly changing socio-economic, political, technological, and natural environment. These are aptly described in a recent book review (James P. Collins, *Science*, Vol. 327, p. 1455, 19 March 2010):

"The toughest changes ahead involve training, institutional organization, and the social context of research. A radical restructuring of the culture of scientific work will be needed to integrate biological, physical, and social sciences and engineering; move across the science-technology interface; foster systems thinking; support flexible and interdisciplinary approaches to problem-solving; integrate knowledge creation and knowledge use; and balance individual with group achievement. Fostering innovation will need to become a core institutional value."

Though Collins' subject here is the world of research, similar concepts certainly apply all across the world of academe and cover all aspects of teaching and learning, as described in the UAlbany's draft mission, **"Expanding knowledge and transforming minds to shape the future of our community and our world"**

Our Team wishes the University the best of good fortune as it grapples with these challenges!