

Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students
of

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
COLLEGE AT CORTLAND

by

An Evaluation Team representing the
Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Prepared after study of the institution's self-study report
and a visit to the campus on April 15-18, 2012

The Members of the Team:

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Working with the Team:

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This report represents the views of the evaluation team as interpreted by the Chair, and it goes directly to the institution before being considered by the Commission.

It is a confidential document prepared as an educational service for the benefit of the institution. All comments in the report are made in good faith, in an effort to assist Cortland.

This report is based solely on an educational evaluation of the institution and of the manner in which it appears to be carrying out its educational objectives.

AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT:

President/CEO:

Dr. Erik J. Bitterbaum
President
SUNY College at Cortland, New York

Chief Academic Officer:

Dr. Mark Prus
Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs
SUNY College at Cortland, New York

College Council Chair (campus):

Cortland College Council
Thomas Gallagher

Chancellor of the SUNY System:

Dr. Nancy L. Zimpher
Chancellor
State University of New York Central Office

Board of Trustees Chair (system):

H. Carl McCall
Chair
State University of New York

I. Context and Nature of the Visit

Institutional Overview:

Initial Accreditation:	1949
Last Reaffirmed:	November 15, 2007
Control:	Public
Affiliation:	Supervised by the State University of New York
Institution Type:	Master's – Larger Programs

Scope of Institution at Time of Visit:

Degrees Offered:	Bachelor's, Master's, Post-Master's Certificate
Branch Campuses:	None

Self-Study Design:

Comprehensive Report Reordering Standards To Reflect an Institution, with four (4) priorities: Academic Excellence, Transformational Education, Well-being, and Maximize Resources.

II. Affirmation of Continued Compliance with Eligibility Requirements

Based on a review of the self-study, interviews, the certification statement supplied by the institution and other institutional documents, the team affirms that the State University of New York College at Cortland continues to meet the eligibility requirements in *Characteristics of Excellence*.

III. Compliance with Federal Requirements

Based on review of the self-study, certification by SUNY College at Cortland, and interviews, the team affirms that the institution's Title IV cohort default rate is within federal limits. Additionally, the team is unaware of any problematic issues relative to state regulatory requirements.

IV. Evaluation Overview

The Team commends the college community at Cortland for an excellent Self-Study and for many other notable achievements, including:

- Significant, College-wide priorities developed with campus-wide involvement;
- A complex assessment effort that systematically collects information and relates the information to clearly identified institutional goals.
- Prudent budgeting and spending plans developed by the President and his cabinet and executed by Deans and Department heads have allowed the institution to retain programs vital to its integrity and mission; and
- The creation of the Advisement and Transition Office has contributed greatly to the support of Cortland students.
- The cooperation between Academic and Student Affairs has been exemplary as evidenced by efforts in Civic Engagement and the creation of COR 101 (First Year Experience); and

- The external accreditation of four areas—Counseling Center, Health Center, Campus Police and the Institute for Civic Engagement.

V. Compliance with Accreditation Standards

Standard 1: Mission and Goals

Chapters 4 and 10 of the Self-Study Report

Standard 6: Integrity

Chapters 2, 4, 5, and 10 of the Self-Study Report

Standard 1: *“The institution’s mission clearly defines its purpose within the context of higher education and indicates who the institution serves and what it intends to accomplish. The institution’s stated goals, consistent with the aspirations and expectations of higher education, clearly specify how the institution will fulfill its mission. The mission and goals are developed and recognized by the institution with the participation of its members and its governing body and are used to develop and shape its programs and practices and to evaluate its effectiveness.”*

Standard 6: *“In the conduct of its programs and activities involving the public and the constituencies it serves, the institution demonstrates adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies, providing support for academic and intellectual freedom.”*

- **The institution meets these standards.**

Summary of evidence and findings: Standard 1

- The college mission statement is aspirational, contemporary, easily understood by all stakeholders, and overwhelmingly student-centered.
- This statement was supplemented by a vision statement, values, and priorities – interpreted as goals – to constitute the institution’s strategic plan which in turn provides greater insight into aligning strategic directions and resources via a new annual report format.
- The mission statement is widely disseminated through publications such as the College Catalog, the institution’s main homepage, and a variety of online publications.

Significant Accomplishments

- Despite an apparent moratorium of the SUNY Mission Review Procedure the institution opted to revisit its mission statement. Since its 2007 PRR, the campus community has reaffirmed the institution’s revised mission statement, and generated a new vision statement, core values, and strategic priorities. This work was accomplished collaboratively through the Strategic Planning Steering Committee (SPSC) – which was broadly comprised of faculty, staff, students and alumni and which solicited feedback from the campus at large.

Suggestions

- Follow up on Self-Study Recommendations 4.1 and 4.2:
 - 4.1 Reconcile the campus strategic plan with the SUNY System strategic plan

- named The Power of SUNY.
- 4.2 Ensure the effectiveness of the new standardized annual report formats in aligning institutional priorities with all levels of review including individual evaluations as well as department, division and institution level strategic reports.

Summary of evidence and findings: Standard 6

Chapters 4, 5 and 10 of the institution's self-study provide comprehensive evidence that SUNY Cortland demonstrates a high level of commitment to its ethical policies and standards. A review of numerous documents was conducted including the:

- Academic Catalogs
- College Handbook
- Code of Student Conduct
- Human Resources Policies and Procedures, including the Affirmative Action Policies
- Faculty Search Committee Procedure Manual
- College Teacher Evaluation Handbook
- Title IX Compliance Review
- Curriculum Procedures and Process website
- Research and Sponsored Programs Policies and Procedures

These and many other documents cross listed in the *Volume II: 2012 Document Roadmap* provide direct evidence of the college's acute concern for ethics. The documents are complete, inclusive and readily accessible to all campus stakeholders via the internet. Older versions of these documents that are updated annually appear to be archived where the most recent versions are also linked.

The institution involves a broad representation of the campus constituencies in discussions and the generation of many campus documents – including its Strategic Plan and the Middle States Study. Interviews with many groups during the team visit confirmed and reinforced the institution's desire for transparency and a strong mutual concern for ethics and the well-being of all campus affiliates. Their concern for integrity has impacted their policies, procedures, practices and governance structure. SUNY Cortland, its administration, staff, faculty and students, has clearly adopted and practice a culture of integrity including high ethical standards, transparency, and both academic and intellectual freedom.

Significant Accomplishments

The institution appears to be conducting inquiry then enhancing programs and procedures based upon its findings. Some notable enhancements documented by the team include:

- Adoption of the "Red Watch Band" program to provide students with amnesty when reporting serious alcohol-related, medical situations.
- The institution's expanded capacity to accommodate increased student demand for human subjects research via the IRB.
- Improvements made in Advisement and Transition Office to address the needs of greater numbers of transfer students.
- Changes made to Scholars' Day.

- Improvements to new employee orientation and mentoring.
- Renaming of the Student Conduct Office (formerly Judicial Affairs) to one more meaningful to students.

Such actions help to demonstrate what Middle States terms a “culture of evidence.”

The Bringing Theory to Practice Program; the Center for Ethics, Peace and Social Justice; the Summer Ethics Institute; and the State of Poverty Simulation – as well as the expansion of the Multicultural Life and Diversity Office – are excellent examples of the College’s commitment to integrity.

Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

Chapters 4 and 10 of the Self-Study Report

Standard 3: Institutional Resources

Chapters 9 and 10 of the Self-Study Report

Standard 2: *“An institution conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals, develops objectives to achieve them, and utilizes the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal. Implementation and subsequent evaluation of the success of the strategic plan and resource allocation support the development and change necessary to improve and to maintain institutional quality.”*

Standard 3: *“The human, financial, technical, physical facilities, and other resources necessary to achieve an institution’s mission and goals are available and accessible. In the context of the institution’s mission, the effective and efficient uses of the institution’s resources are analyzed as part of ongoing outcomes assessment.”*

- **The institution meets these standards.**

Summary of evidence and findings: Standard 2

- The four major strategic priorities of the College are: Academic Excellence, Transformational Education, Well –being and Maximize Resources.
- The College’s strategic priorities were developed by active participation and input from its faculty, staff and students. Throughout the College, shared governance structures are utilized for decision-making.
- As part of the State University of New York, Cortland has a hierarchal governance structure starting at the Governor and legislative bodies to SUNY Board of Trustees and the SUNY Chancellor to institutional departmental and program-level committees. This multi-level approach guides the College through a decision making process that includes many voices.
- The SUNY Strategic Plan, The Power of SUNY, unveiled in April 2010

included many faculty, staff and students from the campus who continue to participate in defining and recommending specific proposals to advance the ‘six big ideas.’ This participation helps to position the College within SUNY and also ensures that Cortland’s own goals and priorities are aligned with SUNY goals and priorities.

- The planning process is transparent as evidenced by the open forums and collaborative group activities that helped with the formulation of the four strategic priorities.
- The Facilities Master Plan guides the College in developing spaces to accommodate new programs and the planned increase in the student resident population.
- Regular self-assessment and reaccreditation reports for services and academic programs is a part of the activities as is evidenced by the recent approval of Recreation Parks and Leisure Studies and the assessment of Student Health Services and University Police Departments.
- Continual review of three peer institutions with similar enrollment and other characteristics provide comparisons of operating budgets, library technology, wireless technology and alumni participation rates as well as other measures.
- Political, economic and social scanning is accomplished by participating in a number of statewide committees that serve the College well.

Significant Accomplishments

- The College is commended for the involvement of all constituents in the development of the strategic priorities.
- The College is commended for the development of a detailed Campus Master Plan.

Recommendation

- The College should coordinate the various financial plans into a multi-year planning document that will align with its carefully crafted strategic direction. Specifically, Cortland’s four (4) strategic priorities should form the basis for a multi-year strategic planning document—that is, a detailed strategic plan—that can inform the budgeting process as well as all other aspects of the College’s functioning in the years ahead. This strategic plan should detail specific goals and strategies, and assign responsibility so that appropriate assessments can be conducted and future strategic adjustments made.

Summary of evidence and findings: Standard 3

- State revenues as a portion of the College budget was 41% in FY 2009 and has decreased to 31% in FY 2011 forcing the College to use its reserves to continue operations and fund unfunded mandates such as sustainability requirements, labor

contract wage and salary increases and procurement regulations.

- The College responded by establishing a hiring freeze, reductions in Other Than Personal Services, use of other revenue sources such as reserves and increasing the administrative rates from other funds that allowed them to continue all programs, centers and institutes.
- The hiring freeze has been released and gradually the positions are being filled in anticipation that state funding will continue at a maintenance level.
- Increases in fundraising and a subsequent increase in funds available from the endowment are used to subsidize scholarships and other internal programmatic support.
- Multi-year financial plans are in place for the Dormitory Income Fund as well as the Income Fund Reimbursable revenues that are aligned with the strategic priorities
- The College formed a Budget Decentralization Committee in response to a recommendation from the 2002 MSXHE report and issued twenty-five recommendations. Decentralization was completed in 2003-2004 and reverted to centralization for state-funded positions in 2006 as a result of issues that arose. The current system is working well in light of the budget issues with state funded positions.
- The campus has made considerable progress in meeting accessibility requirements and will complete the remaining areas to provide access during the residence hall renovations.

Significant Accomplishments

- The College administration should be commended for the transparency of the budget situation as well as continuing to provide a quality education in spite of the budget situation.
- The College administration should be commended for their success with the capital campaign to support the campus expansion and endowment growth.

Suggestion

- The College should continue to seek alternative sources of revenues that will continue each year as well as one-time sources.

Standard 4: Leadership and Governance
Chapters 2, 4, and 10 of the Self-Study Report
Standard 5: Administration
Chapter 10 of the Self-Study Report

Standard 4: *“The institution’s system of governance clearly defines the roles of institutional constituencies in policy development and decision-making. The governance structure includes an active governing body with sufficient autonomy to assure institutional integrity and to fulfill its responsibilities of policy and resource development, consistent with the mission of the institution.”*

Standard 5: *“The institution’s administrative structure and services facilitate learning and research/scholarship, foster quality improvement, and support the institution’s organization and governance.”*

- **The institution meets these standards.**

Summary of evidence and findings: Standard 4

The Cortland governance structure is well defined and is established by State Law, collective bargaining agreements and by principles of shared governance. The Cortland governance structure is a hierarchal structure emanating from the New York State Governor and legislative bodies to Cortland administration structure at the institutional, divisional, departmental and program levels. SUNY provides central administrative functions for Cortland with Cortland faculty, staff and students serving on various SUNY advisory committees. The Cortland College Council, also appointed by the Governor, has certain on-campus responsibilities that are very specific, prescribed and limited.

Administrative authority and responsibility at Cortland is delegated through a well-defined organizational structure designed to provide oversight and accountability. Various administrative processes are in place to ensure that all members of the administrative leadership are focused on furthering the mission and the goals it has set, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness and overall performance of the leadership, faculty and staff.

The Cortland Faculty Senate is the official means through which faculty participate in College-wide shared governance. The Faculty Senate addresses effective educational policies and other professional matters. In addition, the Faculty Senate address issues of professional behavior, ethical conduct and institutional integrity as they relate to administrators, faculty, students, and other personnel.

- Many of the administrative decision-making processes are prescribed and limited by various collective bargaining agreements. Faculty/Professional staff is represented by United University Professions, with Classified employees represented either by the Civil Service Employees Association or the Public Employees Federation.

The Cortland College governance structure encourages, promotes, and in some cases mandates student participation in all aspects of shared governance through the Student Government Association. There is strong evidence to support the self-study assertion of active participation and input from faculty, staff and students in shared governance.

- Both the College President and the Chairperson of the Cortland College Council certify that Cortland recognizes the Middle States Commission’s compliance requirement and upholds SUNY’s policies pertaining to

MSCHE standards and requirements of affiliation, as well as compliance with Federal Title IV requirements.

- Participative governance structures are encouraged and have been developed throughout the College and are actively utilized for decision making.
- Representatives of College constituent groups are all in agreement that communication through the shared governance structure is a mutual communication exchange system top down and bottom up.
- Cortland provides many opportunities for faculty, staff and students to become actively engaged in helping shape the mission, goals and programs of Cortland.
- Union leaders and Cortland administrators collaborate effectively to support Cortland's mission and goals.
- There is a very robust awards and recognition program across the college's constituent groups that recognizes longevity and service to the College and the community.
- Representatives from all College constituent groups are represented at the President's annual retreats.

Summary of evidence and findings: Standard 5

The administrative structure of SUNY Cortland begins with a SUNY system-wide Board of Trustees and a SUNY Cortland College Council. The College Council consists of nine members who have very clearly defined and prescribed limited Cortland campus responsibilities.

Operational administration of the SUNY College at Cortland begins with the College President as Chief Executive Officer and the President's Cabinet who are responsible for overall decision making. The President of the College directs staff and faculty in the administration of the College. The President and Cabinet use a variety of standing and ad-hoc advisory committees to gather data and input to facilitate informed decision making. The decision-making process contributes to and supports the institutional priorities as defined in the strategic plan.

Administrative authority and responsibility at Cortland are delegated through a well-defined organizational structure designed to provide oversight and accountability. Various administrative processes are in place to ensure that all members of the administrative leadership are focused on furthering the mission and the goals it has set, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness and overall performance of the College leadership, faculty and staff.

- The President's Cabinet reviews fiscal, academic, management and policy matters and makes Recommendations to the President concerning such matters.
- Administrative leadership focuses on one of the core values of 'maximizing resources' so that structures, decision-making, and processes all work toward institutional vision, responsiveness and sustainability.

- Cortland’s Faculty Senate assumes major responsibility for the development of the academic and curricular programming of the College, and is responsible for oversight of the research and service programs.
- To ensure campus-wide representation, the faculty Senate requires a full review of faculty governance structure at least every five years.
- The President and Cabinet are reviewed annually via secondary sources, self-evaluation and a compiled evaluation. The President is also reviewed annually by the SUNY Chancellor, with a comprehensive review and face-to-face interview.
- All administrative offices and academic departments are required to annually review all office/department assessment plans.
- Prudent budgeting and spending plans developed by the President, his Cabinet, and executed by Dean’s and Department Heads have allowed the institution to retain programs vital to its integrity and mission.
- Cortland provides opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to become actively engaged in participative, shared governance.

Standard 8: Student Admissions and Retention

Chapters 5 and 9 of the Self-Study Report

Standard 9: Student Support Services

Chapters 8 and 9 of the Self-Study Report

Standard 8: *“The institution seeks to admit students whose interests, goals, and abilities are congruent with its mission and seeks to retain them through the pursuit of the students’ educational goals.”*

Standard 9: *“The institution provides student support services reasonably necessary to enable each student to achieve the institution’s goals for students.”*

- **The institution meets these standards.**

Summary of evidence and findings: Standard 8

- Admissions standards have been reviewed routinely and assessed in terms of meeting the institution’s goals and its mission in a timely manner.
- After reviewing and measuring the type of student seeking admission to Cortland, there have been adjustments made to admissions practices.
- Potential students and their families are given accurate information about the institution and its offerings.
- Enrollment management strategies are reviewed locally and at the system level.
- Information about the institution’s publications, both written and electronic, is reviewed frequently.

- Cortland admits a growing number of transfer students each year and has identified potential problems with upper level courses as a significant area of concern.
- A separate office called Advisement and Transition has been developed to insure student success.
- Cortland is committed to improving student diversity and to fostering a multicultural based understanding across all social groups.
- Cortland conducts satisfaction surveys on vital services like Financial Aid and Admissions.
- Cortland attempts to reach all students through its electronic offerings that include: Facebook, mySpace, twitter, myRed Dragon and “Wiser Advisor.”
- Information about the University learning outcomes are clearly documented in the College Catalog.
- Special admission programs have been designated to address student achievement outside of traditional academic environments.
- The College has invested time and resources to be certain it has maintained its physical plant that is most supportive of the admissions process.
- The College should be acknowledged for its 84% first year retention rate.
- The College has identified a concern with attracting a diverse student population and the issues of retaining that population. It is committed to examining its enrollment practices in order to address this matter. It will be one of the topics discussed during its Presidential retreat in Summer 2012.

Significant accomplishments

The establishment of the Advisement and Transitions Office has been of great benefit to the College in serving the needs of undeclared majors.

Summary of evidence and findings: Standard 9

- Cortland has developed offerings that support student learning both inside and outside the classroom.
- 83% of all students have participated in at least one form of structured experiential education [internships, practicums, field work].
- There is strong indication of active student participation in campus activities with documented numbers [for example, 128,324 visits to the fitness center].
- The institution has clearly developed a commitment to “well-being” and to transforming student learning by providing significant support services.
- There appears to be institutional commitment to transformative learning as stated in the mission.
- Learning communities have been established in response to student interest and to meet special needs of students.
- Study abroad programs are active but it was noted need further documentation of what is learned.
- Commend the College on the creation of COR 101 which serves 1200 students.

- Residence life has developed a detailed rubric of its learning outcomes.
- All of student affairs are to be commended for its commitment to meeting CAS standards.
- The employment of full-time residence life staff living on-campus is a practice that has been important to student living experiences.
- Commendation is also extended to the Counseling Center [IACS], Health Services [AAAHC], Campus Police [DCIS], Civic Engagement [Carnegie Foundation elective classification] for being accredited.
- Sustained enrollments are an important goal of the College in particular with minority and underrepresented student groups.
- Using assessment techniques, satisfaction surveys, national surveys [NSSE for example], Cortland has identified issues of concern and had developed plans to address those issues.
- Concern is demonstrated over the increased number of substance abuse violations and the Student Affairs staff is developing interventions to address the concern.
- There is confirmed evidence of a positive working relationship between Academic and Student Affairs divisions, in particular regarding Civic Engagement. There is also evidence of a positive working relationship between the Academic and Student Affairs Divisions in supporting student leadership initiatives.
- A complaint procedure for students is in different office locations within the administrative structure of the campus.
- Providing student support services to all students with differing needs has been identified through the creation of the strategic plan. Diversity of the population of students is of significant concern and it has been included in the plans for the President’s Retreat to be held in Summer 2012.

Significant Accomplishments

- The cooperation between Academic and Student Affairs has been exemplary as evidenced by efforts in Civic Engagement and the creation of COR 101.
- The external accreditation of four areas [Counseling Center, Health Center, Campus Police and Civic Engagement] is commendable.

Suggestion

- With the University’s stated commitment to reviewing diversity as a part of its strategic plan, it is most important that as a community it develops a Social Equity Plan of Action that may include considerations of university administrative reorganization, student enrollment, faculty and staff recruitment and community education programs that address involvement with local community leaders.

Standard 10: Faculty

Chapters 4, 6, 7, and 10 of the Self-Study Report

Standard 10: *“The institution’s instructional, research, and service programs are devised, developed, monitored, and supported by qualified professionals.”*

- **The institution meets this standard.**

Summary of evidence and findings: Standard 10

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents and interviews with administrators, faculty, staff, students, and others, the team concluded:

- SUNY Cortland has established procedures and criteria for the faculty and other professionals, for appointment, promotion, tenure, and grievance that are available to all personnel.
- The faculty at SUNY Cortland are appropriately prepared and qualified for the positions they hold. A terminal degree is specified in the Tenure and Promotion Guidelines for all faculty positions.
- The Promotion, Tenure and Sabbatical guidelines specify various forms of evidence to be used in evaluating scholarship, teaching, professional growth and other faculty activities.
- The faculty provides oversight of the educational curricula of the College. Modifications of the curricula, proposals of new courses and/or programs are initiated and approved by the faculty. Curricular modifications go to the respective Deans, through the College Curriculum and Review, and Graduate Faculty Executive Committees and then to the Provost for approval. The policies indicated that the faculty has primary responsibility for curriculum development.
- Institutional support is provided for faculty development and advancement. Faculty may apply for grants to support professional development, sabbaticals, and travel through the Faculty Development Center, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, and other offices. Despite current economic conditions, the financial support has been maintained and increased.
- New faculty members are mentored by department chairpersons to ensure that they meet their goals for teaching effectiveness, research and service.
- The team has some concern about the increased reliance on the use of adjunct faculty, who have different procedures and protections applied to them than tenured and tenure-track faculty.

Significant Accomplishments

- Cortland has Learning Communities for Pre-Major (undeclared majors) students that are taught by upper division faculty which serve as recruitment vehicles for prospective students.
- The President's Leadership Coalition for Student Support enriches students' learning experiences.
- The Cortland Center for Environmental and Outdoor Education facility has been used for student and faculty orientations and retreats.

Standard 11: Educational Offerings
Chapters 5, 7, 8 and 9 of the Self-Study Report
Standard 12: General Education
Chapters 7 and 9 of the Self-Study Report
Standard 13: Related Educational Activities
Chapters 5, 7, 8 and 9 of the Self-Study Report

Standard 11: *“The institution’s educational offerings display academic content, rigor, and coherence appropriate to its higher education mission. The institution identifies student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings.”*

Standard 12: *“The institution’s curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, and technological competency.”*

Standard 13: *“The institution’s programs or activities that are characterized by particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorship meet appropriate standards.”*

- **The institution meets these standards.**

Summary of evidence and findings: Standard 11

Cortland provided an excellent review of topics related to Standard 11 in their Self-Study report and is to be commended for their thorough and critical evaluation of practices. Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents and interviews with administrators, faculty, staff, students, and others, the team concluded:

- The graduate and undergraduate educational offerings reflect a coherent sequence of courses for the programs offered at SUNY Cortland in accord with the institutional mission embracing academic excellence, transformational education, well-being and maximization of resources for its students.
- Analysis of institutional data under girded the institution’s decision to eliminate programs and departments with patterns of low enrollment that has resulted in maximization of human and material resources.
- Standardized course syllabi across the college were collaboratively revised and developed in academic programs to reflect the institution’s plan to link the college mission, program goals and student learning outcomes. (Although as noted in discussions regarding Standards 12 and 14, there is some unevenness across programs in departments with respect to the consistency with which this was accomplished.)
- It is also clear that the College is considering, for example, issues of academic rigor that are often overlooked. The issue of rigor is relevant when nearly 40% of incoming students are transfer students, there is an increase in the number of underprepared students, adult learners, accelerated students and international students, and an increase in utilization of distance learning courses.
- The College is aware that they should develop a campus vision and strategic plan for distance learning, and summer and winter term course offerings.

- The College learning resources offices are performing well and the Advisement and Transition office is recognized for doing an outstanding job at providing services and support to students regarding transition to college, academic planning, major choice, and academic decision making. Their role is to help students make the most of their college career by providing assistance with choosing a major, understanding SUNY Cortland policies and procedures, understanding advisement and registration, and connecting to campus resources.
- The new initiative under the umbrella of “Transformational Education” is exciting and the evidence indicates that SUNY Cortland offers a wide variety of transformational activities to students, faculty and staff.

Suggestions

- In order to assist gathering assessment information more efficiently in the future, we suggest obtaining information management software for submission of annual reports would be useful in gathering information more effectively and efficiently.
- We concur with recommendation 7.1 of the self-study that the Faculty Senate might wish to consider the inclusion of related statements in the required faculty Course Teacher Evaluations (CTE’s) as one means of assessing class rigor.
- These College efforts will be strained by the growing number of students in need of these services and suggest that increased resources should be made available.
- While outcome assessment data is regularly collected for many traditional experiences, the campus lacks a cohesive system to communicate, track and assess student learning outcomes for the co-curricular, transformative, service learning and experiential learning activities. It might be helpful for the College to evaluate the merits of a co-curricular transcript and/or portfolio system to link these activities and learning outcomes.
- We support the Self-Study recommendation to explore the use of the Bringing Theory to Practice Project as a benchmark to assess other forms of experiential education.

Summary of evidence and findings: Standard 12

To structure the review of Standard 12: General Education, the Team explored five (5) overarching questions including:

- (1) **Outcomes** – *Does Cortland clearly identify a set of learning outcomes identifying the most important knowledge, skills, and values that students should acquire in the general education program?*
- (2) **Curriculum Alignment** - *Is the Cortland general education curriculum explicitly designed to provide opportunities for students to develop increasing sophistication with respect to each outcome?*
- (3) **Assessment Planning** – *Does Cortland have a plan to cycle through the outcomes over a reasonable period of time, specifically identifying when, how, and how often each outcome will be assessed?*
- (4) **Assessment Implementation** – *Are the Cortland general education assessment studies systematically collecting valid evidence for each targeted outcome?*
- (5) **Use of Results** – *Does the Cortland community effectively use the general education assessment findings to have an impact?*

The evidence indicates that there are a clearly identified set of learning outcomes.

- The list of general education outcomes is reasonable, appropriate, and exceeds SUNY basic requirements. These outcomes are clearly identified and communicated to the campus community in a variety of manners including on the SUNY Cortland website, in the catalog, and reinforced at the Academic Convocation targeting first-year and new transfer students.
- The outcomes have explicit common rubrics (with only one exception) identified for assessing the course-embedded assignments and the course syllabi, and materials are regularly submitted and reviewed to insure alignment with the established learning outcomes.

The evidence indicates that the curriculum is designed to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate the learning outcomes; however, there does not appear to be a focus on students acquiring increasing levels of sophistication with the outcomes.

- Students appear to have reasonable opportunities to develop each of the general education outcomes and these opportunities are clearly identified on the SUNY Cortland website and other material provided to students and faculty.
- Students may develop increasing sophistication with respect to each outcome due to the presence of general education courses that include “introductory” and “upper division” courses (more for some categories than others). However, most categories of the general education program require only one course to satisfy the requirement and there is no systematic treatment of outcomes of the type that might be summarized in a curriculum map that shows “beginning,” “intermediate” and “advanced” treatment of outcomes.

The evidence reveals a well-developed plan to assess outcomes:

- The new assessment plan developed by the Cortland General Education Committee and the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment constitutes a fully articulated, sustainable, multi-year assessment plan (4 year cycle) that describes when and how each outcome will be assessed.
- This plan further allows for review and revision of the plan, as needed, based on experience and feedback from internal & external reviewers. A good example of this derives from a Department Chairs Survey wherein “88% of chairs indicated that they have either failed to be apprised of GE assessment results in a timely fashion and/or they did not find the assessment results useful.” These data were used to revise the assessment plan by developing a clearer and more concise response form to help facilitate the conversation and review process, and, in Summer 2011, the Office of Institutional Assessment and Research hired a third staff member to help with the heavy assessment workload.
- The plan also clearly uses comparative data (primarily its own past record) to track the effectiveness of the program and value of plan revisions as well as to begin addressing issues related to academic rigor. However, as with many colleges, the establishment of performance benchmarks to help identify successes or challenges within the general education program are sparse but it should be noted that these discussions are beginning.

The evidence suggests that the assessments are valid; however, little information was available to evaluate issues related to reliability although some examination of inter-rater reliability did occur.

- Course-embedded assessments now used for general education program assessment efforts

(since the SUNY System decision to streamline assessment thereby allowing campuses to select their own assessment instruments) are reviewed carefully by the GE Committee, and in a growing number of instances, by area subcommittees such as the College Writing Committee and the Quantitative Skills Committee. This level of review helps to ensure that the assessments are valid for each of the student learning outcomes related to a given general education category and can be assessed with the established rubric.

- The use of assessment rubrics requires a calibration (norming) session as a means of providing training that, among other things, can increase reliability. Calibration usually involves a training session in which raters apply rubrics to pre-selected examples of student work that vary in quality; then they reach consensus about the rating each example should receive. The purpose is to ensure that all raters apply the criteria in the same way so that each student's product would receive the same score, regardless of rater.

The evidence does suggest that the data are having an impact despite some past concerns with the timeliness and usefulness of data formats. In fact, ample evidence was provided to indicate that the general education assessment data is impacting practice.

- For example, the 2009-2010 General Education Assessment Committee Annual Report indicated that syllabi reviews must be initiated earlier in order to be prepared for the next cycle.
- The 2010 report created for category 10, basic writing, is a model for ways that other designated category groups can assess their own learning outcomes and report back to the larger campus community. For example, it was stated in this review that "...Argument and research constitute areas of difficulty for our students. At the end of the year, 7.8 percent of students in the sample wrote essays "not meeting" the outcomes. Many of these students need a substantial amount of guided practice in the manipulation of ideas, and much encouragement to move out of the habit of learning by rote and parroting (and sometimes pirating) ideas. Because our students have such difficulty working with source material, we should consider changing Writing Studies I to incorporate serious work with sources in the first semester, rather than waiting until the second semester of composition to begin this complex area of study."

Suggestions

- The Cortland general education program should consider moving toward a systematic treatment of learning outcomes of the type that might be summarized in a curriculum map that shows "beginning," "intermediate" and "advanced" treatment of outcomes across courses. This can be done to facilitate comparing the various courses approved for a given general education category. It can also help to reinforce the comments outlined by AAC&U (Association of American Colleges and Universities) in their report titled *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College* (2002, p. 31), "the goals of liberal education are so challenging that all the years of college and the entire curriculum are needed to accomplish them. Responsibility for a coherent curriculum rests on the shoulders of all faculty members working cooperatively."
- We concur with the comments identified in Self-Study Recommendation 7.2 a. The establishment of performance benchmarks, and perhaps more importantly the conversations that lead to the establishment of benchmarks, can help identify success or challenges within the general education program. We encourage Cortland to pursue this topic in the coming years.

- We also suggest that other elements of the Self-Study Recommendation 7.2 be pursued. Specifically, to help increase involvement in the review and use of assessment results, subcommittees dedicated to the general education categories modeled from the existing subcommittees may prove beneficial. This would help eliminate the “slipping between the cracks” for data that sometimes occurs after collections but before utilization.

Summary of evidence and findings: Standard 13

As also highlighted in the discussion regarding Standard 11, Cortland provides a vast array of support services designed to assist underprepared students, students with disabilities, and students who need assistance to be successful.

- Offices such as Student Development Center, Advisement and Transition, and Tutoring, along with programs such as Academic Support and Achievement Program enjoy a respected position on campus due in large measure to their ability to document their successes. For instance, as cited in the Self-Study “Over 81% of those who came to ASAP in the fall with low indicators of academic confidence and inadequate short- and long-term study behaviors (see Figure 7.2) ended their semester with at least a 2.0 GPA. Notably, those students who attended ASAP in the spring had considerably lower scores than those who came in the fall, yet over 71% still achieved at least a 2.0 GPA. In addition, 72% of the students who were on academic probation in the spring earned a semester GPA of at least 2.0.”

The certificate programs offered at the graduate level have been approved by the college faculty with clearly defined objectives, requirements and desired outcomes. The international programs offered to the student fit within the mission of the college to provide enriched global experiences for its students.

Evidence also indicates that structured activities such as service learning, internships, residence life student training programs, student research activities, peer tutoring and athletics are largely effective and are linked to learning objectives. The Self-Study describes the wide variety of transformative educational experiences linked to curricular offerings as well as co-curricular activities of SUNY Cortland. Additionally, students often pursue experiential activities independently. With over sixty recognized student clubs and organizations, a vibrant service learning program, an extensive intramural and club sport team program, intercollegiate athletics, a well-developed internship network, strong campus leadership programs, active learning communities, a rich study abroad program and multiple other opportunities for engagement, students have many options to participate in transformational experiences.

- For example, the College’s Institute for Civic Engagement (ICE) is currently a demonstration site for Bringing Theory to Practice, an independent project in partnership with the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). This project will evaluate “high-impact learning,” including service learning, learning communities, undergraduate research, community-based research, senior theses, capstone courses, internships, international experiences, and multicultural experiences. This project will serve as a model to expand analysis into other co-curricular and extracurricular activities outside of the classroom.
- Successful structured experiential learning activities are developed, and designed through a collaborative effort with the faculty to ensure a strong link to a course or program’s learning objectives. Service learning offers a strong example of such collaboration at SUNY Cortland.

- Students participating in structured internships are required to work with faculty members to identify specific learning objectives for the experience. These learning objectives are stated on internship Learning Agreements and other departmental tracking forms. Final assessments and grades are based upon completion of academic work linked to these learning objectives as well as Employer Intern Appraisals.

Suggestions

- Given the increase in number of students requiring support services, for instance the 12.8% increase in number of students seen by Student Disability Services, we support the Self-Study recommendation to maintain, and preferably increase support services and opportunities for underprepared students. This may take the form of increases in budget, personnel, and/or technological support to increase student awareness of these programs, for example.
- Expanding support for assessment efforts, including an increase in “top-down” reinforcement of the importance of assessment perhaps by expanding professional development opportunities, and expanding the responsibilities of the College Assessment Committee, may advance the assessment efforts directed at specifying the success students achieve by participating in transformative experiences.

Standard 7: Institutional Assessment
Chapters 4 and 10 of the Self-Study Report
Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning
Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10 of the Self-Study Report

Standard 7: *“The institution has developed and implemented an assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals and its compliance with accreditation standards.”*

Standard 14: *“Assessment of student learning demonstrates that, at graduation, or other appropriate points, the institution’s students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals.”*

- **The institution meets these standards.**

Summary of evidence and findings: Standard 7

- Assessment at SUNY Cortland involves both “top down” and “bottom up” approaches in keeping with the notion that the job of each member of the campus community includes assessment.
- SUNY Cortland has systematic, sustained process of assessment that includes: establishing goals, setting policy, choosing and generating learning outcome measures, analyzing data, making changes based on analysis and sharing results at all levels for many departments and service units.

- SUNY Cortland should be commended for developing a complex assessment effort containing 11 Elements and 5 Levels(See below). They systematically collect, analyze and relate their existing data and information to clearly identified goals.

Elements

1. Overall Assessment Plan
2. Assessment Philosophy
3. Student Learning Outcomes Goals
4. Assessment Policies
5. Student Learning Outcomes Measures (Direct)
6. Student Learning Outcomes Measures (Indirect)
7. Measures Usage
8. Banner Database Retrieval
9. Online Interface, Retrieval Analysis
10. Online Surveys
11. College Assessment Committee Grants to Improve Assessment

Levels

1. Federal
2. State
3. SUNY
4. SUNY Cortland
5. External Accreditation

- At Cortland, assessment also begins with faculty and staff members assessing students and the College on a daily basis, and develops into program, department, school, unit, and College assessment systems.
- Evidence of the use of assessment results is found in several formal assessment reports:
 - Annual Reports of Academic and Service Units Outline
 - Specialized Program Association reports
 - Program Reviews
- In most cases, assessment results at SUNY Cortland are shared and discussed with appropriate constituents and used in institutional and department planning.
- As discussed in the evaluation of Standard 12, SUNY Cortland’s periodic evaluation of the effectiveness of the institution’s assessment processes led to the development and implementation of a new GE Assessment plan and timeline.
- As with the GE Program, the review and use of Student Learning Outcomes needs to be formalized, assessed and utilized. The College General Education Committee can serve to facilitate this process.

Significant Accomplishments

- GE Assessment Plan, review and implementation process
- Articulation of overall assessment plan, philosophy, and policies is clear and shared with all constituencies.
- Annual Reports of Service Units

Suggestions

As stated in Recommendation 7.2 improvement of the GE process would include establishing and/or revising benchmarks for each category, continuing establishing subcommittees in all category areas to discuss assessment issues throughout the assessment process, increase access and involvement in review of assessment results to provide recommendations for improvement/change within categories and disseminate the GE results in a more timely and specific way so that faculty can critically examine the effectiveness of their GE offerings.

Explore development/purchase and utilization of information management software for submission of annual reports to gather information more effectively and efficiently and make findings more accessible.

As stated in Self-Study Recommendation 4.2 the following will strengthen the College-wide assessment process:

- a. Develop a College-wide plan for monitoring the effectiveness of the new standardized annual report format as a method for alignment of individual and unit annual reports with institutional strategic priorities.
- b. Explore the further development of data management strategies that would facilitate the alignment of activities and resources with the strategic plan.

Summary of evidence and findings: Standard 14

Approximately half of Cortland students are in Teacher Education, therefore, teacher certification examination results are one of the primary institution-wide assessment measures for student learning outcomes. The data provides a rich resource of information that is routinely reported to the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

Review of Department syllabi, Annual Reports, Program Reviews and discussion with Cortland community, it is evident measurable Student Learning Outcomes are assessed and shared and results are used to inform practice, in all NCATE, SPA accredited and other external accredited programs with clear documentation and demonstration of usage of assessment results. However, there are clear instances where this is not true among departments that do not have external accreditation.

Significant Accomplishments

- Annual Department Reports
- Program Review Process
- Achievement of external accreditations (NCATE and Special Program Associations)

Suggestions

- Explore further development/purchase of data management strategies to utilize information management software for submission of annual reports, to gather information more effectively and efficiently and to make assessment findings more accessible.
- Revisit the role of the College Assessment Committee

Recommendation

- Measurable goals, objectives, and student learning outcomes should be developed and assessed in all academic programs—regardless of external accreditation—at the course, program and unit levels, with the goal of creating and maintaining a culture of continuous improvement with regard to all of Cortland’s strategic goals and priorities.

- VI.** The two recommendations already presented by the Team—one in Standard 2, and above in Standard 14—are seen as important and related. The goals for assessment must be part of the goal structure of a detailed strategic plan—via the key priorities of Academic Excellence and Transformational Education. For without assessment, there can be no compelling evidence that those lofty priorities are being achieved.

Conclusion

In conclusion, under the strong and collaborative leadership of President Bitterbaum, Cortland has made great progress since its last Middle States evaluation, and is clearly poised to achieve even greater heights in the years ahead. While funding concerns and other uncertainties will always have to be dealt with, the Cortland community has shown great capacity and skill in working together to overcome great challenges. This collaborative spirit may become even more important in the years ahead, but at this point in the College’s history, the Cortland family is certainly entitled to a *brief* period of celebration for the successes of the past, before moving on to face and overcome the daunting challenges of the future. And at this time, we call on all members of the Cortland family to work together to make the Cortland dream a reality.

The Team believes that Cortland has a bright future ahead of it. And we, your Middle States colleagues on the Team, who share your passion and commitment to public higher education, wish you great success as you work to accomplish your noble mission.