

**Middle States Accreditation: Update  
Report to the Board and Campus  
February 14, 2017**

In this communication I provide an update on the status of our work to comply with the Middle States Commission's standards of accreditation. Now, ten months after the March 2016 evaluation team and the follow-up visit in November, we have made considerable progress. Although some work is completed, a substantial portion of our progress has been in setting in place the organizational structure that will lead us to full compliance.

First, a look at the time schedule. The MSC set an outside limit of two years for compliance and removal from probation, although it was made clear that we must demonstrate progress in the interim. And we have accomplished the first stage with the November evaluation. Another visit by an evaluation team will be directed by the MSC at its March meeting, and I am hopeful that the visit will not be scheduled before October or November of this year.

If we make the requisite progress leading to a mid-to-late Fall 2017 visit on the six Standards that are outstanding, I am confident we can anticipate removal from probationary status at the March 2018 meeting of the MSC. My confidence is based, however, on our full compliance with the standards.

Our work can be classified into three general areas: planning, assessment of learning outcomes, and governance and administration.

**Planning.** The broad category of planning is manifest in MSC Standards 2 (Planning, Resource Allocation and Institutional Renewal), 3 (Institutional Resources) and 7 (Institutional Assessment). By establishing the Institutional Planning Committee (IPC), with its four sub-committees organized to complete the work required, the structure is now in place to fulfill these three Standards.

The scope of the IPC's work is, however, broader than implied by the titles of these three Standards. The Strategic Plan must incorporate these functional areas: academic master plan, learning outcomes assessment, financial management, institutional effectiveness, facilities master plan, information technology, and enrollment management. Vice President Valerie Collins has brought her exceptional skills and experience to this effort, and she and Professor Pat Lupino, as Co-Chairs of the IPC, constitute an excellent leadership team. The membership of the committee is complete, the first meeting has been held and the sub-committees have begun their work. We will keep the Board and campus informed and engaged as the work unfolds.

**Assessment of Learning Outcomes.** Significant progress had been made by academic departments in devising systems of learning outcomes prior to the March 2016 evaluation team's visit. Perhaps, however, that was not adequately noted by the visiting teams. Much

remains to be done, though. Working with a group of Assessment Fellows, Vice President Collins has developed a conceptual plan for completing this very large task. She has also engaged the SUNY System assessment specialist, Dr. Deborah Moeckel, to conduct sessions with Deans, Department Chairs and faculty assessment coordinators. And she has invited a consultant (coincidentally an NCC graduate) from a regional college who is highly recommended by our staff liaison at the Middle States Commission.

**Governance and Administration.** Under this area are MSC Standards 4 (Leadership and Governance), 5 (Administration) and 6 (Integrity). The Board's actions to revise and update its By-laws (Policy 1200, Rules of Procedure), including the incorporation of a code of ethics, and the adoption of a framework (Policy 1300) that outlines the process for developing and adopting policies, are significant advances. With the adoption of these two policies as a foundation, the Board has also embarked upon updating and developing a series of policies for the governance of the College.

These actions by the Board, including putting in place a President and Chief Academic Officer, were in large measure the advances that brought the November 2016 Visiting Team to recommend to the MSC that we have met the Standard of Integrity (MSC 6). Additional important factors leading to the Team's recommendation was a perception that the campus community is working with a renewed sense of collegiality and cooperation, the adoption by faculty of the classroom management policy, and the staff's completing development of the student complaint system as required by federal law.

Having made significant advances in this area belies, however, the absolute necessity that we address other issues within these two Standards. The November Visiting Team wrote this requirement with respect to Standard 4 (Leadership and Governance):

“While Board Policy 1200 has been approved, at the time of this visit it has yet to be fully operationalized. The College must continue to move forward, with each constituency group embracing their roles and responsibilities as outlined.”

The report further states:

“While much progress has been made in recent months, there is insufficient evidence supporting compliance with a well-defined, operational system of collegial governance.”

In Standard 5 (Administration), the November Team lists two requirements:

“The College must provide evidence of adequate information and decision-making systems to support the work of administrative leaders.”

“The College must engage in the assessment of the effectiveness of administrative structures and services.”

If we are to fulfill these accreditation requirements on leadership, governance and administration, we cannot reach compliance within the two-year time limit set for compliance by evolving modifications in our shared governance system one-by-one. The process undertaken to form the Institutional Planning Committee is an example of addressing a single governance issue. Given the MSC's emphasis on planning, and knowing that an effective plan would require months to develop, it was essential to take up this issue immediately. With extensive effort and collaboration of the campus community we have established a system for planning. The myriad of other shared governance issues cannot, however, be addressed individually in time to reach compliance.

Following are steps I propose we take to facilitate the process of attaining the necessary reform:

- Establish a group, the Governance Review Task Force (GRTF), including the President and three senior administrators to work with the Academic Senate Executive Committee (ASEC) to scrutinize the AS By-Laws for revisions that will comply with the requirement of "...each constituency group embracing their roles and responsibilities...". As the foundation of the governance system is based in the NCCFT contract, a representative of this group should be included on the task force. In addition, in order to assure due attention to the academic mission, a representative of the Academic Department Chairs and the AFA should be included. The task force, comprised of 11 members, would by the beginning of April devise revisions in governance procedures to recommend to the campus. The changes to be proposed will more clearly define roles of faculty and administration.
- Upon the GRTF's issuing a draft with recommended changes in governance procedures, public forums will be held. Further, the Annual College Wide Colloquium will be dedicated to shared governance, as was discussed during the Fall, and as came to be incorporated into the November Team's report. Proposed changes in the Academic Senate By-laws would reach the floor of the AS in April with two meetings, if needed, for action before the end of the Spring term.

I conclude this report with some observations on how the current system needs change in order to function as an effective shared governance.

First, the membership of the AS and its committees, defined as they are as a community governance system, does not clearly resolve into their respective roles the responsibilities of faculty and administration. In fact, the roles of faculty, staff and administration roles are not detectable as separate functions. Although administrators are included as a small proportion of membership of the AS committees, these

individuals cannot be expected to effectively represent the administration's position on issues. In many cases issues are not formally parsed in a way that the administrator on a committee could presume to know the position of the broader administration.

Second, the definition of the roles of committees are in too many cases—and even more extensively in the minds of campus faculty and staff—defined as “administrative” committees. Shared governance absolutely depends on the effective functioning of governance committees, but not as administrative committees. Planning is a prime example: any planning group must always include a large contingent of faculty, yet the complexity of institutional planning cannot be facilitated by a governance committee. The Assessment Committee is an example of relegating to a governance body the role that can only be carried out through the academic administration—Chief Academic Officer, Deans, Department Chairs and faculty. The responsibility of committees varies with respect to their role within a shared governance system. Curriculum, academic programs and faculty evaluation are matters that must have a strong voice and influence of the faculty. The President should be reluctant to overrule or oppose the recommendations of such committees that have strong faculty prerogatives. Other committees, especially those dealing with college-wide issues and legal and regulatory matters, should perform more as consultative committees.

Third, the “legislative” system, that is, the movement of issues through committees and the AS for votes, can come to the President's desk without adequate deliberation and input. The system is too much of a one-way flow of information and process. The involvement and membership of administrators on the committees does not prevent this one-way process. An organization that assures adequate and timely interaction between senior administration and Academic Senate can avoid this problem.

Fourth, the tone of the system is one of confrontation. Acknowledging that past administrative and leadership problems continue to be held in the minds of many, there is need to design a system that avoids confrontation as the normal routine and addresses issues in unified effort. There are differences of views on issues, yet these differences should be manifested in creative tension and not outright conflict. By devising an internal governance system that deals effectively with issues, the Board will be less frequently drawn into matters that should be managed within the governance system of faculty and administration.

It is critical to act with deliberate speed in the interest of reaching compliance and removal from probationary status of accreditation. Very importantly, it is also essential for the long-term effective functioning of the College.

Hubert Keen  
President