

Report to the  
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, and  
Students of Plymouth State University  
Plymouth, New Hampshire

by

an Evaluation Team representing the  
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education  
of the  
New England Association of Schools and Colleges

Prepared after study of the institution's  
Self-Study Report and a visit to  
the campus, October 19-22, 2003

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This report presents the views of the evaluation committee as interpreted by the chairperson. Its content is based on the committee's evaluation of the institution with respect to the Commission's criteria for accreditation. It is a confidential document in which all comments are made in good faith. The report is prepared as an educational service to the institution and to assist the Commission in making its decision in regard to the institution's accreditation status.

## **Introduction**

Throughout the Evaluation Team's visit, all members of the Plymouth State University (PSU) community provided cordial hospitality, offered full assistance to the Team, and furnished all the information requested. The community was aware of the purpose of the Team's visit and was prepared to answer questions.

Numerous individual and group meetings were conducted with campus leaders, including faculty, students, administrators, and staff. Several meetings were held with senior administrators, and Team members met individually or in groups with administrators, including the president of the University. Team members met as well with available department chairpersons, the speaker of the faculty, and the leaders of administrative faculty Senates, and the student government. A Sunday evening reception and luncheon meetings on Monday and Tuesday were attended by administrators, student and faculty leaders, and individuals who coordinated the preparation of the Self-Study Report. On Tuesday, Team members met with two members of the Board of Trustees who were extremely knowledgeable about the mission, purposes, and state of the University. Two team members visited an off-campus site and met with a program coordinator and graduate students.

The Evaluation Team found the Self-Study Report to be an accurate portrayal of the general state of the institution. Materials provided were well organized and accessible in copy and, in most cases, electronically on the web site created for the visit. Documents such as the Strategic Plan, Catalog, View Book, Audited Financial Reports, Campus Master Plan Reports, and Faculty Handbook gave an accurate and comprehensive description of the state of the University. A review of these documents before and during the Team's visit (October 19-22, 2003), the chair's preliminary visit (February 25, 2003), and the meetings held by Team members on campus are the basis for the information and the evaluative judgments contained in the 11 sections of this report, which addresses the *Standards for Accreditation* of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

This evaluation of PSU is a comprehensive evaluation that follows its fifth-year report submitted in 1998.

## 1. *Mission and Purposes*

In fall 2003 the institution changed its status and designation from Plymouth State College to Plymouth State University and adopted a new mission statement. Campus discussion of the proposed change in status and conversations of the president with faculty in spring 2002 supported the need for an updated mission statement. The previous statement (1991) was deemed too long and did not include sufficient acknowledgment of the new focus on graduate and continuing education. The new statement was formulated by the College Planning Committee (CPC), was discussed thoroughly on campus, and was accepted by the Board of Trustees in October 2003. The approved version was posted on the web.

The mission statement identifies Plymouth State University as a comprehensive institution and as the educational and cultural center of the region. It is dedicated to preparing well-rounded graduates who will serve their communities with distinction. Its name and mission are consistent with sentiments expressed by various campus constituencies in that both accurately reflect the campus programs, such as the increased importance of graduate professional programs in education and business, and the greater demand for the training of practitioners to meet regional workforce needs. However, faculty and administrators have not fully come to terms with how the change in status could or should affect many aspects of the institution.

The University is about to launch a strategic planning process to replace the plan in place since 1999. The mission statement's commitments can be usefully employed relative to curriculum development and assessment efforts for the purpose of evaluation of institutional effectiveness.

### **Strengths**

- The new mission statement reflects the charge given the institution by the State Board of Trustees to serve regional educational needs while affirming the University's commitments to students and the surrounding community to provide access, high-quality education, and cultural resources.
- Development of the new involved broad campus participation has been embraced by the campus community.

### **Areas of Concern**

- Renamed a university, the institution has not yet fully considered or sufficiently delineated what the new status implies for its operations and identity.

## Suggestions

- The leadership should capitalize on the significant opportunity presented by the changed mission and the new name and articulate its vision to the campus community.
- The institution could use the new strategic planning process as a mechanism for assisting the campus community to understand how the change in mission and name will affect the campus.
- The development of a short complementary mission statement that lends itself to display and inclusion in publications could be an effective tool for communicating with prospective students, parents, and the public, and for supplementing recruitment and marketing efforts.

## 2. *Planning and Evaluation*

The University has demonstrated that it values planning through developing and executing a strategic plan linked to resource allocation that is reviewed and updated annually. In developing the plan, the CPC received input from campus constituencies. Many of the plan's goals have been realized. The institution is well-positioned to begin working on a new strategic plan that examines the implications of its new status and revised mission.

Other planning bodies have been established to address issues identified through the strategic planning process, e.g., the Assessment Task Force, which made recommendations to the president. In 2003 each academic department developed its own strategic plan, using a format provided by the vice president for academic affairs. These discrete plans have not been integrated into a coherent academic plan to guide programmatic adjustments, curriculum and program development, and resource allocation based on academic priorities. The College Budget Committee allowed resource allocation recommendations for academic programs to be tied directly to the strategic plan. PSU recognizes the necessity for an academic plan to make optimum use of resources and that non-prioritized proliferation of programs cannot persist.

The University is making a strong effort to connect planning to resource allocation through the College Budget Committee and the efforts of the vice president for academic affairs to connect departmental budget requests to departmental strategic plans and assessment evidence. The FY03 and FY04 budget recommendations centered on addressing current shortfalls but were mindful of making choices that would allow the University to move toward realization of the goals laid out in the strategic plan.

The University has made progress toward creating a culture of assessment and planning through the president's leadership and by provision of resources to support planning and evaluation including the recently established Office of Institutional Research (OIR) to

coordinate the collection, analysis, reporting, and dissemination of institutional data such as the IPEDS, Common Data Set, and data support for University projects such as the Foundations of Excellence Program and NCATE accreditation.

The faculty has generally embraced its developing role in assessment and has been using the results of early assessment to make program and curriculum changes. In 2002, the Assessment Advisory Group (AAG) was established to provide support to academic departments, and administrative responsibility for coordinating the assessment effort was assigned to the associate vice president of undergraduate studies. Departments were asked to develop goals and objectives for majors/programs by spring 2003, with implementation in fall 2003. The AAG reviewed and gave feedback to departments on all outcomes; it will do the same for department assessment plans. Fifteen of sixteen departments have completed outcomes, and one-third to one-half have completed plans, according to information posted on the assessment web site.

A University-wide plan for the assessment of major programs and the general education program has not yet been formulated. As the University implements the new General Education curriculum, major program curricula will also change. The plan will be an important element for assessing the effectiveness of the new curriculum.

An academic program review process reviews programs on a six-year cycle. Campus conversations and documentation indicate that departments have used the reviews to initiate curriculum changes and to develop new programs.

As new planning processes have come into being, the existing governance structure has been maintained, resulting in a two-tiered planning system. University committees and task forces with administration-appointed memberships and faculty committees with elected memberships involved in planning and assessment review the same areas; for example, there are two committees that deal with technology. The Computer Advisory Board, a university-wide planning body comprising appointed faculty and staff, developed a strategic plan for campus technology acquisition, support, and end-user training. The faculty Instructional Technology Committee is charged by the vice president of academic affairs (VPAA) to undertake specific technology projects.

### **Strengths**

- The strategic planning process involves the entire campus community and includes a process for monitoring progress and making changes in the plan on an annual basis in which the entire campus community can participate.
- The faculty, administration, and staff are committed to making planning, assessment, and budgeting effective supports for achievement of the University mission.

- The Office of Institutional Research provides a central point for coordinated collection, analysis, and dissemination of data to support planning and assessment.

### **Areas of Concern**

- Although the Assessment Advisory Group reviews plans and makes suggestions, it does not have direct authority to move the assessment process along in the departments, to create an effective assessment process, and to develop a University-wide assessment plan.
- Other than the strategic plan, an academic plan that would chart the development of programs and curricula does not exist.
- There does not appear to be a direct link either through governance or practice between the processes of strategic planning, resource allocation, and academic program review.

### **Suggestions**

- Develop a University-wide academic plan to guide program and curriculum development.
- Formulate and implement an institution-wide plan for the assessment of student learning outcomes in majors and the general education curriculum that is linked to planning and resource allocation, and provide meaningful support and direct coordination of the plan.
- Use the resources of the Office of Institutional Research to collect and analyze data necessary for planning, assessment, and resource allocation decisions at the University, school, and program levels.

### *3. Organization and Governance*

As part of the University System of New Hampshire, PSU has a complex governance process. At the system level, the Board of Trustees and the chancellor set overall policy and publish the system-wide *Policy Manual* that details campus responsibilities. The trustees have recently redefined their role to allow the presidents additional authority over their individual campuses while retaining the trustees' own right to establish system-wide policies. The Council of Presidents meets regularly with the chancellor on matters of common concern and acts as a mechanism for upward as well as downward communication.

At the campus level, faculty members have jurisdiction over academic policies; their decision-making bodies are eight committees (on which students and staff, as well as faculty, are represented) as detailed in the Faculty By-Laws. The Executive Council

functions as a quasi-legislative body with representation from faculty committees, the staff, and student Senates, and directly elected faculty representatives. It is empowered to make decisions but often sends critical issues to general faculty meetings for discussion and a subsequent vote of the entire faculty in a “town meeting” setting.

Other areas of campus life are governed by entities specific to their arenas. For example, the Student Senate, the Professional and Technical Staff Senate, and the Operating Staff Senate each conducts business according to a published handbook. Graduate programs are well integrated into the academic governance-process, having been reorganized into a consolidated unit in 2001 - but planning for graduate programs is somewhat separate from overall academic planning and program development.

In addition, several ad hoc or advisory committees and task forces have specific areas of responsibility, usually with narrower scopes of authority and more limited timelines than the standing committees. Some faculty members see the administration’s increasing use of task forces to investigate specific issues and make recommendations as a way of bypassing the relatively slow and cumbersome governance system. Overall, the number of formal governance committees, ad hoc committees, task forces, and advisory committees is large for a campus of this size and may lead to some confusion, lack of focus, or duplication of effort.

The campus appears to be exhausted by the load of work created by the current committee structure. As one long-time faculty member commented, “The time is ripe” to review and streamline governance. The change from a college to a university can provide the opportunity to review the governance structure and such related issues as promotion and tenure criteria, and guidelines for campus outreach, as part of the campus discussion of “what it means to be a university.”

Untenured faculty may be under pressure to accept committee assignments even though they need to spend significant amounts of time on their scholarship. Further, the extensive committee structure may make it difficult to maintain the level of engagement and energy required to accomplish labor-intensive projects.

The president and the vice president for academic affairs sit on the Executive Council and regularly consult with other governance bodies. In concert with the trustees and faculty, they have been responsible for forging the campus’s strategic vision, positioning the institution to emphasize quality teaching, learning, scholarship, and outreach.

PSU should consider rethinking the types and number of students involved in campus decision making. Rather than, in the words of one staff member, “trying to err on the side of inclusion,” perhaps it would be more practical to focus student participation on, in the words of the accreditation standard, “those matters in which students have a direct and reasonable interest.”

Student representation on campus-wide committees is uneven. Many of the faculty committees have difficulty retaining student members and encouraging their meaningful

participation. Some of the difficulty may be attributable to the large number of student seats available relative to the number of interested students. Another contributing factor may be the possible irrelevance to students of the responsibility of the faculty committees.

### **Strengths**

- Talented, hard-working faculty members who participate energetically in the governance of the institution.
- Students who enter into the life of the University and numerous student organizations, and a Student Senate that involves a significant number of students and seems to be an effective governance body.
- The University System of New Hampshire governance - the central Board of Trustees and the Administrative Board of presidents - provides strong oversight of financial resources and the opportunity for coordination of policies and programs across the system. The division of responsibilities between the system and the campus is clear and communication channels are abundant.
- The Trustees seem to be knowledgeable about the unique characteristics and challenges of the individual campuses.
- The current University organization of academic administration establishes a logical distribution of responsibilities among the vice presidents and equitable workloads to allow for appropriate supervision of operations.
- Campus governance is controlled by well-defined rules and updated handbooks that layout campus policies, including mechanisms for reviewing and updating the University mission statement and other pertinent documents.
- Governance allows faculty a strong role in the development, oversight, and quality control of most areas of campus life.
- The creation of the Executive Council has provided active coordination of University-wide initiatives and activities.

### **Areas of Concern**

- The governance process creates 415 committee positions for faculty that 156 faculty members must fill. The number of committees and large size of some have several negative consequences. Some faculty report being “pulled in too many directions” or being “overworked” because of the heavy service burden.



- The responsibilities of the Executive Council and other governance bodies such as the general faculty meeting should be clarified to avoid confusion of roles. If the Executive Council is effective and has mechanisms for faculty input, is the general faculty “town meeting” still a viable decision-making group?
- Uneven student participation on non-student campus committees.

### **Suggestions**

- A great opportunity and an obvious need exist for PSU leadership to establish a clear set of institutional priorities.
- PSU should streamline its governance and administrative processes through an examination of associated structures, clarification of roles and responsibilities, and reduction of duplication, all of which would conduce to more effective overall governance.
- Encourage student participation on campus committees by assigning students to committees whose matters students have a direct and reasonable interest.
- Graduate programs should be an integral part of institutional planning and resource allocation processes.

## *4. Programs and Instruction*

### *Undergraduate Degree Programs (including Instruction)*

Plymouth State University has made the transition from being an institution with a predominantly undergraduate mission to a Carnegie Masters I University. The new mission contains the following: “by providing well-educated graduates; by offering ongoing opportunities for graduate education and professional development; and by extending to communities partnership opportunities for cultural enrichment and economic development.” Since the previous NEASC review, the institution has not offered associate degree programs. It offers 48 programs that lead to a baccalaureate degree, including four interdisciplinary majors. A number of majors have multiple options, and minors are offered in a number of areas.

Students need a minimum of 122 credits to graduate and must complete all general education requirements and all major degree requirements. Students seeking a B.A. must also complete the foreign language proficiency examination. PSU established the Council on the First-Year Experience, which has instituted a common reading for entering students. The Honors Program enrolls first-year and sophomore students but has not yet been implemented for upper-division students.

Plymouth State University provides faculty opportunities to enhance programs and instruction, and the vice president for academic affairs administers a budget for faculty development. Programs include the Writing Across the Curriculum program, new-faculty orientation, and reflective practice. The yearlong new-faculty orientation is an excellent means to assist faculty members to gain an understanding of the institution's culture and mission. A faculty fellowship program has addressed technology, outreach initiatives, and diversity. Faculty will have additional opportunities through the exchange program with institutions in England and Romania.

The University is commended on its Writing Across the Curriculum program and developing a national publication, *The WAC Journal*, in this important area. It is also commended for developing a proposal for revising and improving the General Education Program so as to overcome the concerns with the existing program. It is a move that will improve the educational experience of students. The administration encourages faculty to take sabbaticals for professional development and to work on academic initiatives.

A meeting with undergraduate students revealed a high level of satisfaction with their educational experience at PSU and praise for the faculty. Their primary dissatisfaction was with academic advising.

### **Strengths**

- Programs that develop human capital to serve the region, state, and nation.
- Eliminating the associate degree programs to reduce duplication with the New Hampshire Technical Institutes/Colleges and to utilize resources more effectively.
- The General Education task force report of April 2003, approved by the faculty, proposes the components of an improved General Education program. This overcomes significant shortcoming in the undergraduate program.
- The new First-Year Seminar (a component of the General Education program) slated for a fall 2004 implementation, is an excellent means to connect students to the academic community and develop skills needed to succeed in a rapidly changing world.
- *The WAC Journal*, a national publication, addresses an area of significant concern in undergraduate education, students' writing skills.
- Off-campus courses through the Continuing Education program assist nontraditional and location-bound students to achieve their educational objectives.

## Areas of Concern

- The institution has a commodious offering of majors (and options), some of which have low enrollments and have had few degrees awarded during the past decade.
- The present dynamic at PSU is to overreach by expanding programs and services, while putting less emphasis on assessing the effectiveness of programs and services that would lead to program adjustment and elimination. It appears that in trying to be all things to all people, everything becomes equally valid and valued.
- Despite the obvious scarcity of resources, PSU does not demonstrate that program development and elimination are guided by a clear set of priorities central to achieving the institution's mission and purposes.

## Suggestions

- Simplify the undergraduate curriculum to feature on programs central to the mission of the institution, paying particular attention to programs with excessive credit requirements. Eliminate under-enrolled programs, where appropriate, so as to fund new programs and initiatives.
- The University is encouraged to coordinate assessment efforts directed at learning outcomes systematically.

### *Graduate Degree Programs (including Scholarship and Research)*

Plymouth State University has a proud history and its focus is on teaching and learning. Graduate programs include the Master of Business Administration, Master of Education, and Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies. There appears to be a great deal of satisfaction with and appreciation of the effort that PSU has made in graduate studies and in community outreach. The institution should be commended for these truly collaborative programs that are designed to meet the needs of northern New Hampshire. Other graduate programs are being contemplated and appear to be in the planning stage.

A meeting with graduate students (the majority of whom were pursuing a Master of Education degree) revealed a high level of satisfaction with their program and their interaction with faculty. However, they expressed concern with the lack of formal graduate courses in certain areas and the need to meet requirements with independent study courses (some of which were senior courses with an additional meeting time that did not allow for critical classroom discussion).

## **Strengths**

- Graduate programs in education and in business designed to meet the needs of the region and the state.
- Growth in enrollments, and the accommodation of nontraditional students and employed individuals interested in pursuing a graduate degree.
- Close interaction and collaboration with the community, teachers and principals in the school system, and the College of Lifelong Learning.

## **Areas of Concern**

- Lack of documentation of the scholarly activity and productivity of the graduate faculty.
- Reduction of enrollments in the MBA program.

## **Suggestions**

- Prior to developing a graduate program, articulate a plan on how it is to be funded and supported to ensure quality and integrity.
- The scholarly activity of faculty should be supported, rewarded, and documented.
- Assist faculty in preparing proposals for external funding from state and federal sources and from foundations, and for contract funding.

## *Admissions and Retention*

In recent years PSU has enlarged its undergraduate applicant pool. This has allowed for an increase in the number of students admitted to the institution and ultimately of those who accept admission. The University offers provisional admission to students who have not met the required three years of high school mathematics; the students are enrolled in courses to enhance their math skills. The program has been successful in preparing these students to pursue a baccalaureate degree. The development of a three-credit First-Year Seminar should help improve first-year to second-year persistence rates.

PSU has program articulation with associate degree program in Teacher Preparation and Liberal Studies that assists transfer to baccalaureate programs. It also has a plan to facilitate transfer of students from the state's Technical Institutes/Colleges, whereby their general education courses will, as a block, meet PSU requirements are commendable.

Advising appears to be an area of concern for many students. Although the University has taken steps toward improving advising services for juniors through the Office of Undergraduate Advising, this needs to be reevaluated, especially for first-year students.

### **Strengths**

- Increasing number of undergraduate, transfer, and graduate student applicants admitted.
- Efforts to evaluate transfer credits consistently and in a timely fashion.

### **Areas of Concern**

- The heavy reliance on and need to admit out-of-state students.
- The room for improvements in first-year to sophomore persistence rates.
- More needs to be done to ensure access of underrepresented students.
- Student advising remains worrisome.

### **Suggestions**

- After determining key reasons for first-year student attrition, take appropriate actions to improve first-year to second-year persistence, especially of out-of-state students.
- Finalize and implement the plan to facilitate transfer of students from the New Hampshire Technical Institutes/Colleges to PSU.

## *5. Faculty*

PSU displays a strong sense of community. It has a well-qualified faculty, with the self-study reporting that 97 percent have appropriate terminal degrees. Salary enhancements have brought the FTE salaries more in line with regional salaries, and heightened support for faculty development through funding of release time, professional travel to conferences, and sabbaticals is strengthening professional development, especially related to institutional improvement. Sabbatical leaves have increased and are provided to faculty to pursue creative and scholarly activities, or other professional activities. With the exception of one year when twenty sabbaticals were granted, the average number of leaves has been less than ten. The vice president for academic affairs stated that any faculty member who proposes a worthwhile project should expect to receive a sabbatical.

PSU has a full-time faculty of 171 and a part-time faculty of 134. The overall student: faculty ratio is 16:1. The teaching load is 24 hours, with the possibility of overload for

graduate teaching managed at the departmental level. The age distribution of the faculty is skewed toward more senior faculty, with one-third of the present faculty 55 years of age or older. The faculty has been undergoing significant transition in the past decade with 78, or nearly 45 percent of the total FTE, either retiring or leaving the institution in the past ten years. Opportunities for future new hires offer some promise in addressing areas of concern outlined below.

The academic vice president supports the Center for Teaching and Learning (established since the previous NEASC evaluation), the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Task Force (with its own national journal), and the Reflective Practice group, each of which enhances both the scholarly and teaching missions of the institution. The Society for Scholarly Dialogue organizes lunch and dinner gatherings each semester for PSU and visiting scholars. Faculty development should be recognized as an important institutional priority to be supported by the administration.

Faculty members are historically represented broadly on University committees and play an active role in their own governance. There are 2.6 committee assignments per faculty person. Faculty members have a sense of ownership of the curriculum and express confidence in their self-governance. At this turning point in the institution's history, there is an opportunity for review of faculty governance together with a discussion of the streamlining or reorganization of committee work.

The faculty-driven process of the substantial revision of the General Education program is laudable. The revised program has generated a sense of excitement, with the promise of a reinvigorated faculty involvement.

Lack of diversity on the faculty and among the campus community at large is a major issue for PSU. Twelve faculty members of Asian descent and one African-American of Canadian descent constitute the cohort among the FTE faculty of racially/ethnically diverse backgrounds, and faculty in protected categories are underrepresented. Also, there are fewer women (30 percent) than men (70 percent) in the associate and full professor ranks.

Although the President's Commission on Status of Women is monitoring the representation of women on campus, and an Affirmative Action Commission has its plan, there does not appear to have been noticeable progress in diversifying the faculty. Although improvement has occurred in salaries, they are not sufficiently competitive for the recruitment and retention of a more diverse faculty.

The imminent retirement replacement of a significant proportion of the faculty opens an opportunity for its diversification by race/ethnicity, gender, and other protected categories.

Creative and scholarly productivity varies widely among faculty members and is not adequately documented. Nor has PSU clearly defined institutional or departmental criteria and expectations in that regard. Its new status opens the door for University-wide discussion and articulation. Internal resources and extramural grants could be used to support and enhance scholarly endeavors.

Part-time faculty are hired by individual departments and are used in significant numbers by a few departments. An evaluation of the appropriate role of adjunct faculty in the new General Education program and in staffing the new Freshman Seminar should be initiated.

No institution-wide criteria or standardized forms are in place for the student evaluation of teaching, which is an issue for discussion by the PSU community.

### **Strengths**

- A well-qualified faculty whose members play an active role in governance and in curriculum development.
- The faculty-driven process of the substantial revision of the General Education program is laudable.
- Active centers and societies that enhance both the scholarly and teaching missions of the institution.

### **Areas of Concern**

- Lack of diversity on the faculty and among the campus community.
- Individual faculty concerns that there is insufficient time to reflect upon pedagogy, pursue research, or improve syllabi because of four-course loads each semester, extensive committee work, and heavy advising.

### **Suggestions**

- Devise and implement a long-term, realistic, and proactive plan for diversifying the faculty and the campus environment.
- Investigate and take appropriate action regarding workload issues, e.g., four-course preparations and heavy committee work by individual faculty members.
- Support faculty assessment of learning outcomes in the majors and the revised General Education program.
- Engage in discussions and take appropriate action regarding institution-wide criteria and procedures for faculty renewal, tenure and promotion.

## *6. Student Services*

The PSU Division of Student Affairs under the leadership of a vice president encompasses athletics; campus safety; community relations; counseling and human relations; financial aid; international student affairs; judicial programs; health services; residence life and dining services; student activities and recreation; the wellness center; and women's services, etc.

Student Affairs operates within the standards of NEASC by providing programs, services, and resources to support student personal development and learning. Students are encouraged to participate in a variety of experiences designed to prepare them to become contributing citizens.

Employees in Student Affairs are qualified, credentialed, seasoned professionals who have a strong commitment to the institution. Collaboration appears to be the norm with regard to student development and learning. The staffs within the division collaborate with one another, and with other PSU units in creating and delivering programs and services. Campus committees are plentiful, and participation in them is seen by the staffs as a method of communicating and working with other offices. The committee structure allows for a variety of voices and brings Academic and Student Affairs personnel to the same table. The approach to campus matters appears to be a good one but is nonetheless a drain on personnel. Professional development opportunities, along with affiliation and participation in professional associations, are encouraged and supported. The leadership meets frequently to develop, implement, and assess plans and programs, both operationally and strategically to ensure that all students have equal access to programs and facilities.

Several opportunities exist for students to make connections on campus by means of membership in the numerous clubs and organizations related to their academic pursuits and/or social interests. Student leaders are developed in this way, as well as through structured programs, of which LEADS (Leadership Effectiveness and Development Seminar) is one. The Hartman Union Building (HUB) is an excellent facility that houses the student organizations, office and meeting spaces, food courts, mailboxes, bookstore, and space for recreation and fitness activities.

PSU students have the opportunity to study abroad and in the domestic exchange programs. An active international student organization sponsors programs and activities to which the campus community is invited. Students can also participate in internships, service-learning, and community service to broaden their life perspectives. The on-campus community and the local and regional communities are used as "classrooms" to foster learning through service learning and community service opportunities. Off-campus and part-time students have less access to student services such as training in behavioral expectations.



Demand for on-campus housing by both continuing and incoming students exceeds availability. A variety of housing options are offered, e.g., single, double, and triple rooms, and apartments; also special-interest housing, such as wellness, music and arts, and recreation. Students also live in town neighborhoods near and beyond those adjacent to the campus, including fraternities and sororities raising concerns among their neighbors. The concerns are addressed by community and campus members at meetings of the Campus Community Council. Campus and town police cooperate in addressing student behavior related to alcohol and/or other matters, an arrangement that has helped to hold students more accountable for their off-campus behavior and to improve town-gown relationships.

Improving diversity within the student population continues to be a challenge. Efforts are made to develop strategies to connect with and recruit among minority populations, e.g., the growing Latino community in Nashua and at high schools in the Boston area. Additionally, AHANA scholarships are annually available but are not fully utilized.

Various initiatives have been undertaken to celebrate diversity and to educate students. One is the Cultural Mosaic, a collaborative activity for first-year students that involves a common reading and dialogue, along with a convocation keynote speaker. The cultures of Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America were celebrated in the past three years. In addition, the Silver Cultural Arts Center and the student-run PACE organization hold events and activities throughout the year that feature diversity.

### **Strengths**

- Components of the division of student affairs work together, as well as with the division of academic affairs.
- Services and programs are student-centered, and students are happy to be at PSU because the staffs are dedicated, knowledgeable, and approachable.
- Staff meetings are held regularly, including an annual retreat to develop, implement, and assess plans and programs.
- Staff-development activities are encouraged and supported.
- Athletics strives to create equal opportunities for male and female athletes and has identified the need for a written plan for Title IX compliance.

### **Areas of Concern**

- Staff members serve on numerous committees; is a drain on personnel.
- A continuing need exists to address diversity in terms of student recruitment, retention, and resources.

- A continuing need exists to exercise effectively regulate student behavior off-campus and to work on university-community relations.

### **Suggestions**

- Evaluate committee memberships to ascertain how staff time and contributions would be better utilized.
- Develop and monitor strategies to enhance minority recruitment and retention strategies.

## *7. Library and Information Resources*

PSU has presented a clearly written and well-balanced analysis of its Lamson Library's resources that indicates that the library and its technology services are excellent, certainly more than sufficient to support the institution's move to University status.

The range of resources offered by the library is wide. Although any library collection can be improved, the library's paper, electronic, and microform resources are more than up to supporting the University's curricula. A number of faculty have enthusiastically commended the library's support of graduate programs. Its web site is flexible and comprehensive, and has a large number of clearly identified portals to a broad range of online databases.

One advantage of the library is that it receives considerable financial support from the University System of New Hampshire, mainly for purchase of electronic systems. PSU has increased its support for library acquisitions since 1999 without a commensurate growth in its operating budget. In addition, the institution's membership in the University System of New Hampshire and in the New Hampshire College and University Council has been beneficial. Involvement in consortia arrangements allows the library to enhance its outreach and resource-sharing while permitting PSU students expanded access to the resources of other consortium libraries. The library staff benefits from the increased contact with fellow librarians in the other consortium libraries.

The diligence of Information Technology Services (ITS) has reaped consistently positive results insofar as obtaining the hardware and software to achieve the level of technological support its clients need. ITS seems to have fared well over the past decade in funding support, but PSU may be approaching a ceiling in its ability to fund all the technological projects necessary for ITS to maintain its current level of service.

The library and ITS share a single, full-time technology position which clearly maintains communication and promotes a sense of working together toward shared goals. The newly appointed ITS director, who can provide a fresh perspective, says that he has never

seen a more integrated relationship between an ITS department and a library such as the partnership at PSU.

The library's staffing level of nineteen, including the director, is somewhat lean for a university library. The loss of three full-time positions over the past ten years, although ameliorated by the appointment of a full-time access services librarian by promotion from within the library staff, is a real hindrance to the library's efforts to provide all the services expected by its clientele. The Self-Study Report repeatedly stresses the need to hire an electronic resources and outreach librarian with responsibility to manage the library web page. Library staff also believes there is a need to hire a head of circulation to provide full-time management of circulation, and a non-MLS librarian-level full-time technology person.

An established balance should be attained among the various programs for which the library is responsible, so the current situation wherein the acquisitions budget is increases while library operations support lessens year after year will not persist. Again, it is not primarily a matter of insuring regular increases in allocations to the library, as highly desirable as that is.

Again, the quality of the collection, the evident service orientation of the library and ITS staff, the flexible library web site, the modern equipment and software, and high-speed connections all speak to the ability and careful attention of the library and ITS personnel.

A well-developed and designed library-use instruction program is integrated into the required freshman orientation classes. Elements of the program are available on the library web-site. This well-established library-education system must soon be redesigned to fit in with the new general education structure. The librarians are already beginning to plan for the transition to the new structure and have a good understanding of the challenges ahead.

### **Strengths**

- Both Lamson Library and ITS benefit from well-trained, dedicated, and enthusiastic personnel who possess the appropriate range of skills.
- A productive relationship between ITS and the library.
- The library provides an appropriate level of diverse resources in all formats at the university level.
- The benefits the library and ITS derive from membership in consortia, give them greater access to financial support for certain vital projects than would be the case if they were dependent exclusively on PSU resources.
- A well-developed library-use instruction program is integrated into the required freshman orientation classes.

## Areas of Concern

- Given the many duties expected of the library staff, including involvement in campus governance and other committee work, the staff feels overworked and staffing levels appear to be rather lean.
- Although financial support for the library fares no worse than for many of PSU peer components, the funding base has not been dependable over the past ten years, making it difficult to plan for future programs.

## Suggestions

- Staffing needs of Lamson Library should be prioritized and addressed expeditiously.
- The administration should work toward establishing a budget structure on which the library can depend and make a basis for fiscal planning at least into the near future.

## 8. *Physical Resources*

PSU has a well-maintained and attractive campus in a beautiful location. The physical plant provides a safe environment that supports teaching and learning, and a comprehensive array of student services. This investment in the physical plant is an important component of a reputation commensurate with the change to university status.

The tools appear to be in place to support strategic capital planning and space allocation so as to undergird the institution's mission, program enrollment, changing teaching and learning methods, and evolving delivery of services. Funding of capital needs, based on cost and life-cycle data, have been embraced by various constituents. Deferred maintenance concerns have been well documented and sound financial strategies have been proposed.

During the past decade, PSU has made significant capital investments based on thoroughgoing physical resource planning and facilities audits and assessments. Comprehensive plans were largely implemented. The 1993 plan recommended renovation of the Physical Education Center (not completed); Lamson Library (completed); Boyd Hall (16 million dollar project completed); Hall Residence (partially completed); Mary Lyon Hall (not completed), Blair Hall (partially completed); Hyde Hall (not completed); and Draper-Maynard Hall (completed). State funding will be sought for renovation of the Physical Education facility and a possible addition. Current capital spending from all institutional funds amounts to \$1.6 million. A Campus Needs Report is being devised to guide future capital investment.

PSU employs appropriate capital-needs tracking systems. A facilities condition index helps to identify deficiencies and prioritize capital projects. The Repair and Renovation Budget lists the sources of funds used for adaptation, renewal, campus safety, new construction, deferred maintenance, and IT infrastructure projects.

Deferred maintenance projects have been documented in the range of \$12 to \$15 million (not including infrastructure projects). Expenditures of \$3 million/year are a goal. The Board of Trustees' intent was to increase annual spending of the operating budget on deferred maintenance by \$200,000 per year, a sum that has been waived in the past few years. Based on that figure, maintenance spending would increase to \$5.1 million by 2022, which represent 3 percent of the current \$170 million replacement cost of facilities. Current FY2004 base spending is \$730,000.

The master plan envisions a new residence hall (599 beds to meet the 65 percent residence goal for the 4000-student target) and the renovation of Mary Lyon Hall (to be taken off-line for repair after opening of the new residence hall). These bond-funded projects might impact residence hall rates that are already higher than those at the University of New Hampshire.

With the exception of the current fiscal year and because of the Boyd Hall expansion, the budget for routine maintenance and staffing does not see any significant increase for a number of years. PSU relies on the state to pay for upgrades of major systems (e.g., for utilities) that are vulnerable and in need of repair, but in FY2004, the state is not providing any funding for such projects. In addition, there is a growing need for technology infrastructure upgrades and support.

### **Strengths**

- A well-maintained and attractive campus in a beautiful location.
- Past capital plans have been comprehensive and implemented to a significant extent.
- A new capital planning process has resulted in the Campus Needs Report, which addresses general and education space needs, residential space program, building condition report, utility infrastructure and floodplain constructions, parking and traffic needs, landscape issues, and athletic and fitness facilities.
- Significant funding has been obtained through the state capital program, Knowledge-Economy-Education Plan New Hampshire (KEEP NH) for academic building renovations and additions.
- Capital-needs tracking systems and the funding approach for renovations.

## **Areas of Concern**

- Budget for routine maintenance and staffing did not see any significant increase for a number of years (until this current fiscal year with the inclusion of an expanded Boyd Hall).
- In FY2004, the state has not provided funding for major systems (e.g., utilities) that are vulnerable and in need of repair.
- Growing technology infrastructure upgrades and cost requirements.
- Although funding for needed renovation of the athletic facility will be sought from the state, additional operating expenses will materialize because of the expanded space and offerings.
- The concentration of classes within the time span of 9:00 am to 2:00 pm or so contributes to academic space problems.

## **Suggestions**

- Communicate to the state and the PSU community the importance of investing in physical plant to enhance PSU's reputation.
- Modify scheduling to alleviate classroom space problems. The formation of the space-planning group appears to be a good mechanism to rationalize space planning and allocation activities.

## *9. Financial Resources*

PSU operates essentially as a "subsidized" private higher education institution and essentially under a high-tuition/low-aid model. With modest state support, PSU relies to a large extent on tuition and fees paid by out-of-state students (approximately 45 percent of total enrollment; the Board of Trustees annually waives the statutory 25 percent cap).

Current revenues have been dedicated to current expenditures, limiting PSU's capacity to increase reserves and thereby creating a high degree of uncertainty in budgeting, as well as constraining PSU's flexibility in responding to unexpected losses or revenue fluctuations. Overall, management appears to have a good record of adjusting costs to market conditions and of operating efficiently.

PSU appears to be close to the limit in generating revenue through tuition and fees to substitute for the lack of adequate state funding. Market conditions and residence hall capacity might put future price adjustments and enrollment growth out of bounds. Even now PSU already accepts approximately 80 percent of out-of-state applicants. Student charges are increasing approximately 3 to 6 percent. State financial aid support is

minimal and interest income has been declining. Hence, a further reduction in the base level of state funding will weaken PSU's ability to offer access to competitive programs for in-state students.

Cost increases in the areas of faculty salaries, fringe benefits, financial aid, utilities, technology investment, and debt service have put serious pressures on the PSU budget. Annual utility expenditures increased from \$1.2 million in FY1999 to \$1.7 million in FY2003. Despite these trends, PSU has shown a remarkable capacity to invest in new initiatives, a comprehensive curriculum, and physical plant improvements, as well as to make progress in addressing faculty salary concerns.

The ability of PSU to respond to crises could be seriously impaired by a combination of looming phenomena. Cost pressures could arise from the initiatives to raise faculty salaries to be in line with selected peer institutions, and to increase institutionally funded student financial aid. Further, the current deficit in the pooled system-wide fringe-benefits must be addressed; and a potential liability for payment in lieu of taxes to the town of Plymouth could increase from \$170,000/year to more than \$500,000/year. The governor's FY2004 budget recommended a 5 percent reduction in the PSU allocation. Although the system received level funding for the current year, the governor has the discretion on midyear rescissions to respond to state revenue shortfall. There is a continued necessity to address the deferred maintenance backlog, as well as ongoing building adaptation and renewal and the potential cost of higher interest payments resulting from residence hall renovation and additions under consideration.

PSU's indebtedness of more than \$32 million and its significant annual debt service commitments influence its bond rating and ability to borrow for additional facilities. Bond rating is determined by the overall financial performance of the system. The Board of Trustees has identified a target of housing two-thirds of the student body. More indebtedness and larger payments to service the debt could require institution-wide rent adjustments. Average room rates are currently more than \$400 (12 percent higher than UNH).

A number of financial ratios are currently below Moody's A2 institutions medians: net assets to operations below 15 percent, unrestricted net assets to total debt at 20 percent. Reserves (both general fund and auxiliary funds) are minimal. Three percent of operations as a target for reserve balances, a rather low standard, is not being met. The indicators affect PSU's financial capacity to carry out current and future programs.

Net assets were relatively stable prior to FY2003. They increased in FY2003 consequent upon state capital appropriations received under the Knowledge-Economy-Education Plan New Hampshire (KEEP NH) program.

Relatively stable giving over time suggests conservative assumptions for contributions from development efforts. The institution's new university designation and the Boyd Hall campaign hold some promise.

The Campus Budget Committee has a charge to link planning and budgeting; to develop a viable long-term financial plan; and to maximize the use of limited resources in support of Strategic Plan goals. The traditional incremental method of solving budget shortfalls tends to lead away from the Strategic Plan goals and away from a rational use of resources. Both the Campus Budget Committee and the College Planning Committee favor a value-centered process of budgeting that allows campus constituencies to share in a planning and budgeting process and direct institutional resources to mission-driven priorities.

### **Strengths**

- Improved campus budgeting processes link more directly to strategic planning through an open process that reveals how little budget latitude or discretion is available.
- Financial administration changes have included implementation of new Banner system for finance, grants management and human resource (FRESH) and implementation of new financial reporting standards issued by GASB.
- Relative autonomy, financial flexibility, and excellent relations and support from the central system office.
- Significant capital construction programs financed through HEFA bonds and KEEP NH (state funded) programs

### **Areas of Concern**

- Low levels of state appropriation support; state funding is significantly less than for comparative state institutions.
- Primary source of revenue is student tuition with a heavy reliance on out-of-state enrollment.
- Limited non-state non-tuition revenues and minimal reserves.
- Potential large increases in costs and diminishing state appropriation.

### **Suggestions**

- Implement the value-centered budgeting system to fund a set of clearly articulated priorities central to PSU's mission.
- Maintain clear channels of communication with campus constituencies to obtain support to address potential fiscal crises in the future.



## 10. Public Disclosure

All major publications relevant to public disclosure – academic catalogs, course listings, student handbooks and newspapers, recruitment materials, alumni publications – are available online as well as in paper format. Most publications have an easily readable “look” that is clearly PSU’s brand presentation. Online materials are easily visible at relevant sites, including *my.Plymouth*, which provides students and staff with the latest information about the University.

There is a consistent and forthright willingness at PSU to evaluate the effectiveness of publication materials and structure as they relate to communicating with current and prospective students, and other constituencies. A small entering class in 1996 prompted PSU to review its recruitment materials and hire an outside analyst to evaluate its communication structure. As a result, the position of director of public relations was established in 1999 to provide centralized coordination of the publications effort, a position that was recently changed to vice president for institutional advancement.

Materials and information intended for graduate students are less complete than undergraduate materials, and the effectiveness of graduate recruitment literature is not systematically assessed. Graduate Student Handbook information and other resources about financial aid, scholarships, loans, and the like are not available on line. PSU administrators have indicated that they intend to engage outside advertising agencies to handle publicity for the graduate programs.

Updating the public disclosure elements of the University web (including catalog information) remains a challenge for PSU, as it does for other institutions. For example, earlier versions of the mission statement, but not the officially approved statement, appear on the web. Making sure that web postings are current and easily accessible must be a priority of the University and the web administrator.

### Strengths

- Both online and paper publications have a recognizable “signature look” that is clearly PSU’s brand presentation.
- A long-term commitment to publications management and a forthright willingness to evaluate the effectiveness of publications relative to student recruiting and retention.
- *my.Plymouth* is an excellent medium for providing the PSU community with the latest information.

### Areas of Concern

- Print and web publications for the graduate programs are not on par with undergraduate materials in terms of completeness and evaluation of effectiveness.

- The approved mission statement is not available on the PSU web site.
- Lack of regular updating of catalog information on the web site and of the web pages themselves.

### **Suggestions**

- Establish systems for determining the effectiveness of the graduate recruitment publications.
- Review the university web site to ensure that all vital information relevant to all important aspects of the University's public disclosure, e.g., mission statement and course catalogs, are easily visible and available.

## *11. Integrity*

The university subscribes to a set of ethical standards in the management of its affairs and in its dealings with students, faculty, staff, external agencies, and the general public. Institutional policies, procedures, rules, and regulations can be found in the handbooks for faculty, operating staff, professional and technical staff, adjunct faculty, and students, as well as in the Academic Catalog. The University System of New Hampshire Policy Manual, the Student Handbook, and the Operating Staff Handbook are online. However, there is no link to the Operating Staff Handbook from the PSU web site. In addition, PSU fosters communication among faculty, staff, administration, and students through open forums, committees, and task forces.

With regard to hiring practices, there is a nondiscrimination policy; an affirmative action plan; policies and procedures for job classifications, advancement, and performance; along with rules pertaining to complaints and grievances. Most employees go through an orientation program. Annual reviews are conducted for all levels of employees. The assistant director for employment and Training/Development assesses employee needs for training and development, develops training opportunities, and provides for evaluation.

Student rights and responsibilities, and judicial procedures speak to the free pursuit and dissemination of knowledge. The Academic Catalog carries information on academic standards and requirements, and programs of study that students can select. The Student Handbook contains information about standards of conduct and judicial procedures. Both contain information on sexual harassment, admissions standards, and educational policies and procedures, such as Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The dean of students and the Title IX coordinator are named institutional resources on policy information.

## **Strengths**

- Faculty, operating staff and professional and technical staff handbooks has been recently revised.
- There is support for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students and employees.
- Efforts to celebrate and to educate the campus with regard to diversity include the yearlong multicultural forum, PACE programs, diversity training sessions sponsored by Human Relations and the Women's Services and Gender Resources.
- Continuing attention to compliance with the American with Disabilities Act (including access and retrofitting) and sensitivity to the needs of the disabled.

## **Areas of Concern**

- Handbooks affecting all types of university employees are not on line.
- Efforts and responsibility for improving faculty and student diversity are scattered among academic and administrative departments.

## **Suggestions**

- All handbooks affecting elements of the campus community should be online and given prominent locations on the University web site.
- A single, clearly articulated diversity program with specifically outlined goals should be developed and implemented. Methods should be in place to monitor and evaluate the progress frequently.
- Develop options by which all students would be given the opportunity to be educated in behavioral expectations.

*NOTE: Suggestions are advisory in nature and are offered by the Evaluation Team to Plymouth State University solely for its consideration and comments.*