



## **Self-Study: Executive Summary**

Prepared for:

Middle States Association of  
Colleges and Universities

Commission on Higher Education

Gettysburg College, founded in 1832, is a charter member of the Middle States Association, Commission on Higher Education and has been accredited without interruption since 1921, most recently reaffirmed in 1999. Its Mission Statement reflects both its commitment to the liberal arts as the best form of education and to the residential nature of the college campus as the best setting for that education: "Gettysburg College, a national, residential, undergraduate college committed to a liberal education, prepares students to be active leaders and participants in a changing world."

Since the last accreditation review, the student body has grown from approximately 2,000 students to its current level at about 2,500. The College's increasing excellence has been recognized by independent organizations such as *US News and World Report* and *Moody's Investors Services*. This recognition resulted from increasing numbers of applications, improved student retention, stronger student academic credentials, an improved student/faculty ratio, new and renovated academic buildings, and cutting-edge information technology capabilities, among other strategic initiatives.

During his tenure as President, Gordon Haaland, has instituted a strategic thinking process that incorporates systematic practices such as documented budget planning, a campus master plan, departmental reviews, strategic enrollment and financial aid planning, curriculum review, and faculty governance review. This planning process began with six faculty task force reports which identified areas for improvement. A comprehensive facilities assessment was conducted resulting in the Campus Master Plan. Subsequently a group of over 350 students, faculty, administrators, alumni, and friends of the College were assembled to develop a vision for the College and its role in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Their recommendations contributed to the development of the Strategic Action Plan of 1999 that focused on four areas: Enhanced Academic Excellence, Learning Beyond the Classroom, Dynamic Student Life and a Vibrant College Community. This plan has served as the basis for developing new initiatives and refining existing ones.

In January of 2002, President Haaland appointed the Self-Study Steering Committee for the re-accreditation review. After review of the standards set forth in the new Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education 2002, and, in part, because of the nature of the previous planning efforts, the Committee and the President concluded that there existed ample evidence of compliance with the new standards. This presented an

opportunity for the College to focus its Self-Study in an area that could best assess the accomplishments of the Strategic Action Plan and further its initiatives. For this reason, the College chose the “**Selected Topics Model**” for its Self-Study and specifically **Standard 7: Institutional Assessment** and **Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning**. Their goal was to formalize existing noteworthy assessment methods, develop new assessment methods of student learning suited to a liberal arts environment, and coordinate these efforts into a comprehensive plan.

A two part review process was devised. Standards not addressed in the Self-Study were reviewed using “**Selected Topics Option 1: Review during the Chair’s Preliminary Visit.**” The reviewer determined that the more than 750 documents assembled by the Subcommittee on Standards Not Addressed by the Self-Study did provide evidence that the College met those standards.

The second part of the process was the completion of the Self-Study focusing on assessment. The Steering Committee identified specific goals for the Self-Study:

- To review the College’s Mission Statement for congruence with the current curricular and co-curricular programs;
- To develop a Comprehensive Assessment Plan through an analysis of current practices;
- To develop a Student Learning Assessment Plan through review at the department and course level; and
- To promote student-learning assessment by engaging members of the College community in a dialogue on this topic.

To raise awareness of assessment issues campus-wide, Dr. Alexander “Sandy” Astin, a distinguished scholar on assessment, conducted four workshops over a two-day period on campus to discuss student-learning assessment, learning outside the classroom, and other related issues.

Four subcommittees were created: one, previously mentioned, to assemble the evidence for compliance with the standards not addressed by the Self-Study, and three others to conduct the Self-Study. These three subcommittees were The Subcommittee on Institutional Effectiveness, the Subcommittee on Academic Program Assessment, and the Subcommittee on Learning Outside the Classroom. Each subcommittee identified work groups (largely existing committees) to examine assessment within their areas of responsibility using questions developed by the subcommittee.

The Mission Statement was reviewed by the entire Steering Committee, submitted to the Faculty through the Faculty Council with minor changes in language, and approved by the Board of Trustees.

The Subcommittee on Institutional Effectiveness reviewed current practices of assessment in four areas: Leadership and Governance, Institutional Integrity, Administrative Effectiveness and Educational Offerings. It concluded that extensive assessment was being accomplished at the divisional level, but that the College would

gain by a more systematic approach to planning and assessment. New initiatives should include a method for assessing their effectiveness.

The Subcommittee on Academic Program Assessment considered reports from the Academic Policy and Program Committee, and from twenty-four departments and eight programs. They examined assessment activities related to the general education program, individual departments and programs, individual courses, and faculty/peer assessment. The Subcommittee developed an Assessment Methods Checklist which sought to identify assessment methods that were clear, varied, and creative. The results were shared with the department and program chairs, the faculty, and the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees. The Subcommittee concluded that most assessment activity occurred within individual courses, using a variety of methods.

The Subcommittee on Learning Outside the Classroom held a two-day retreat for work groups utilizing an external facilitator, and key personnel participated in a three-day workshop on assessment. The Subcommittee analyzed reports from fourteen work groups in the College Life and Enrollment and Educational Services divisions. It concluded that student-learning assessment is widely practiced in activities outside the classroom that support the learning environment on campus but that they could be more purposeful, systematic, and reflective.

The result of this Self-Study has been the development and implementation of an Assessment Plan. It includes two components, a framework for measuring the effectiveness of the institution through the administrative functions that support student learning and a comprehensive plan to measure student-learning outcomes from in-class and out-of-the-classroom activities. The plan includes goals for assessment, responsibility for coordinating assessment efforts, assessment processes, and the methods/protocols to be employed.

Three continuing committees have been created to assure that assessment activities are conducted regularly, the results interpreted, and that information disseminated to campus constituencies. In the area of student learning, The Committee on Learning Assessment and the Cocurricular Learning Assessment Group have been established. The Committee on Institutional Effectiveness has been identified to accomplish outcomes analysis of the institution's operations in a more intentional way.

The Self-Study Steering Committee believes that this structure will assure compliance with *Standard 7: Institutional Assessment*, and *Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning*, of Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education. (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2002)