

GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

AN ASSESSMENT PLAN TO MEASURE INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS 2003

Gettysburg graduate Sandy Astin wrote in his book, Assessment for Excellence, that “*an institute’s assessment practices are a reflection of its values. In other words, the values of an institution are revealed in the information about itself that it gathers and pays attention to.*”

The assessment activities at Gettysburg College serve two specific and complementary purposes:

1. To improve student learning outcomes and;
2. To support the College’s strategic plan by continually improving academic and administrative programs, through program planning and development.

As a result of our Self-Study on assessment, an assessment plan with two distinct components has been developed. The first component provides a framework for measuring the effectiveness of the institution in providing administrative programs that support student learning. In the following, we identify our goals for assessment, those responsible for coordinating assessment efforts, the assessment process, and specific methods/protocols employed. Specific strategies for assessing student learning are addressed in the section entitled Assessment Plan for Learning Outcomes.

Gettysburg College’s goal to be considered one of the best liberal arts and sciences colleges in the country resulted in The Strategic Action Plan of 1999. This planning document guides our efforts to make Gettysburg College an even more effective institution of higher education. (APPENDIX: Assessment of the Strategic Action Plan, March 2002)

The initiatives outlined in the Strategic Plan are:

- Enhanced Academic Excellence—Promote the pursuit of academic excellence by focusing on the people and programs that distinguish Gettysburg College.
- Learning Beyond the Classroom—Extend education beyond classroom walls. Encourage use of technology, collaborative techniques, and service learning to enrich traditional academic learning.
- Dynamic Student Life—Provide a dynamic and vital environment, alternative social opportunities and living arrangements.
- Vibrant College Community—Enrich the communal life of Gettysburg College through our efforts to reach out to prospective students, the on-campus community and alumni.

As a result of our Self-Study on assessment we are able to identify current practices that are particularly effective and specific opportunities to strengthen our assessment efforts.

We determined that, as an institution, we need to formalize our assessment activities into a more coherent process that allows for continuous evaluation of method as well as results.

Three new campus committees have been set up to fill that role. In the area of student learning the Committee on Learning Assessment (COLA) and the Co-Curricular Learning Assessment Group have been created and are described in the section on assessment of learning outcomes. To review assessment of institutional effectiveness, the Committee on Institutional Effectiveness (CIE) has been created to accomplish outcomes analysis of the institution's operations in a more intentional way.

Responsibility for Assessment

The Gettysburg College Board of Trustees has the ultimate responsibility to assure that rigorous assessment leads to programs that support student growth and development. The responsibility for carrying out assessment of academic and administrative services and programs rests with the President's Council, composed of the President, the Provost, and Senior Vice Presidents. They will continue to encourage the integration of assessment in all activities in their respective divisions using a cyclical model that promotes feedback and revision throughout the planning, implementation, and evaluation process. Assessment becomes a planning tool that leads to continuous improvement in meeting the goals of the institution.

The Committee on Institutional Effectiveness

The President's Council will serve as the Committee on Institutional Effectiveness with support from the Director of Institutional Analysis. Its primary goal will be to foster a culture of assessment among all divisions of the College and to coordinate assessment activities.

The Committee shall meet annually and shall have the following responsibilities:

- To monitor assessment activities related to strategic initiatives as a criteria for measuring their success.
- To establish/re-affirm institutional goals for the new fiscal year by monitoring key performance indicators and benchmarking with peer institutions.
- To examine planning and assessment processes for quality and integrity; and to encourage departments to present "best practice" models of planning and assessment.
- To review the Institutional Effectiveness Plan itself to determine the need for change.
- To review the Mission Statement to determine that it accurately reflects the institution.
- To review the Strategic Action Plan and revise it, if necessary.
- To review assessment issues with the Board of Trustees annually through the use of institutional benchmarks or key performance indicators.

Current Assessment Activities

Gettysburg College has engaged in institutional assessment and planning in many aspects of its operations. With the addition of the Committee on Institutional Effectiveness to oversee assessment activities, these current practices will continue to form the basis of our assessment plan that is summarized below. **New initiatives are in bold letters.**

- The Strategic Action Plan provides the overall direction for the institution and for goal-setting by each constituency of the College.
- Annually, President's Council members review the goals and accomplishments of their divisions. This includes the evaluation of information that:
 - Determines if/when goals are fully met.
 - Establishes new goals from previously defined or new initiatives.
 - Utilizes the results of the assessment of accomplishments to evaluate practices and determine whether they need to be continued or changed.
- **Annually the Committee on Institutional Effectiveness will review, by division, accomplishments from the previous year and goals for the coming year.** (This review was previously accomplished by President's Council on an annual basis.)
- **Institutional benchmarks or key performance indicators will be reviewed and adjusted to better measure institutional effectiveness on an annual basis.**
- Standing committees of the Board of Trustees review accomplishments and future goals of each division annually.
- **The Board of Trustees reviews assessment issues with the administration annually through the use of institutional benchmarks or key performance indicators.**
- **President's Council meets each year with staff, faculty, and students to share accomplishments and outline priorities for the coming year.**
- President's Council has the responsibility to keep abreast of current issues within their areas and will continue to be professionally active in their areas of responsibility.
- **Annually, the Committee on Institutional Effectiveness will review the Institutional Effectiveness Plan itself to determine whether it is providing for an effective method to analyze assessment results.**

A Model of the Assessment Process

Fundamental to a planning process is the establishment of annual goals for the institution that are first articulated, analyzed for planning purposes, and then evaluated for their achievement. Assessment of results and application of that evaluation becomes the foundation for future planning in this cyclical process. At each level of planning, whether by division, by department within the division, or by program/activity within the department, the planning process includes the following:

- Mission
 - Statement of purpose and how the department's mission relates to the

College's mission and goals.

- **Goals**
Statement of overall goals for the given time period. These goals are specific in nature and convey the long-term (and short-term) intended purpose of the department. Standards by which success will be measured are identified.
- **Activity/Program**
The specific program or event is implemented to meet the goals.
- **Outcome (Results, Status)**
Reviewed each year, these results answer the questions: Did we reach our goals...why or why not? What did we learn? What changes should be made?
- **Application of Results to future activity/practice**
Based on the outcomes/results, what are the next steps? What does the department plan to do now? What barriers or challenges were overcome? Was the process used effective?

This approach reflects the fundamental elements of an interactive assessment cycle. Additional activities that might be added to this cyclical process could include cost/benefit analyses, an analysis of the pros and cons, and a risk analysis including contingency planning. It is important to note that some factors that are important to the evaluation of goals may not be quantifiable such as ethical considerations and impact on stakeholders. (APPENDIX: Templates for setting Annual Goals and Assessment of Annual Goals)

In order to measure the attainment of institutional goals, President's Council members have identified strategic, or key, indicators to serve as benchmarks that assist in the evaluation of the institution's overall health. These benchmarks are used to monitor performance and provide a quick view of conditions. Each year the key indicators themselves are also evaluated to determine their completeness and usefulness. Three- to five-year trend data are maintained where possible, and institution-wide data is collected in the College's Fact book to supplement the key indicators. Management indicators for each division provide a secondary level of assessment of divisional goals.

A set of peer institutions has been identified on which comparative key indicators are maintained as well as supplemental information that is useful and appropriate to more fully understand Gettysburg's place among the peer group.

An expectation of this approach is that ongoing assessment is taking place at all levels of the College—departmental, divisional, President's Council, and Board of Trustees. While the key performance indicators provide a macro view of our accomplishments, similar assessment will take place on programmatic topics in each department to enhance our business processes and improve operations. Many divisions use focus groups, internal

surveys, or audits by external consultants to provide feedback as well as to benchmark against industry standards. Specific examples include: an audit of the Financial Aid Office aimed to improve business practices and the use of technology; an audit of our PeopleSoft (MIS) management infrastructure system and assessment of technology. (APPENDIX: Key Performance Indicators)

External Assessment of Departments, Services, and Programs

Administrative departments, academic departments, and interdisciplinary programs participate in periodic program reviews by external evaluators. The process consists of a self-study, an external evaluators' site visit and report, and a written response to the report by the department or program. The results of these reviews are shared with the appropriate standing committee of the Board of Trustees. Administrative department reviews are initiated within divisions on a regular basis.

Academic Department and Programs: These reviews are comprehensive, covering curriculum and/or program activities, staffing, facilities, financial resources, library resources as appropriate, equipment, student culture, budget enhancements, current challenges, and goals. In the case of academic departments and interdisciplinary programs the evaluations are in a seven-year cycle of formal reviews. A department/program's review and written response to the report are also shared with the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees who meet with the faculty of the department or program to discuss their challenges, opportunities, and accomplishments. Progress on recommendations is monitored by the Provost's Office. Assessment of the Academic Program is addressed more fully elsewhere.

Administration: In addition to the annual evaluation of departmental goals, described above, external evaluations of specific departments are conducted selectively to gain recommendations for improving administrative services. The external review includes an examination of program activities, staffing, facilities, resources, equipment, student culture, budget needs, current challenges, goals, and, as appropriate, user satisfaction. These reviews typically are conducted using existing national survey instruments supplemented with local questions.

The educational environment changes constantly, making demands on the College that can unevenly affect administrative divisions and departments. These assessments provide an opportunity to:

- a) Re-balance budget, staffing, space, and other resources or
- b) Re-distribute the workload to other departments, or to
- c) Eliminate or reduce some activities or programs/processes.

This insures that adequate resources are available to meet anticipated needs.

Evaluation of Employee Performance

The College will continue to follow current practices for the regular and periodic evaluations of faculty, administrators, and support staff.

Faculty: Every full-time, tenure-track faculty member at Gettysburg College anticipates a career in which his or her performance is subject to regular assessment. This faculty evaluation system is explicit, well defined, and thorough. The system includes annual reviews prior to tenure, a pre-tenure review typically after three years, a tenure review after six years, and triennial reviews for tenured faculty. Promotion reviews are conducted for candidates for promotion to the rank of full Professor. Relevant methods of assessment may be found in the *Faculty Handbook* and in the “Standard Operating Procedures” of the Faculty Personnel Committee.

Faculty in term appointments are evaluated annually. Adjunct (part-time) faculty are evaluated by their department chair (or program coordinator) by the completion of the second term of their employment.

Administrators and Support Staff: Every new full-time staff member (administrator and support staff) participates in a performance evaluation at the completion of a three-month probation period. Annual or biennial performance goal-setting exercises and evaluations are conducted by each supervisor/employee team for continuing full-time employees. In the appraisal, the position description serves as the foundation for evaluations. The general description, together with the specific individual’s knowledge, skills, demonstrated abilities, education, and experience are considered in this review. A review of accomplishments since the last review and the setting of goals for the future are important elements of this process as is the use of bonuses to recognize significant merit. A study to assess this initiative concluded that this practice is very important to employees. The performance appraisal process is coordinated by the Human Resources Office.

Assessment of Financial Planning and Resource Allocation

Financial resources are part of the resources available to the College to carry out its mission, goals and objectives. The strategic objectives of the College and the goals and objectives of each of its divisions are represented in the financial commitments the College makes. The College assures this concurrence through the management of its financial resources, utilizing several processes each fiscal year, including:

- A formal budget process,
- Continual review of revenue and expenses during the fiscal year,
- Regular reports on financial status and activities to the Board of Trustees,
- Comparisons with peer institutions, and
- An external audit at the end of each fiscal year.

Each of these processes represents a formal assessment of the use of the financial resources of the college.

The Budget Process: The budget process begins with an analysis by the budget office of all the factors which would affect the College’s ability to meet its financial objectives as identified in the Five-year Financial Plan from the previous year. This analysis includes changes in net assets, the year-end budget surplus, and the College’s projected ability to meet the specific revenue and expense objectives over a five-year period. Once the

administration has reviewed this information, the Fiscal and Personnel Management Committee of the Board of Trustees also reviews and approves the financial objectives and the parameters of the key revenue and expense drivers to be used in projecting the new Five-Year Financial Plan and to set the comprehensive fee for the upcoming academic year. Economic and industry-specific information, as well as comparisons to peer institutions, is considered in establishing the financial objectives for the coming year.

Budgets are built both from the bottom up and top down and are expected to reflect College strategic plans and the divisional goals and objectives at every level. Programs, departments, and divisions are asked to review their budget allocations and submit requests for annual operating budget changes, capital needs (space and equipment), and one-time expenditures and enhancements. These are evaluated and included, when possible, in the appropriate budgets for the upcoming fiscal year.

Once the senior administration has reviewed the proposed budgets and the President endorses them, they are presented to the Faculty Chair and Coordinator Council, the Faculty Finance Committee, and the Subcommittee on Faculty Compensation for review. In the early spring the proposed Operating Budget, Capital Budget, and the Five-Year Financial Plan are then presented to the Fiscal and Personnel Management Committee of the Board of Trustees which brings the final budgets to the full Board for endorsement at its May meeting.

Compensation: A major factor in establishing the budget includes decisions on salaries, wages, and benefits. The assessment of employee compensation (salary and benefits) is based upon three indices.

Faculty compensation comparisons are made using the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) Group IIB at the 95th percentile and the median of a group of 32 comparison institutions. Additional information available through HEDS on salary and benefits, entry salaries, and adjunct faculty compensation are also reviewed. The newly designated peer group of institutions is likely to be used as the standard measure in the future.

Administrations compensation levels are evaluated using the College & University Personnel Association (CUPA) Administrative Compensation Survey comparisons.

Support staff compensation is assessed using local surveys such as the Gettysburg Area Personnel Association (GAPA) Employment Survey results.

In these three areas, comparative studies are considered in combination with local cost-of-living and consumer price indices to assess adequacy of compensation levels.

In addition to this formal review, useful information about the competitiveness of the College's compensation package is also obtained through informal mechanisms such as

employee exit interviews and the employee recruitment process. All compensation information is utilized when decisions are made during the budget development process. Equity adjustments are made in cases where the compensation levels are significantly below expectations, given educational degree, age, years of service, experience, and performance.

Facilities: In addition to the development of an operating budget each year, the capital budget addresses facility improvements. Comprehensive facilities-needs assessment is periodically conducted with a focus on deferred maintenance phase-out, space modernization, landscape enhancements, and new construction. The needs in each of these areas are identified and incorporated in a continuously updated Facilities Master Plan. Facilities projects are also intentionally linked to the Strategic Action Plan and progress on major construction is monitored by the Board of Trustees at each meeting. (APPENDIX: Templates for the Capital Program Status Summary & Implementation Timeline.)

Continuous Financial Review during the Fiscal Year and Reports to the Board: Once the budget has been built, the President, VP for Finance and Administration and the Director of the Budget meet regularly during the fiscal year to review the finances of the college. Shortly after the start of the second semester, when enrollments and revenue are more certain, the President and President's Council discuss any continuing budget needs and consider the allocation of additional dollars for programs in the second semester.

The VP for Finance /Treasurer gives a Treasurers report (revenues/expenditures) to the Trustees at each Board meeting.

Comparisons with Other Institutions: Further assessment of the College's management of financial resources occurs through the Office of Institutional Analysis which draws institution-wide, current, comparative data from the various studies compiled by HEDS relative to peer institutions. Various other sources are also used, including the NACUBO endowment survey, the AICUP Financial Analysis & Trends survey, and the ELCA Higher Education Trends Analysis, IPEDS, CAE, and selected handbooks and rating services. These measurements are supplemented by internally generated surveys of peer institutions, comparative financial ratios compiled by the College's independent auditor, and periodic analyses compiled by external consultants

The Audit: The College retains an external auditing firm to review the financial status and transactions of the College for the prior fiscal year. This review assures the trustees and the various publics, including Middle States, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the Federal Government that the college is handling and accounting for its resources in a manner approved by FASB and the appropriate regulatory bodies.

The auditors are given full access to needed information by the College and have access to the trustee audit committee without management present. This audit is the assessment of the financial probity of the college.

Technical Resources: In addition to the assessment of financial resource management, the College accomplishes ongoing assessment of technological resources through the department of Information Technology (IT). IT is responsible for network and internet access, academic support, the Management Information System, telecommunications, hardware replacement and for the Disaster Recovery and Continuous Operations Plan. The IT department and appropriate committees monitor and update their respective plans as necessary. In the spring of 2003 the College engaged a consultant to assist in the development of a strategic technology plan.

Cross Divisional Assessment

The President establishes appropriate committees for cross-divisional assessments as necessary in a changing environment.

Enrollment Management Committee: The Enrollment Management Committee reviews enrollment projections and proposes enrollment goals for the coming year. These goals are adopted after deliberation and revision by the President's Council. Enrollment projections are integrated into the financial planning of the College. These projections and goals reflect both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of Gettysburg's student body; they affect curricular and student life planning. These and many other data are reviewed in comparison with long term enrollment goals set in previous years at Gettysburg and with data from peer institutions. They provide a basis for assessing institutional effectiveness. A sophisticated financial aid model has been constructed enabling the enrollment team and the College to strategically maximize financial aid resources to meet enrollment goals. (APPENDIX: Planning Cycle)

Faculty Admissions Committee: In an annual cycle, the Office of Admissions and the Vice President for Enrollment and Educational Services gather data and consult with the Faculty Admissions Committee. The number and quality of students applying for admission to the institution are an important, if indirect, measure of perceived institutional performance; the ability to meet the projections and achieve the goals each year is a direct measure of institutional effectiveness. Using comparative data and national benchmarks provides additional information.

President's Personnel Review Team: This team reviews all administrative and support staff personnel requests (new or upgraded) from all divisions. The aim is to assess additional staff needs and ask the hard questions, to invest in staff expansion after a thorough analysis of need. The team presents to the President the historic and current facts surrounding the request including its connection to the institutional Strategic Plan. The President then reviews the information with the appropriate Division Head and those requests with institutional priority and greatest need are approved.

New Assessment Initiatives

With the goal of systematic organization and use of assessment data, the College will initiate the following actions:

- 2003-2004 The Committee on Institutional Effectiveness will begin to function as the oversight committee on institutional assessment and planning activities, with the responsibility of an ongoing review of the institutional assessment plan itself.
- 2003-2004 The Committee on Learning Assessment will begin to function as the oversight committee for all learning assessment activities. The APPC will oversee academic assessment and the Committee on Co-Curricular Learning Assessment will be responsible for assessment of programs that provide opportunities for learning outside the classroom.
- 2004-2005 The current Institutional Analysis Divisional Liaison Program will be strengthened and workshops conducted to assist liaisons and others on “outcome-based” assessment techniques. Commonly used terms associated with assessment will be clearly defined and linked to the College’s mission statement.

As a result of the Self-Study, we also identified specific assessment initiatives to be accomplished and have projected a timeline for their accomplishment:

- 2004-2005 A review of the Bylaws of the College to take advantage of modern improvements in communication will be conducted.
- 2003 – 2005. The Honor Code will undergo a comprehensive, two-year review. The Honor Code is at the center of interaction between faculty and students. The first-year student is not allowed to join this community of learning without first demonstrating knowledge of its requirements and agreeing to abide by them. In this age of cyberspace, collaborative learning, and other new pedagogies, interpreting and administering the Code presents challenges not considered at its inception.
- 2003 -2005 The First-Year Experience Journal program will be initiated, in order to encourage students to evaluate whether their actions reflect their values. In addition to the journal writing, a series of focus group discussions will take place, involving students, faculty, and staff, to explore the question “How would students act on a campus where integrity was a vital, practiced value?” Finally, a more thorough examination of existing data related to integrity currently available in the CIRP and Senior Surveys will be conducted to assess the issue from a “pre” and “post” perspective.
- 2003-2004. A “dashboard of critical indicators” for strategic planning will be developed from current data being collected. As a part of this process we will standardize our set of peer institutions for comparative purposes.

- 2003-2008 A strategic technology plan will be completed by an in-house consultant working with the IT staff to provide a vision for the future of technology support on the college campus.
- 2003-2005 The College will review strategic use of the Web and necessary support of this critical market positioning tool.
- 2003-2008 Regular department reviews will incorporate budget analysis and learning outcomes assessment into the existing model.
- 2004-2005 The staff needs of the Office of Institutional Analysis will be reviewed to assure that the College can meet all assessment, research, and planning needs.

Organization for Assessment of Institutional Effectiveness

Recognizing institutional effectiveness must be a coordinated effort among all college-wide constituencies, we have prepared the following organizational chart to provide a framework for our assessment activities.

GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

ORGANIZATION FOR ASSESSMENT

