

Report to Faculty, Administrators, Trustees, Students
of

SUNY at Potsdam

Prepared following analysis of the institution's
Periodic Review Report

First Reviewer:

Second Reviewer:

August 1, 2017

Evaluation of the Periodic Review Report of SUNY Potsdam

I. Introduction

The Periodic Review Report (PRR) presents a comprehensive overview of institutional progress since the College's decennial self-study and team visit in 2012 and the Commission's acceptance of a Monitoring Report in 2014. The Monitoring Report addressed the visiting team's and Commission's request that Potsdam clarify its mission (Standard 1) and its use of institutional assessment results (Standard 7) to inform planning (Standard 2) and budgeting (Standard 3).

Presenting SUNY Potsdam on the heels of celebrating its bicentennial with a very successful fundraising campaign, the first two years of a new President's term, and the first full year of a new Provost in place, the PRR conveys a renewed commitment to Potsdam's core identity as a leading regional arts-infused comprehensive institution. The PRR also expresses a strong sense of Potsdam's determination to attain fiscal stability after an extended period of enrollment decline. Still suffering the residual effects of the "great recession" with particular acuity for its reliance on graduate level teacher education, Potsdam has also undergone SUNY system scrutiny as a test-case for shared services in the "north country" region of the state.

The PRR also notes that the institution has redoubled its commitment to strong Institutional Diversity and Equity initiatives, after the College endured one of several unfortunate occurrences of racial insensitivity via social media that have been plaguing the nation. In addition, the College is justifiably proud of its downstate metropolitan recruitment efforts, making major strides towards reaching a goal of 40% minority enrollments by 2020-21 (PRR, IDE Report, p. 115) and has identified a need to work more deliberately towards commensurate gains in faculty and staff diversity.

II. Responses to Recommendations from Previous Evaluations

This section summarizes the institution's responses to its own internal recommendations, some of which were echoed by the visiting team. In summary, the readers commend SUNY Potsdam on making significant progress in reviewing and updating its mission documents; on taking the first steps towards revising budget processes that were formerly perceived as lacking transparency and inclusivity; and on centralizing an easily-accessible and comprehensive webpage of institutional information on planning and assessment.

The process began with a revision of the College's outcomes-oriented document: The Potsdam Graduate. Over the course of 2012-2014, a broadly representative task force worked with each unit of the College to align and integrate mission statements to the Potsdam Graduate, to the College Mission Statement and to the Potsdam Pledge. These are published and linked from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness Assessment web pages (PRR, p. 9).

To increase transparency and inclusivity for its budgeting processes, the College has launched two dashboards (Bi-Weekly and Overall Financial Health), has published "Budget Request Process: Guidelines and Instructions," and has begun to implement a campus-wide committee on

Financial Affairs and Strategic Planning (FASP) that was due to begin its work with a new budget director hired in February, 2017 (PRR, p. 10). In addition, a consultant with expertise in strategic planning has laid the groundwork for what will be a finalized plan by Fall, 2017 (PRR, p. 37).

The readers suggest that the institution consider updating its site at <https://www.potsdam.edu/about/administration/president/strategicplanning> to indicate the timeline for expected Strategic Plan publication, and that even an early draft of the Budget Request Process document appear somewhere on the College web site.

The College has also consistently examined ways to enrich the student experience through new support services and programming in spite of fiscal constraints. In particular, the readers note that the approach towards re-examining vacancies and re-aligning staff and faculty workload towards strategic priorities are admirable.

Finally, the PRR notes that the 2012 visiting team concurred with the College's own self-recommendation that it should

Continue the systematic and thorough review of the General Education Program that was initiated in September 2011. Outcomes assessment goals will be integrated into the defining criteria for each designator and assessment practices should ensure that students demonstrate achievement of appropriate outcomes (Visiting Team Report, p. 3).

Unfortunately, the PRR acknowledges that such a review "was not completed, however, because of a SUNY System Administration directive for a credit-hour reduction in General Education programs across the system..." (PRR, p. 18). While the outcomes-based Potsdam Graduate document should have provided a good starting place for generating outcomes assessment goals as promised in the 2011 Self Study, the work on honing these outcomes down to the designator area level could and should have been incorporated into a leaner General Education program concurrently. While the assertion that "the committee had to dedicate its time to this [credit reduction] process" (p. 18) a subsequent promise from the General Education taskforce states that

...the new program will have assessment built into its design from the start, with scaffolded learning outcomes across the curriculum so faculty can use the data to affect improvements and revision cross all students' four-year experience (PRR, p. 34).

According to the General Education Assessment web page, a schedule of designator outcomes assessment appears to have continued during compliance with the SUNY System directive, yet no published reports appear after Spring, 2014. While work on incorporating DIAC diversity outcomes is laudable, it is insufficient to displace the continuity of systematically assessing General Education outcomes for the institution. Furthermore, the templates for Academic Assessment Planning and Reporting may have potential to be re-purposed for General Education.

*The readers **recommend** that the College begin immediate work on updating its assessment of General Education outcomes to align to the Potsdam Graduate and to the institution's overall academic assessment plan.*

III. Major Challenges and Opportunities

Declining Revenues and Dependence on Enrollment Projections

The PRR notes that the College plans to address a number of significant challenges during the next five years that include closely monitoring enrollment trends related to population shifts in its immediate service region. In the years immediately preceding these challenges, the College also acknowledges a number of senior leadership transitions that are nearing completion.

The PRR also contains a brief update on the implementation of shared services with nearby SUNY Canton, noting that some shared services have been discontinued after several years of review (p. 21).

Enrollment Trends and Additional Revenue Opportunities

In keeping with national trends during “the great recession,” Potsdam experienced enrollment declines between the 2009 visit and the PRR. These declines were exacerbated by reliance on graduate level teacher education, no longer actively supported by most update school districts.

The College reports that it plans to increase enrollments over the next five years through a combined strategy of building new academic programs, increasing partnership arrangements with training providers, attracting out-of-state students, and a formalizing a more focused vision for graduate and professional programs, aligned to a global education priority in the SUNY system strategic plan.

IV. Enrollment and Finance Trends and Projections

The readers compliment the College on recognizing that it needs to curb the overall enrollment decline and further on its ability to have addressed student diversity at the same time by recruiting downstate students. Additionally, the College has done some promising initial market-based work with employers and high schools to continue assessing local needs and building stronger pipelines (PRR, pp. 26-28).

The readers suggest that the institution consider continue a systematic and recurring assessment mechanism of market demand in the Watertown, NY region to gauge whether the outlay of resources required to sustain a branch campus (as defined by NYSED) will continue to be offset with enough enrollment gains from the region.

The readers suggest that the institution carefully assess market need for new programs before making significant investments in new faculty resources for those programs.

In addition to its plan for enrollment stabilization, the College reports success in exceeding development campaign goals, and on beginning participation in a loan program from the Open SUNY initiative.

The readers suggest that the institution remain realistic about the allure of online enrollments vs. the frequently disappointing results of same. Similarly, over-reliance on fundraising successes over prolonged periods of time can carry a high risk of exhausting

donor pools, especially during times of economic downturn, further exacerbating any structural misalignment of operating expenses and revenues.

V. Assessment Processes and Plans

As noted in Section II, the College has undertaken extensive review of its own assessment activities, most laudably in the area of administrative/institutional assessment.

The College has also repeatedly made student learning outcomes recommendations to itself about “closing the loop” on the *use* of assessment results since the time of the 2012 visit. Its increasing clear, accessible, systematic approach to the integration of assessment results in the planning and budgeting marks commendable progress on the previous recommendations.

The College is therefore well-positioned to incorporate similarly effective assessment of General Education into its overall Academic Affairs Strategic plan, and into its ongoing schedule of academic assessment, using adapted templates and guidelines from those already in place for major programs.

VI. Linked Institutional Planning and Budgeting Processes

As noted in earlier sections, budgeting and planning processes have begun to become more inclusively streamlined, participatory, and transparent, concurrently with the arrival of a new president in 2014.

The readers find that the evidence presented is appropriate to the moment-in-time of this Periodic Review Report.

VII. Conclusion

SUNY Potsdam continues to serve as a leader in arts-infused, comprehensive college with a decreasing reliance on single-population professional programs, such as graduate-level teacher education. Its core identity is strong, its mission statements re-aligned appropriately, and its work on diversity proceeding apace.

Concurrently, welcoming new leadership, the College has engaged in inclusive conversations to set the stage for its current strategic planning cycle, and has already committed to publishing a strategic plan in Fall, 2017.

Additionally, the College has constructed a plan to reverse several years of operating losses and is on a positive path forward to stabilize and perhaps even grow its enrollments.

Overall, SUNY Potsdam meets the *Characteristics for Excellence* and demonstrates sufficient evidence of same throughout the PRR and its appendices. Consequently, the readers offer the

following summary of actions contained in the body of this report, including four suggestions and one recommendation:

1. The readers **suggest** that the institution consider updating its site at <https://www.potsdam.edu/about/administration/president/strategicplanning> to indicate the timeline for expected Strategic Plan publication, and that even an early draft of the Budget Request Process document appear somewhere on the College web site.
2. The readers **recommend** that the College begin immediate work on updating its assessment of General Education outcomes to align to the Potsdam Graduate and to the institution's overall academic assessment plan.
3. The readers **suggest** that the institution consider continue a systematic and recurring assessment mechanism of market demand in the Watertown, NY region to gauge whether the outlay of resources required to sustain a branch campus (as defined by NYSED) will continue to be offset with enough enrollment gains from the region.
4. The readers **suggest** that the institution carefully assess market need for new programs before making significant investments in new faculty resources for those programs.
5. The readers **suggest** that the institution remain realistic about the allure of online enrollments vs. the frequently disappointing results of same. Similarly, over-reliance on fundraising successes over prolonged periods of time can carry a high risk of exhausting donor pools, especially during times of economic downturn, further exacerbating any structural misalignment of operating expenses and revenues.