Dear Faculty and Staff:

The University at Albany is now beginning its decennial accreditation process with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). I would like to ask you to consider joining one of the Subcommittees that will draft our self-study during the 2008-2009 academic year. To learn more about the 14 Characteristics of Excellence that MSCHE uses to evaluate college and university self-studies, please go to https://wiki.albany.edu/display/middlestates/Characteristics+of+Excellence. (These 14 characteristics are also briefly described below.) At that website, you can also send an e-mail to sign up for one of the committees or you can simply send an e-mail to uaselfstudy@albany.edu. Please note that, wherever possible, you should indicate two or three subcommittees on which you might be willing to serve, as well as your preference regarding first, second and third choice. Please reply to uaselfstudy@albany.edu with your subcommittee preferences by Friday, May 9, 2008.

In case you are not familiar with the accreditation process, you should know that it involves several steps, the first of which is to develop our self-study. This will be followed by a visit from an external review team during the spring 2010 term. While I know how busy each of you is, our ability to produce an effective self-study depends on maximum participation by the campus community in the process. I therefore urge each of you to consider participating in this very important process.

I have appointed Dr. Sue R. Faerman, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and Distinguished Teaching Professor, as chair for our self-study team. Dr. Bruce Szelest and the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness will provide staff support, and Lana Neveu, Finance Officer, will serve as point of contact from the President's Office.

While it is certainly true that accreditation is a high stakes mandate with critical consequences for institutions that do not receive accreditation status, our focus here should really be on using the self-study process as an opportunity to thoroughly review the entire university (all units) and to examine goals and how we assess progress toward them. I believe we are well-positioned to conduct a meaningful and internally useful accreditation self-study and to use the process to become even better in all that we do - thanks in no small part to the great work that the University's faculty and staff do on an ongoing basis.

Sincerely yours,
George Philip

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Characteristics of Excellence

Standard 1: Mission and Goals: The institution's mission clearly defines its purpose within the context of higher education and indicates who the institution serves and what it intends to accomplish.

Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal: 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.

Standard 3: Institutional Resources: The human, financial, technical, physical facilities, and other resources necessary to achieve an institution's mission and goals are available and accessible.

Standard 4: Leadership and Governance: The institution's system of governance clearly defines the roles of institutional constituencies in policy development and decision-making.

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.

Standard 6: Integrity: 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.

Standard 7: Institutional Assessment: 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.

Standard 8: Student Admissions and Retention: 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.

Standard 9: Student Support Services: The institution provides student support services reasonably necessary to enable each student to achieve the institution's goals for students.

Standard 10: Faculty: The institution's instructional, research, and service programs are devised, developed, monitored, and supported by qualified professionals.

Standard 11: Educational Offerings: The institution's educational offerings display academic content, rigor, and coherence appropriate to its higher education mission.

Standard 12: General Education: 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.
Standard 13: Related Educational Activities: The institution’s programs or activities that are characterized by particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorship meet appropriate standards.

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning: 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.