

Report to Faculty, Administrators, Trustees, Students
of

Union County College
Cranford, New Jersey 07016

Prepared following analysis of the institution's
Periodic Review Report

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Evaluation of the Periodic Review Report of Union County College

I. Introduction

Union County College, the first of New Jersey's community colleges, was founded in 1933 as a private, liberal arts institution which has evolved into a comprehensive community college offering 77 Associate Degree and Certificate programs. As stated on the College website, "Union County College provides opportunities for higher education for people of diverse ethnic, racial, cultural, educational and socioeconomic backgrounds in a multi-campus setting. The College has four campuses, which are located in Cranford, Elizabeth, Plainfield and Scotch Plains. The Scotch Plains campus is operated in collaboration with the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey."

The Periodic review report (PRR) provides readers with a comprehensive overview of the institutional progress since the College's last decennial self-study and team visit and its subsequent progress report. The PRR is clearly written with appropriate support documentation. The report demonstrates a commitment to widespread college involvement in its preparation and it demonstrates a clear commitment to progress that has taken place at the institution since the team visit. The institution is to be commended for the quality and completeness of the Periodic Review Report.

II. Responses to Recommendations from the Previous Decennial Evaluation

This section summarizes the College's responses to all of the recommendations made in the decennial report prepared by the visiting team. Key areas include: Institutional Assessment (Standard 7), Student Support Services (standard 9), General Education (Standard 12), and Assessment of Student Learning (Standard 14).

Institutional Effectiveness

The decennial report contained one recommendations relating to Standard 7, Institutional Assessment: *The College needs to demonstrate how it uses assessment results in all areas to effect positive change in the institution.* The College has addressed this recommendation in the PRR.

The PRR notes the development of a Strategic Planning matrix as well as an Institutional Effectiveness Plan with Key Performance Indicators, demonstrated institutional reliance upon a number of survey instruments, and tied these items to the College's mission and goals. While the recent efforts are noteworthy, Union College will need to remain focused on embedding these efforts in their culture to more fully inform decision-making in critical areas and impact resource allocation.

In 2010, the President led efforts focused upon institutional effectiveness, including a Board retreat, the adoption of a new planning tool, and a strategic planning matrix to reflect that year's priorities. A comprehensive Institutional Effectiveness Plan was developed to reflect the College's assessment activities in the following areas: college-wide, academic, student services, business and finance, and administrative services. The Institutional Effectiveness Plan is appropriately tied to College goals. Further,

planning documents support the assessment efforts and include annual reports, master plans in functional areas, departmental plans, and the strategic plan. These two are relatively recent additions, resulting from the President's arrival at the institution in 2010.

In 2012, a committee of faculty and staff was formed to review the mission, goals, philosophy, goals, and objectives of the College. It is unclear how the College will systemically and continuously conduct this type of review in future years to ensure alignment of the Institutional Effectiveness Plan and assessment and planning efforts.

While the College relies upon survey tools and instruments, including the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey, graduate surveys, the Community College Survey of Student Engagement, and various other internal survey instruments, the College needs to clearly demonstrate how the results of the surveys lead to institutional improvements, the activities that support such, and the allocation of resources to these efforts. While a number of initiatives in the area of Student Services resulted from the use of survey instruments and assessment, it is less clear how the results of institutional assessment methods have been used in other areas of the College. Many of the initiatives reflected in the PRR have commenced within the last two years, which have positioned the College well to build a culture of assessment. However, the readers stress the need for the College to continue to prioritize its focus upon institutional and student learning assessment.

Further, many of the initiatives noted in the PRR, including the use of survey instruments, have been grant-funded. The College should determine how it will support assessment activities in the future if grant funding is no longer available to fund costly surveys, professional development, course redesign, and other improvements that support teaching and learning.

The College has demonstrated clear statements of key goals, priorities, and expected outcomes, made strides toward the development of organized assessment processes that will need to be sustained, supported assessment activities and initiatives with coordination throughout the institution, shared assessment results with internal and external constituents, and appears committed to using assessment results to improve teaching and learning and advance the strategic priorities of the institution.

*The readers **suggest** that the College determine how they will financially fund assessment instruments in the future.*

*The readers **recommend** the College continue to build assessment tools, an assessment cycle, and a stronger culture of assessment to promote institutional effectiveness, inform decision-making, and impact resource allocation.*

Student Support Services

The visiting team report in 2007 provided the following recommendation in the area of Student Support Services: *The current student services assessment plans are effectively assessing the delivery of student services. However, the plans should include more assessment measurements tied to student learning outcomes.*

The PRR has identified several student support initiatives that the college has addressed since the 2007 visit specifically relating to both standards 8: Student admissions and retention and standards 9: Student Support Services.

The College has implemented a number of initiatives in the area of student support services focused around testing of new students, orientation, learning communities, student athletes, and the developmental and success courses. Most of these have appropriate assessment measures that are directly or indirectly tied to student learning outcomes.

The College continues to concentrate on retention and graduation rates but has added a number of other success initiatives with plans to assess the effectiveness as well. It was not entirely conclusive that all of these activities are assessed at the student learning level, but it appears that most do have specific outcomes that can be related to student learning such as the area of intrapersonal development in the counseling and career center as well as plans to assess athletes and measures of teamwork and sportsmanship. The College also administered the Noel –Levitz Student satisfaction Inventory in Fall 2011; some of the results were used to support grant initiatives at the College that in turn focused on student retention.

Specific learning objectives were developed or modified in specific support courses such as the Institute for Intensive English as well as Developmental English and Math. The College has assessed its College Success course and has made changes based on these assessments. In addition, the college's Center for Student Success was developed as part of a Title V grant in 2007. The grant reporting requirements compare the performance of Learning Community students to those of other students. Additional assessments are also in place for the Title V Improving the Pipeline in STEM Teacher Education.

The Distance Education area moved to ANGEL as their LMS in 2008 and specific outcomes have been identified regarding student utilization of the system; however the focus is often on the numbers of calls or questions as opposed to the quality of the services.

The Academic Learning Centers have added a number of services and have seen increased traffic in tutoring and assistance. The College added a database capable of tracking usage in 2007. Qualitative surveys to students are online and paper-based. It would be helpful to the College if the tutoring usage could be linked to success in the actual classes.

Union has also expanded its efforts in the EOF program by adding an expanded orientation schedule and creating a peer mentoring program. In addition, the Student Success Center has provided supplemental instruction in a comfortable and accessible environment. Retention data and various assessment tools were utilized to include the Noel-Levitz Assessment College Student Inventory, Learning Assessment of Study Skills Inventory, and Student Directed Search. The assessment data also includes qualitative data regarding the actual student experience.

Additional areas include the Overcoming Hatred/Creating Community Committee which became a standing committee in 2008. This Committee provides and sponsors events relating to particular themes during the year. These activities are being assessed through surveys and in some cases tied to class participation. In the case of class participation, it has been able to access student learning outcomes through various classroom assignments.

Finally the Campus Safety issues are being addressed by electronic email and brochures. The UCC 101 classes have been provided with presentations designed to introduce students to campus safety measures and recommendations. There is a plan to assess the effectiveness of the presentations.

Union College should be commended for its efforts to increase the student support services and in their efforts to build assessment tools.

*The readers **suggest** the College continued to build assessment tools for all the student support services.*

*The readers **suggest** that evaluations of the Distance Education include a qualitative component and also that the utilization of the support services be tracked to student performance in classes using a methodology similar to the assessment for the Student assisted learning component.*

General Education

The visiting team recommended as a result of their 2007 visit that the *College should develop and fully implement a comprehensive plan to assess general education outcomes and use the results of this assessment to guide curricular improvement.*

Union County College has been faced with new criteria for general education as directed by the state of New Jersey. This process was undertaken within the state by VPAA's in the system during the period 2007-2009. As a result the College has been reviewing the requirements within their own programs and as a result ended up with program changes in 82% of their programs. New mapping of goals/objectives/learning outcomes and assessments are being reviewed to align with the states new initiative.

A Learning Outcomes Committee has been established to oversee the process of implementation of assessment and this includes assistance in the General Education realm in the form of reference materials, conferences, and overall coordination of assessment.

The College was able to secure grant funding to administer the MAPP standardized assessment tool which measures general education competencies but they have been unable to link this to curriculum changes. In addition, the College provides data on specific changes that have made a positive impact on programs and courses; however, this appears to be the result of previous assessments.

Most recently (Fall 2010) the College required each faculty member to assess at least one objective in one course section every semester. Some assessment took place in 56% of the General Education courses with 64% of those courses being reassessed. Four General Education courses were assessed using the course-wide assessment process. This occurred in 2010-2011.

The College continues to plan to improve and expand on the General Education process and it is clear that the statewide plan consumed a significant portion of time which may have delayed some active General Education assessment; however, it appears that the

College does have a plan. They have created a subcommittee of the Learning Outcomes Committee specific to General Education. A draft assessment plan is under review for this new subcommittee.

*While the College has reworked their General Education component and has been assessing some of the General Education courses, the readers **recommend** the college continue to fully implement a comprehensive plan to assess General Education outcomes and use the results of this assessment to guide curricular improvement.*

Assessment of Student Learning

The decennial report contained three recommendations relating to the assessment of Student Learning. The College has addressed these recommendations in the PRR. The first recommendation was, *A number of courses have been assessed on a pilot scale since 1985 with preliminary results. The process needs to be streamlined and sustained. Develop "clear, realistic guidelines and timetable for assessing courses across the disciplines, allowing the process to produce "results that can be used with confidence to inform decisions."*

The College has taken clear steps to develop guidelines and timetables to produce and utilize assessment data. The Learning outcomes committee has created a master syllabi template and is currently used in 80% of the courses. An assessment grid outlining the process of assessment is also utilized and appears to be effective. As of spring 2011 over 60% of the faculty have submitted assessment data. A timeline was established and reinforced by the VPAA in cooperation with the department chairs. According to the report a process and culture of assessment is being promoted. The assessment data provided for Psychology, Developmental English, The Institute for Intensive English, and Math have provided evidence that assessment is taking place and that it is, in fact, being utilized to make changes and continuous improvement. It is not clear that this is taking place on a large scale.

The second recommendation relating to standard 14 in the decennial report was *Collect and provide "evidence that student learning assessment information is shared and discussed with appropriate constituents and is used to improve teaching and learning"*.

The College has made clear efforts to communicate the assessment information to the College community. The Learning Outcomes Committee provides feedback regarding the submitted plans via the department chairs who are expected to share with the faculty. In addition, the chair of the Committee speaks at faculty meetings to share assessment information and strategies to promote student learning.

The College also produces written and verbal reports of outcomes assessment as reported in the PRR. Examples were not provided. The College also cited the use of Advisory Committees for feedback. The College also has offered a number of professional development activities internally at the College.

*The readers **suggest** that the College continue with internal professional development while ensuring the opportunity for attending external conferences and training relating specifically to assessment activities.*

The third and final recommendation from the decennial report addressed program review. Specifically, the team recommended that the College *Implement the Program Review Process as documented on page 85 of the Self-Study Report or develop another timely review process.*

Union County College has responded appropriately to this recommendation and the program review process has been implemented. The College has provided a systematic timeline for program review and many of the programs have already undergone review. Some programs have been discontinued; however, there was little mention of the overall programmatic changes as a result of this process.

The program review guidelines (exhibit 153) demonstrate that the process is thorough. Department chairs are asked to report on student learning outcomes as part of their annual reports. In addition, an assessment manual is currently being developed to assist faculty in the assessment process.

*The readers commend the College on their documented process; however, we are concerned that there may be a focus on course-based outcomes that overshadow the actual program outcomes. As a result, the readers **recommend** that the College continue the process of program review and demonstrate that programmatic changes take place as a result of the process.*

III. Major Challenges and/or Opportunities

The College has identified its major challenge to be that of potential declining enrollment. With the declining trend in high school graduation, Union County College is concerned that its enrollment will not continue to grow. Union experienced its first enrollment decline in 2011 after seeing a growth trend since 2005. Students contribute to a significant portion of the college operating budget, currently 64% and this is expected to increase. In addition, the Pell grant changes are likely to increase student's time to completion toward a degree. While all of this is taking place, Union County College is faced with a number of federal policies that are performance or funding-based. Union has mentioned the gainful employment and the Carl Perkins performance standards as challenges.

The College is aware of the enrollment challenges and has joined the New Jersey Community College Completion Agenda which has specific goals for graduation through 2020. Currently Union is monitoring this and is on pace to exceed the completion target.

Union has addressed four areas that they are focusing on in alignment with the Strategic Plan. These areas are as follows:

Teaching and Learning

Union will be focusing on the results of their program review process and best practice models to revise current programs.

The readers **suggest** that Union create a professional development plan to support faculty in learning more about best practices.

Student Support and activities

Union is committed to providing increased student support services and to improve the areas of student support. Examples provided were a new Math Success Center at the Cranford Campus and the addition of two new women's sports.

Employees, Facilities, and Technology

New facilities have been completed and each campus is slated for upgrades over the next three years. Updates include a new parking garage that has been completed, a new business office at the Elizabeth Campus, and a new student services building on the Cranford Campus. Additional plans for 2013 and 2014 include a building renovation in Plainfield and to the Lessner Building on the Elizabeth Campus.

In the area of technology, the College has nearly 95% of the classrooms on the Elizabeth and Plainfield Campuses equipped for multi-media. Wireless access is available in all buildings on the Cranford, Elizabeth, and Plainfield campuses.

Union in the Community

The College is addressing this area in several ways. Union is further developing its website and portal to facilitate access and to open new markets. The College is also expanding its fundraising efforts to support scholarships.

Union is also working closely with Union County High Schools to facilitate early placement testing in the high schools with the goal of student readiness upon entrance to College. Union also joined the League of Innovation and stressed that the League has signed a commitment to the Completion Agenda which aligns with their own commitment.

IV. Enrollment and Finance Trends

Union has provided projections of enrollment and finance trends. As mentioned previously, there is an expected decline in enrollment as a result of several external factors; the most significant appear to be the decline in the high school population, the reduced Pell grants, and the economy of Union County. Already, students are contributing the highest percentage toward operating costs, 62% and this is expected to rise.

Enrollment trends are on the decline and the contributions from students are significantly supporting the budget and this percentage of support is expected to rise. The expenses, as with any institution, are expected to rise over the next several years as well. Union does not express, with a sense of urgency, how this situation will be addressed. The projections indicate that the percentage of instructional costs will be most affected having been 46.7% of the total expenditures in 2012, with a projection of only 43.7% in 2015. No mention is made as to whether that will necessitate layoffs of faculty or staff. The other area most affected appears to be academic support down from 7.3% to a projected 6.2% in 2015.

Financially, the College appears to be in a position to cover its costs, but it may require cuts and challenges to providing services to the students. There is a concern that the students who are bearing the most significant portion of the operating budget ultimately face the consequences of increased operating costs and a reduction of services.

*The readers **recommend** that the College develop a plan for dealing with declining enrollment and increasing costs that will minimize the effect on students.*

V. Assessment Process and Plans

Union County College has been responding positively to recommendations made in the decennial report for both Standards 7 and 14. Some additional recommendations have been made and the assessment processes were addressed as part of the PRR in the previous section. Overall the College is moving forward with assessment and has made significant progress in nearly all areas relating to assessment.

Institutionally the College is moving forward and has closely aligned actions with the Strategic Plan. The Institutional Assessment process provided limited examples of how Institutional assessment guides change or improvement. Some examples have been cited in student services and the academic divisions, but it is less clear how the results of institutional assessment methods have been used in other areas of the College. Many of the initiatives reflected in the PRR have commenced within the last two years, and have positioned the College well to build a culture of assessment.

Progress in Assessment can be found in the feedback regarding the assessment process in assessing Student Learning. For example, nearly all courses have master syllabi with required student learning outcomes and faculty have been asked to assess at least one outcome. While assessment is taking place, the readers recommended in the previous section that a more systematic process occur that will make assessment more meaningful. Program reviews are taking place and program outcomes are being linked to specific course outcomes. There is a systematic schedule for program review and the college has made progress on disseminating this information as well as assessment best practices.

While the College has made significant progress, there is a need for improvement and the actual usage of the data. The College appears to be headed in the right direction but will need to be diligent in continuing the progress.

VI. Linked Institutional Planning and Budgeting Process

The College has a clearly defined model for linking planning and budgeting. The process appears to be inclusive and involves long-range planning. In addition, a Presidential retreat took place in 2011 to strategize on the development of the academic and facilities strategic plan.

The budgeting process involves use of the strategic plan which has been updated every three years. Requests for budget items are tied to the plan and include a packet for requests where specific proposals aimed at achieving goals within the strategic plan are submitted to a strategic planning advisory committee which ranks the proposals in "order of congruence with the strategic objectives." These ranked proposals are then submitted to the President. Funding has occurred every year for the last ten (10) years

for some or all of the requested amounts. This information is subsequently reported to the faculty at a faculty meeting.

The College's annual report summarizes the accomplishment of the Strategic plan, the Technology plan, and the Facilities Master plan each year.

The College is to be commended for the inclusive linked process and for the subsequent communication of the information. This process would appear to remind everyone at the college of the strategic directions which the College is taking.

VII. Conclusion

Union County College has responded favorably to recommendations set forth in the decennial report and has made progress where needed. The College is moving in a positive direction in terms of assessment and student services. Plans are in place to revise courses and programs and to add to the support services at the College. Union College has demonstrated a commitment to planning in nearly all areas and the process appears to be inclusive.

Union College has a number of reasons to be proud of its accomplishments and the efforts put forth to improve the College. As the College looks forward it must continue to address the increasing burden on the students in terms of tuition. As a summary, the readers will restate our suggestions and recommendations which are stated earlier in the report.

*The readers **suggest** that the College determine how they will financially fund assessment instruments in the future*

*The readers **suggest** the College continue to build assessment tools for all the student support services*

*The readers **suggest** that evaluations of the Distance Education include a qualitative component and also that the utilization of the support services be tracked to student performance in classes similar to the methodology of assessment for the Student assisted learning component.*

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