

IV. Evaluation Overview

Juniata College's progress over the last ten years has been transformational. The team notes especially the added campus capacity, strengthened admissions market position, development of the next generation of teaching talent, and emphasis on the importance of trustee development.

The students, faculty, staff, and visitors to Juniata College experience a campus quad that, as a defining geometry of the American college, has been appropriately emphasized as Juniata's center of gravity--the feel is inspiring and as vivid as Mr. Jefferson's lawn at the University of Virginia. The quad makes an important statement about openness and the well-integrated liberal arts life. Juniatians hold an authentic mindfulness of the College's heritage that is rooted in Church of the Brethren, a heritage centered on values such as modesty, courtesy, service, non-confrontational discourse, and community harmony. The team believes that Juniata College is a place that lives and teaches the importance of making wise judgments without being judgmental.

We found among Juniatians a willingness to face realities with intelligence and creativity, realities particularly understood by the finite limitations of a modest endowment and the perennial pressure of being successful in all enrollment measures. The College is endowed with a highly dedicated, much admired faculty willing to carry a large portfolio of teaching breadth, advising relationships, and campus involvement; such dedication was visible and palpable to visitors. The staff has a keen grasp of professionalism and competence, whether in observing the quality of grounds maintenance or the abundance of critical analysis in the back office. Everyone wears more than one hat, a source of pride.

Happy, hard-working, caring, ambitious, promising students are present in abundance at Juniata; their understanding about the quality of the Juniata experience is generally unambiguous--they know and are known by their faculty and staff mentors. We heard many examples and testimonials of self-confidence and individual accomplishment, but not to the individualistic exclusion of belonging to something larger than the self.

Campus interviews affirm the correlation the main points of Self-Study and the state of the college as strong in terms of leadership, financial sophistication, excellent faculty, student achievement and growth, and philanthropic support. The Board of Trustees is "involved, but not intrusive," and its members also among the best at expressing the comprehensive mission of Juniata. Trustees show a knowing, well-informed depth of understanding in both the specific scope of the college's current challenges--leadership transition, enrollment dependency, and financial equilibrium--and the wider lens of demographic shifts and the uncertain, even sagging perceptions of the value proposition about the variety and quality of American higher education.

Greater diversity in constituent populations of the Juniata community is clearly desirable, but has not yet been achieved to anyone's satisfaction; a new inflection point of fresh energy and ideas about developing a campus that "looks like the world" must be encouraged to spark and kindle. The team advises against the danger of allowing discouragement to become fatalistic surrender or the challenge of diversity to become overshadowed by operational fundamentals always nearby.

Standard 1: Mission and Goals

Significant accomplishments, progress, or exemplary/innovative processes

- The College has sought wide representation and input into the development of the strategic plan.
- The College periodically reviewed and updated its progress in the goals of the strategic plan. Recent revisions to the budgeting process (from one year to three years) help monitor the strategic plan's goals and strategies.
- The Board of Trustees chairperson is taking responsibility to increase trustee awareness and understanding of the College's mission.

Non-binding Findings for Improvement (Suggestions)

- As noted in the Self Study, the mission of the College is not referenced in the *Faculty Handbook*. This should be addressed.
- Keeping the community informed of revisions to the strategic plan is also noted in the Self-Study and the team concurs.
- It may be helpful to include mission more directly in the faculty evaluation process—perhaps embedded in the four categories already listed.

Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

Significant accomplishments or progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- Juniata has done a commendable job infusing assessment results in both the planning process and evaluating outcomes of the Plan. The institutional research office, along with other offices and units, provides abundant data and other empirical evidence.

Non-binding Findings for Improvement (Suggestions)

- The visiting team noticed an *ad hoc* approach to planning during the current leadership transition period. The 2008 strategic plan progress report has not been updated since 2010, and relevant planning for the new online program appears to be incomplete.
- The College may benefit from better communication of progress towards meeting goals of strategic plan.
- The team encourages the College to examine the process for allocating positions in academic departments.

Standard 3: Institutional Resources

Significant accomplishments or progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- Coordinated by the budget team when an annual operating surplus occurs, management of the special funding pool is an exemplary practice that promotes transparency, fosters inclusion across campus, and facilitates systematic revenue planning.
- The College is commended for maintaining its Standard & Poor's "A- Stable" rating in light of the many recent unanticipated financial challenges.
- The College's disciplined and long term approach to a 5% endowment spending rate is exemplary given the financial challenges that cause pressure to increase that rate.

Standard 4: Leadership and Governance

Significant accomplishments or progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- The College has enjoyed strong, effective leadership over the past several years. Most faculty and staff feel empowered to do their jobs and serve the college in their various capacities.

Non-binding Findings for Improvement (Suggestions)

- The team agrees with the College's observation that clarifying and/or defining job descriptions within and between administrative units will improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Standard 5: Administration

Significant accomplishments or progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- Juniata College is to be commended for sustaining an environment that has resulted in the college being recognized as a Great College to Work For three times since 2008.

Non-binding Findings for Improvement (Suggestions)

- The team suggests the College review the practice of full-time appointments across areas of responsibility to ensure that the positions provide for enough time to fulfill both sets of responsibility and to allow the departments participating in such arrangement achieve a stable and predictable staffing pattern for each department.
- Consistent with its efforts to create an inclusive campus culture that celebrates diversity and plurality, the College should seek to examine best practices and introduce new, creative ways to recruit and retain professional from ALANA populations.

Standard 6: Integrity

Significant accomplishments or progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- The College is to be commended for maintaining a very comprehensive array of operating policies on its web site.

Non-binding Findings for Improvement (Suggestions)

- The team suggests that all institutional policies posted on the web site indicate the most recent revision or approval date.

Standard 7: Institutional Assessment

Significant accomplishments or progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- The team commends the College's transparency in assessment efforts. The mission statement, current strategic plan, goals directly aligned with the strategic plan, and related outcomes can be found on the external website. And, the Self-Study speaks directly to the goals of the strategic plan.
- Most strategic plan outcomes have indeed been achieved. For those that have not, staff provided cogent explanations in areas not included in the Self-Study report.
- A culture of assessment has taken root, as evidenced by the establishment of the Center for Excellence which – among other functions – helps provide professional development on assessment matters.

Non-binding Findings for Improvement (Suggestions)

- Campus-wide assessment at Juniata does not seem to be consistently implemented. In some instances the institution relies solely upon indirect tools. In other instances, assessment is in the planning stages. Finally, where assessment has been begun, progress is extremely slow and not always of the quality that will actually provide useful, valid results upon which thoughtful decisions can be made.

Recommendation

- In order to assure the college's success, the team recommends that assessment plans be implemented broadly, consistently, and expeditiously, and that oversight be defined in such a manner as to thoroughly incorporate the assessment of learning across the organization.

Standard 8: Student Admissions and Retention

Significant accomplishments or progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- Juniata has increased its enrollment significantly over the past 10 years while increasing the quality and diversity of its students. Increases in students of color and international students more than doubled to 20%. Also in that time the percent of students from outside the state almost doubled, from 21% to 39%. These positive results set up the institution for greater stability in its long term enrollment planning.
- While Juniata has not fully met its retention and graduation goals, the College has been making progress and has numerous programs in place to support students in the first year, including the Supported Admit program, summer orientation, the Inbound program, and first year call-in.

Non-binding Findings for Improvement (Suggestions)

- While a short term enrollment operation plan is used and appropriate, a formal, long term enrollment planning model would be useful to the college-wide planning process.
- While the approval of a new enrollment and retention specialist is a good step to improve planning and assessment, there is evidence that the remaining admission staff is stretched thin. Considering that Juniata's markets have expanded and the number of applications have grown, a review of staffing levels among those who recruit and read applications should be conducted.

Standard 9: Student Support Services

Significant accomplishments or progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- Juniata is commended for the focused efforts made in the Student Mental Health report to assess both the current services and needs of students.

Non-binding Findings for Improvement (Suggestions)

Careful consideration as to how the college can fulfill the mental health needs must be given with special attention to wait times for service and space constraints.

Standard 10: Faculty

Significant accomplishments or progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- The College has hired a corps of faculty who are well qualified, dedicated, and effective professionals who are devoted to the College in every way, and who take on whatever roles and tasks are necessary.
- The low turnover rate among faculty and the number of faculty who are able to go on sabbatical, including a high acceptance rate for sabbatical applicants, are commendable.

Non-binding Findings for Improvement (Suggestions)

- The faculty and administration need to share a sense of accountability for improvement of recruitment and retention of faculty from ALANA populations.

Standard 11: Educational Offerings

Significant accomplishments or progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- The POE model and the two advisor system are unique to this college's curriculum. These approaches support the mission of the college, are well-regarded by both faculty and students, and provide students with support and flexibility in their educational choices. These models undergo continuous and careful consideration and evaluation by both faculty and students. The use of input from a variety of stakeholders to continuously reassess and improve educational offerings is commendable.

Non-binding Findings for Improvement (Suggestions)

- The college should continue its work towards having all syllabi include learning outcomes.
- The college may want to clarify requirements among general education courses, such as those courses with a CA designation, to ensure consistency and that the courses are all meeting the set requirements.

As popular and effective a space as the library appears to be, the College would be advised to study its physical and programmatic needs and to envision its future within the context of the liberal arts curriculum.

Standard 12: General Education

Significant accomplishments or progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- General Education is thriving at the College. It appears to be coherent and students and faculty readily and positively identify with it.

Non-binding Findings for Improvement (Suggestions)

- Assessment of General Education should be more fully implemented.

Standard 13: Related Educational Activities

Significant accomplishments or progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- There is strong participation in study abroad programs, with over 40% of students participating and such a wide variety of opportunities available.
- The growth in student volunteer hours and the variety of service learning opportunities available to students is noteworthy, as is the percentage of students who participate in internships.

Non-binding Findings for Improvement (Suggestions)

- The college may want to review student support services, such as the library, technology training, and tutoring services, to ensure that the learning resources are appropriate, sufficient, and accessible for online students.
- The college may consider strengthening faculty training for online instruction, including course design for online courses, online pedagogy, and legal issues related to online instruction.
- The development of an online student orientation process may help enhance students' success in online courses.

Recommendation

- The team recommends that the College assign overall responsibility for ongoing oversight of online instruction, including reviewing and strengthening, where needed, key elements such as strategic planning, appropriateness of support services and technical support and training, legal considerations, review of student identity verification, and assessment and evaluation.

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

Significant accomplishments or progress, or exemplary/innovative practices

- The team commends the College's program review process, as it incorporates feedback and provides for follow through into department planning. The Self-Study document provides a schedule for the self-assessment of all academic departments, from 1999 through 2013. Though the completion pattern appears to be inconsistent, programs complete their Self-Study on a roughly six-year cycle and submit their report to the APAC for review. After final revisions (if needed) the study is submitted to an external reviewer, who submits a report to the provost and the department. Incorporating feedback from the external reviewer, the department drafts a Memo of Understanding, outlining the department's plan for the next six years as well as a list of resources necessary to implement the plan.

- Also worthy of note is Juniata College's participation in the ICI/DPQ initiative, an attempt to assess the comparability of student competencies resulting from the Juniata College Programs of Emphasis (POEs) with the more traditional majors offered by other institutions. The Accounting, Business and Economics, Environmental Science, and Communications programs are completing work on this. However, this assessment focuses on what students should be able to do, how the college provides this experience and where in the curriculum it occurs. The process does not assess student proficiencies directly.
- The team commends the College's development of the Center for Excellence, which encourages the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Faculty published research on the development of the center as well as a variety of other topics. The Center holds faculty brown bags on a regular basis and engages a significant portion of the faculty in curricular and pedagogical discussions.

Non-binding Findings for Improvement (Suggestions)

- College documents and team conversations with staff shows that they understand the distinction between direct and indirect assessment. To date, a number of assessment indicators are indirect. Though plans appear to be in place, evidence of direct assessment is uneven at best and should be made more apparent.
- Juniata College needs to accelerate the timeline on the assessment of general education. Though some progress has been made on the direct assessment of writing, the assessment of other core areas has yet to be fully addressed. Plans discussed with the team convey an understanding of the need and that the expertise exists on campus to guide those efforts. However, significant progress is long overdue. The team encourages the administration and faculty to support the efforts of the Assistant Provost and the Director of Institutional Research in spearheading those efforts.

Recommendation

- The team recommends that Juniata College establish a timeline that encompasses all aspects of the general education program, articulating when components of the CORE and FISHN will be assessed and how. Implementation of those plans should begin immediately.