

Plymouth State University

NEASC Fifth Year Interim Report
2008

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Preparing the 2008 Interim Report

Accreditation is a community endeavor.

In June of 2007, President Sara Jayne Steen and Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Julie Bernier selected the members of the campus committee to prepare this fifth-year interim accreditation report for the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE) of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC).

Committee Members

President Steen invited campus members to participate on the committee based on their knowledge of the content areas of the NEASC Standards.

Membership selections reflected a desire to draw on the broad range of campus constituencies and to make the process participative and open to input from the entire campus.

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Background Information and Timeline

The committee chair met individually with each member in order to explain the process. At each meeting, he distributed copies of the mission statement; strategic plan; 2003 Self-Study; the revised NEASC standards; CIHE data forms; letter of accreditation including areas of emphasis to be addressed in the 2008 interim report [Terrence J. MacTaggart, 3/28/2004]; 2003 Visiting Team Report to Plymouth State University [Dimitrios S. Pachis 10/2003]; Response to the NEASC Visiting Team Report [Virginia Barry 1/29/2004]; and the NEASC report formatting guidelines.

Process

Committee members received a timeline of committee activities in September of 2007. By November of 2007, after several meetings, committee members completed an outline of their chapters or sections, sharing feedback and recommendations. The president and the provost reviewed the outline and their comments were returned to the authors.

Committee members completed their drafts by February of 2008, posting them to a website [www.plymouth.edu/neasc] and a Web log [neasc.blogs.plymouth.edu] in order to gather feedback from the entire campus. Responses went directly to the authors and the committee chair. Discussions and content revisions continued throughout February and March.

In April of 2008, the committee discussed the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education data forms, and information available at that time. The president, with additional input from the provost, the vice president for Financial Affairs, and the associate vice president for Graduate Studies prepared the Responses to Areas Identified for Special Emphasis and the Five-Year Plan.

Campus Review and the Final Report

In May of 2008, after incorporating feedback, the committee wrote a final draft of the report and posted it to the website and the Web log. The report was printed for delivery to the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges for review at its fall meeting.

The Plymouth State University Community

Plymouth State University evolved from Holmes Plymouth Academy, dating back to 1808 as a pioneer institution for teacher training.

Plymouth State University (located in Plymouth, between New Hampshire's White Mountains and Lakes Region) is a coeducational, residential university with an enrollment of approximately 4,200 undergraduate and 2,700 graduate students.

Founded in 1871, Plymouth has evolved from a normal school to a teachers' college to a state university. Our 170 acres and 46 buildings preserve the bricks-and-ivy look of the New England small college heritage while integrating state-of-the-art technology and facilities into an attractive, contemporary campus design.

In 1911, Dr. Ernest L. Silver, began his twenty-five-year administration of the school, during which time the school grew to maturity both professionally and physically. In 1927, the American Council of Teacher Colleges evaluated Plymouth Normal School and rated it a Grade A teachers' college—a rating it has held ever since. In 1939, the New Hampshire State Legislature officially recognized the increased stature of the institution by changing its designation to Plymouth Teachers College and, in 1963, to Plymouth State College of the University System of New Hampshire.

This development established Plymouth as a multi-purpose institution allowing it to grant degrees in the liberal arts, as well as in business and teaching. The first four-year class to receive degrees in the liberal arts with majors in subjects such as English, music, history, biology, mathematics, and business administration received their degrees on the lawn in front of Mary Lyon Hall in 1968.

In 1999, the faculty voted that Plymouth State College begin efforts to recognize its role as a regional university. On August 16, 2003, acting on the authority of the state legislature and the governor, Plymouth State College officially changed its name to Plymouth State University. As a Carnegie Master's/L (Larger programs) University, we confer a comprehensive range of undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Plymouth State University Today

Plymouth State University as a comprehensive regional university offers a rich, student-focused learning environment for undergraduate, graduate, and non-traditional students. The institution offers forty-two undergraduate majors and sixty-two minors, and more than seventy-five graduate degree and certification programs. In addition to outstanding programs in education, business, humanities, arts, and the natural and social sciences, hallmark outreach programs include centers and institutes for meteorology, the environment, New Hampshire studies, and rural partnerships.

Campus Governance

In his report to the campus, Dr. Pachis noted that the “governance process creates 415 committee positions for faculty that 156 faculty members must fill.” In 2006, a governance task force was created to make recommendations about changes to the governance structure. Their major recommendations were approved by the full faculty in May 2006.

Area for Special Emphasis: “...ensuring that the campus governance system balances efficiency of accomplishment with opportunities for participation” [Terrence J. MacTaggart, 3/28/2004]

In 2003, NEASC identified the campus governance system as an area of special concern. Specifically, it worried that our governance system did not balance “efficiency of accomplishment with opportunities for participation.” Since the 2003 visit, the campus has made significant changes to the faculty governance structure. These changes are an excellent beginning to our ongoing efforts to make governance as effective and open as possible.

Implementation Task Force

An implementation task force has worked for the past two years to put changes into practice, and we are now at the end of our first year under a new faculty governance structure. These reforms have resulted in a decrease in the number of committees and committee positions as well as less overlap among the remaining committees’ efforts.

As noted in chapter 3 of the Narrative portion of this report, three elected faculty committees have been combined into one. Academic Advising, Academic Review,

and Academic Standards together required nineteen faculty positions. Through much discussion, the governance task force came to realize the work done by each of these three committees informed and had considerable impact upon the work of the others. In some cases, there was outright redundancy.

Reorganization was in order. Now, a single committee of eight, the Academic Affairs Committee, maintains responsibility for issues concerning academic advising, academic review, and academic standards.

Some had worried that eight faculty would now be overly burdened with the work of the nineteen who made up the previous committees. The elimination of overlapping tasks has apparently quelled this fear. In fact, the large number of faculty running for this committee's vacancies evidences its popularity for fulfilling service commitments.

Consolidating Committees

The Continuing Education Committee and the Online Education Committee together had twenty-five faculty positions. Their recent dissolution gave rise to the Frost School Council with its four elected and four appointed faculty positions. The four departments currently offering degree programs through the Frost School appoint these representatives.

The following committees have also been dissolved: Administrator Selection, Administrator Evaluation, Bookstore, Faculty Budget and Resource, Information Resources, and University Planning—an encouraging *loss* of thirty-one faculty service positions. A variety of approaches has facilitated this reduction. The Administrator Selection Committee is only created as needed by a process of faculty input and a special election.

Two such elections during the 2007-08 academic year proved this process works well. Other committees that formerly maintained a constant presence, if only in name, will now be created or eliminated as need requires. At intervals of not more than five years, the Steering Committee will appoint a task force to evaluate the principal administrators, and the Bookstore Committee will be appointed only when needed.

President Steen expressed concern for continuing and ensuring a connection between the planning and the budgeting processes. To this end, she created a campus-wide Planning and Budgeting Leadership Group (PBLG) to replace both the Faculty Budget & Resource and the University Planning committees. In a great step toward consolidating effort, now only four faculty serve on the PBLG.

President Steen expressed concern for ensuring a connection between the planning and the budgeting processes.

They are observed by the Chair of the Council of Chairs who serves ex officio. Finally, the governance task force recognized that other committees had already taken on the roles of the Information Resource Committee, and they—some would say mercifully—eliminated that committee altogether.

The Executive Council was the policy-making body that sat between the eight principal policy-making committees and the full faculty. Its membership included a representative from each of these eight committees; the faculty speaker; the faculty representative to the board of trustees; ten at-large members; and a representative from the graduate council—twenty-one positions. The elimination of the Executive Council removed an apparently redundant layer of policy approval.

The Steering Committee now replaces the Executive Council. It does not itself make policy, but instead serves to facilitate communication among committees. It consists of the Faculty Speaker, the Faculty Speaker-Elect, and the chairs of the following committees: Academic Affairs, Curriculum, Faculty Welfare, the Frost School, and the General Education Committee: seven service positions replacing twenty-one governance seats.

The changes described in this section represent a laudable reduction of sixty-nine faculty service positions.

Steering Committee Effectiveness

The Steering Committee has already proven to be an effective mechanism for communication among the policy-making committees. When an issue is brought to a particular committee, the chair knows whether another group is already addressing it. He or she can, therefore, eliminate the duplication of effort. For example, when the issue of how to evaluate advising as part of the promotion and tenure process was brought to the Academic Affairs Committee, that chair was aware another group was currently working on issues of promotion and tenure and transferred the advising concern to its appropriate jurisdiction.

The changes described in this section represent a laudable reduction of sixty-nine faculty service positions—from ninety-seven to twenty-eight. The Governance Implementation Task Force is currently working on assessing the changes. For the moment, we find anecdotal evidence supporting faculty satisfaction and feelings of increased efficiency and effectiveness in service work.

Implementing and Assessing General Education

The new general education program is fully implemented. It has effective ongoing assessment, and the first group of courses has already undergone the sunset re-approval process. We are looking forward to using the results of the CLA and our own writing assessment process to improve the program in the near future.

“Through the interim report, the Commission looks forward to learning of the institutions success in implementing the new program and evaluating its success, consistent with our standard on Programs and Instruction.”
[Terrence J. MacTaggart, 3/28/2004]

The faculty approved a new general education program in the spring of 2003. Our provost appointed Dr. Robert Miller to oversee the transition and implementation process. For many years he has helped monitor and nurture the various incarnations of our general education programs. The three-year appointment involved several stages. In a complete, thorough, and complex analysis, Dr. Miller used his considerable experience and expertise to examine enrollments in the old general education courses. He compared the current and historical enrollments of all existing courses used to fulfill both major and general education requirements. Armed with these data, Dr. Miller determined the number of students who would continue to need old general education courses during the transition. He then developed a process of phasing out the old and phasing in the new. He presented the complex analysis to department chairs and assisted in planning course offerings for subsequent semesters.

Throughout his appointment, Dr. Miller served as the program’s navigational constant in what might otherwise have been a stormy sea of course changes, recalculation of needs, and unanticipated nuance. His constant vigilance made a difficult transition seem relatively simple.

At the same time, the associate vice president for Undergraduate Studies managed a dedicated budget supporting general education implementation—funding and encouraging any workshops, course design projects, or faculty development initiatives the new program required. An essential adjunct to this process, the Frost Faculty Center for Learning and Teaching Excellence, offered two years of faculty development initiatives including instruction, forums, and workshops supporting nearly every aspect of the transition.

The farsighted, faculty authored whitepaper outlining the new program anticipated the need for a General Education Implementation Task Force. This task force played a crucial oversight role, ever watchful to faithful implementation of the new program's intent. By providing recommendations of process, implementation, and interpretation, its presence was yet another guide leading to a smooth transition.

Assessment

An assessment requirement was built into the new program. Our self-mandated systemic assessment elements are varied and thorough. The assessment plan includes three elements.

The original whitepaper mandated that a form of direct evidence be identified and piloted within the first few years of the program.

First, a sunset rule was established to avoid having courses receive general education status without follow-up or assessment. All departments teaching courses with a general education designation must reapply to the General Education Committee for their courses' continued general education status at least every four years. A part of the reexamination process includes a show of evidence that the intended outcomes of the program are clearly communicated to students. In the—as it turns out, frequent—event that the committee requires further clarification or wishes to compliment efforts, the professors or department chairs appear in person before the committee. Status revocation becomes effective with the next academic catalog.

Second, students themselves routinely assess all general education courses they take. These assessments, required for the sunset re-approval process, ask students to rate the extent to which each of the general education goals were addressed and achieved. The resulting data become important considerations in the decisions of the General Education Committee.

In a general way, the Office of Undergraduate Studies oversees the evaluation process that has been in force since its inception. However, Undergraduate Studies has special jurisdiction over the third and final assessment element involving acquisition of direct evidence. Beginning this fall, we will be using the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) test along with a writing assessment tool designed by our own faculty writing assessment expert. The choice of the CLA coincides with our participation in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA). To assess writing, Dr. Elliot Gruner, our new director of the first-year English composition program has begun development of a writing assessment process to

be piloted in spring of 2009. The Office of Undergraduate Studies will report outcomes and encourage program enhancements.

The new general education program is fully implemented. It has effective ongoing assessment, and the first group of courses has already undergone the sunset re-approval process. We are looking forward to using the results of the CLA and our own inchoate writing assessment process to enhance the program in the near future.

Fiscal Well-Being

As evidenced by our strategic indicators, we have improved our financial profile since the 2003 accreditation visit. We have done this while continuously meeting our responsibilities as a regional comprehensive university.

...assessing Plymouth State's "overall fiscal well-being, in light of the institution's designation as a university and its expanded mission, without likely prospect of significant additional financial resources from the state." [Terrence J. MacTaggart, 3/28/2004]

We were already funding the activities and initiatives that define us as a regional comprehensive university when the state legislature officially awarded the university title. The designation recognized our expanding role and our better-defined mission. Chapter 9 and the data provided in the appendix outline the complete financial picture. What follows here are only a few examples supporting the claim of overall fiscal well-being.

The College of Graduate Studies

The graduate program continues to grow as we further realize the part of our mission that pledges special commitment to New Hampshire's North Country and Lakes Region. We have expanded outreach by, among other things, opening a permanent site in Concord and offering specific programs in the northern part of the state and in the Lakes Region. We have already made a significant contribution by awarding seventeen graduate degrees to persons who are now both able and likely to receive higher wages and to make more significant contributions here in New Hampshire rather than seek employment out of state. The program's success has seen the rewards of new grant funding that will provide additional scholarships for the next cohort.

Centers and Institutes

Further evidence supporting our regional service mission may be found in our Center for the Environment, Center for Rural Partnerships, and Institute for New Hampshire Studies. Funding for these initiatives was already in place when we became a university, and their work helped cement our positive regional service reputation. Despite the initial funding requirements, all three of these operations have now succeeded in significantly increasing funding to the university by acquiring grants, project contracts, and indirect cost reimbursements.

The Frost School

The Frost School, started in the fall of 2006, provides yet another service component of our mission. The Frost School targets regional students unable to matriculate in traditional daytime programs. It provides flexible access for the growing population of individuals with limited or no higher education. Although growth in this program has been slow, we believe the program's design—including increased online access—will be a significant factor in its success as the school gains footing.

Grants and Capital Campaigns

Grant income for research and program development has doubled from \$1.5 million in 2005 to \$3 million in 2007. Expanding the Office of Sponsored Research has helped faculty and administrators refine and focus the use of new funds enabling further growth and assuring sound financial management.

Building on the success of recent advancement efforts, we are undertaking a new capital campaign that will ask our friends and alumni to support a significant level of endowment gifts enabling scholarships for students, faculty development opportunities, and funding for a new welcome center and ice arena complex. This complex will serve a dual function: to welcome visitors to the region—especially to the towns of Plymouth and Holderness—and to support our own athletic and academic programs while providing public access to a highly desirable recreation facility.

State Appropriation

State appropriation has always been, and probably always will be, a limiting factor for public education in the State of New Hampshire. However, we continue to develop a responsible financial foundation meeting the needs of the institution and the region we are charged to support. As evidenced by our strategic indicators, we have improved our financial profile since the 2003

accreditation visit. We have done this while continuously meeting our responsibilities as a regional comprehensive university.

Planned Expansion of the Graduate Program

Extensive planning and assessment initiatives, combined with program success, speak to the College of Graduate Studies' commitment to our educational and outreach mission, our program quality, and our responsible resource allocation. We refer the reader to chapter 4 for more information supporting the College of Graduate Studies' activities.

*Concern expressed in the 2003 re-accreditation letter: "ensuring the ability to support the planned expansion of graduate programming."
[Terrence J. MacTaggart, 3/28/2004]*

As a public regional university, Plymouth serves the state of New Hampshire and New England 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.

College of Graduate Studies Mission

The College of Graduate Studies aims to prepare exceptional practitioners in a variety of disciplines through excellence in academic study. We demonstrate a strong commitment to adult learners by responding to students' needs, helping students meet their personal and professional goals, and collaborating in the development and delivery of flexible and accessible programs. Through dynamic collaboration with the diverse faculty of scholars and practitioners, we encourage students to be active agents.

Graduate Studies has developed business plans for the Concord site, doctoral program, and a strategic plan to align with the new PSU University Strategic Plan.

In a planned process of clarifying goals and objectives, graduate coordinators engaged in a two-year self-study. Part of that study led to the articulation and integration of five common hallmarks into all graduate coursework: leadership

and advocacy; scholarship and action/application; reflection and innovation; professionalism and service; and global awareness and social responsibility.

Graduate Program Growth

In 1948, the Board of Education and the New Hampshire State Department of Education authorized the establishment of the Master of Education program to provide professional development for the preparation of elementary and secondary level teachers. The need to develop business leaders across the state led, in 1974, to the addition of the Master of Business Administration degree. We responded to the needs and varying schedules of our students by offering programs both on-campus and at satellite locations. In 1997, in conjunction with the New Hampshire Special Education Administrators Association, we developed the Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies program—an initiative partially funded through the New Hampshire State Department of Education. Another series of need-driven programs followed: the Master of Science degree program in Criminal Justice in 2000; the Master of Arts in Teaching in both Art Education and Science Education in 2003; and the Master of Science degree programs in Applied Meteorology, Biology, Environmental Science and Policy, and Science Education in 2005. The programs quickly gained acceptance. In 2004, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education accredited our education programs, and the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs awarded national recognition in 2006. As further testimony to our commitment to quality programs and to our ability to respond to regional need, the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education granted program accreditation in the fall of 2007, and the Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs renewed our accreditation in the spring of 2007.

Response to Regional Need

During the 2006-2007 academic year, the university conducted a self-study investigating the need and potential for a doctoral program. In the spring of this year, the state legislature approved, and the governor signed, authorization to offer a Doctor of Education degree in Learning, Leadership, and Community. We will soon be seeking NEASC accreditation for this much-needed program.

Organization, Facilities, and Self Study

The physical location of Graduate Studies changed as the degree programs grew and the personnel and infrastructure kept pace. As recently as 1999, graduate programs operated separately in the Business and Education departments. In 2002, graduate programs merged into the *Division of Graduate Studies, Continuing Education, and Outreach* and moved to a suite of offices near

Hyde Hall. In 2004, President Wharton, recognizing the need for planning and restructuring, asked the Graduate Council to conduct a thorough self-study. That study and its resulting proposal (approved in May 2006) led to the establishment of the current *College of Graduate Studies*. One month after that approval, the College of Graduate Studies moved to its own campus building.

Opportunities to fulfill our mission became more abundant in August of 2006. Growth of programs with the local area schools opened the possibility of an additional location in Concord, the professional development center at Penacook, and partnerships with several New Hampshire professional organizations including the New Hampshire Association of School Principals, the New Hampshire School Administrators Association, and the New Hampshire Association of Special Education Administrators. In the fall of 2006, the College of Graduate Studies leased a Concord site with four classrooms, and in the fall of 2007, we secured three more classrooms in that location in answer to enrollment demand.

Personnel, Planning, and Policy Development

On schedule with the proposal that grew from our self-study, the College of Graduate Studies has restructured, and we hired new personnel—our own assistant registrar; a technology assistant to coordinate the website and technology needs; a marketing manager; an admissions counselor; and a graduate program manager to oversee partnership registration and work with graduate faculty.

The Graduate Council and Graduate Faculty groups merged into a group known as Graduate Faculty, and this group oversees all graduate curricula and policies. Additional changes since our 2003 accreditation visit include new graduate by-laws, a new graduate curriculum committee, and a graduate promotion and tenure committee. Graduate Studies has developed business plans for the Concord site, and for the potential doctoral program. Its new strategic plan aligns with the university's master strategic plan.

Student Services

Collaboration with Plymouth Academic Support Services (PASS), the Writing Center, Lamson Library Commons, and the Counseling Center has increased the available hours for access and range of academic support services.

Graduate Studies has a virtual writing tutor—a graduate assistant who works with students on campus and through email for writing support. For improved communication, the College of Graduate Studies has developed a new quarterly e-newsletter. There are new modules developed to assist in orientation: a new

Igrad online advising service, and a student portal to address student inquiries. Graduate students can now register online for coursework, and an administrative assistant from the bursar and financial aid offices now works in the College of Graduate Studies assisting with billing and financial aid questions.

Faculty Development and Sharing Resources

The College of Graduate Studies and the Office of Academic Affairs supports the *NH Journal of Education*, a professional publication highlighting the research of faculty and students. Lamson Library receives \$10,000 per year from the graduate budget for online access to databases and journals supporting graduate programs and research. We support thirty graduate assistants who work with faculty across the disciplines in a variety of capacities from academic support to experiential practica. The College also offers professional development funds in concert with the Office of Academic Affairs.

Sharing What We Learn

In 2005, Graduate Studies implemented a new tradition of a yearly symposium held during the fall alumni weekend. The symposium, based on the theme of one of the hallmarks mentioned above, features the Distinguished Graduate Faculty award recipient, the Small Business Institute faculty, and all student award winners. Graduate Studies also sponsors technology workshops for faculty, retreats for faculty of various disciplines, and a fall meeting for all the graduate program coordinators.

Assessment

Graduate Studies is in the process of putting course evaluation forms online. There is a new online end-of-the-year evaluation for students completing the graduate program. The results feed back to improve program consistency and quality. Graduate programs all employ a common writing rubric distributed at graduate faculty meetings every year. Unit and program assessment plans are in process.

We hope our progress since the 2003 NEASC accreditation visit is apparent. We are proud of our progress. The extensive planning and assessment initiatives, combined with program success, speak to the College of Graduate Studies' commitment to our educational and outreach mission, our program quality, and our responsible resource allocation. We refer the reader to chapter 4 for more information.

1. Mission and Purpose

Accreditation is a community endeavor.

*Area of concern expressed by the 2003 NEASC visiting team:
“Renamed a university, the institution has not yet fully considered or sufficiently delineated what the new status implies for its operations and identity. • 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.” [Dimitrios S. Pachis 10/2003]*

This interim report comes at an especially formative time for Plymouth State University. University System of New Hampshire Chancellor Stephen J. Reno set the tone at the 2006 inauguration of Dr. Sara Jayne Steen—the fourteenth president since our founding in 1871. In his comments, Chancellor Reno praised the educational and service roles Plymouth State fills for the university system, state, and region. He then urged President Steen to “make *mission* an action verb.”



Recent Activity

As a regional university, Plymouth State embraces its mission to prepare well-educated graduates through ongoing community, undergraduate, graduate, and professional development programs. It extends opportunities for community partnership, cultural enrichment, and economic development; it has a special commitment to serve New Hampshire's North Country and Lakes Region.

We operate under three clearly articulated guiding principles: student centeredness, excellence, and service. As our mission states, decisions are made “with the best interest of the students in mind; we value teaching excellence; we constantly work to improve access, opportunity, and affordability; we offer programs that are holistic and provide optimum support.” We are committed to excellence in “academic programs offered, research conducted, [and] service and cultural enrichment provided to the region.” One of the ways that Plymouth State lives up to its motto, *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve), is to share its “intellectual resources with the community to solve real problems, develop tomorrow’s leaders, and work together as a community.”

We seek to realize our mission by focusing on five key areas: excellence and quality; student success; faculty and staff support; partnerships and engagement; and physical, technological, and financial resources.



The Current Situation

At PSU, mission has indeed become an action verb. A newly created position, Associate Dean for Institutional Research and Assessment, partially demonstrates our commitment to congruence among mission, action, and assessment. This position places oversight of these three key elements of institutional effectiveness and quality in one office.

Our mission is a living statement, approved by the board of trustees in 2003 and recently redrafted to address our role as a regional university. We have completed a yearlong campus-wide discussion focusing on mission as an integral part of developing the current strategic plan. The newly formed Planning and Budget Leadership Group appropriately links

Ut Prosim

[That I May Serve]
—University Motto

planning to budgeting and makes the budget process more participatory.

The mission statement succinctly outlines the institution's aspirations. It describes how we have defined and embraced our role as a regional university. The Center for the Environment and the Center for Rural Partnerships (established in 2004 and 2006 respectively) are only two examples illustrating the ways PSU seeks to meet its regional mission. These centers help connect the needs and goals of northern New Hampshire with research, education, and productive partnerships.

While Plymouth has always tied action to mission, the two have reached a level of congruence unique in our history. The coincidence of a new president and provost and our relatively new status as a regional university has allowed Plymouth to articulate well-defined educational and service roles in both the state university system and in the region. Previously amorphous activities have crystallized into a clearer vision for direction and service.



The Near Future

As the board of trustees reviews the refined mission for formal adoption, they will not be seeing a dramatic change in Plymouth's role. Instead, they will see a clearer statement of those essential qualities that Plymouth strives to fill in its special niche in the University System of New Hampshire and in the region. They will see a focused statement for future action.

A next step for Plymouth will be to foster greater awareness of the text of the mission statement among students, faculty, and staff. Currently, few might be able to quote the mission verbatim, but there would undoubtedly be great similarity among student, faculty, and staff descriptions of Plymouth State University's common ideals.

By tying the planning process to the mission, every campus constituency has seen the advantage of describing priorities in the words of mission goals. Since no action speaks louder about an institution's priorities than its distribution of resources, recent planning initiatives have called everyone's attention to the common roadmap. The process has been nurturing and supportive; our Values and Guiding Principles show that we are as committed to the quality of the trip as we are to our destination. We believe we have sure footing on the path to continuing excellence.

Endorsement of the revised mission statement by the board of trustees and the campus community recognizes an ongoing effort to continue improving quality education and student experiences. Our mission speaks to our desire to fill the educational and service needs of our community. Ultimately, our mission defines our motto, *Ut Prosim—(That I May Serve)*.

2. Planning and Evaluation

The key component of PSU's new planning initiative is its strategic plan completed in 2007.

*Areas of concern expressed by the 2003 NEASC visiting team:
"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." [Dimitrios S. Pachis 10/2003]*

With a continued view towards service, excellence, and student centeredness, the university has revised and extended its planning and evaluation activities.

Recent Activity



As described in chapter 3, the Governance Implementation Task Force has dissolved the University Planning Committee, the Campus Budget Committee, and the Faculty Resource and Budget Committee. In their place, the newly created Planning Budget Leadership Group (PBLG)—made up of various campus constituent groups—coordinates campus-wide planning and budgeting. In addition, Dr. Scott Mantie has been hired to fill a newly created position, Associate Dean for Institutional Research and Assessment. The associate dean has conducted a comprehensive review of student data reporting processes, including

enrollment, retention, and graduation. The processes were revised where appropriate, and a new methodology implemented to more accurately calculate graduate student enrollment rates. Financial aid availability, typical time to graduation, and the expected amount of student debt upon graduation are available now online and in print to assist students and prospective students in making informed decisions. A further indicator of the new emphasis on evaluation and assessment is the appointment of Dr. Daniel Moore as a faculty fellow working with Dr. Mantie in the area of planning, evaluation, and assessment.

The key component of PSU's new planning initiative is its strategic plan. Completed in 2007, the plan begins with a restatement of the college mission and outlines five planning goals: excellence and quality; student success; faculty and staff support; partnerships and engagement; and physical, technological, and financial resources. As stated in the strategic plan, "The goals and priorities...are not intended to target specific segments of the campus; rather, all five goals are embraced by all corners of the campus community." A first phase of this new strategic plan is already well underway. It calls for reports from every campus department prioritizing needs and linking their fulfillment directly to the goals of the strategic plan. Significantly, one of the goals of the strategic plan specifically calls for "improv[ing] programs through appropriate assessment and through development of a culture of evidence."

Annual departmental assessment reports add to the information available for planning and evaluation. The actions described here, and in the following chapter on governance, address the 2003 visiting team's concern that there was no clear link "between the processes of strategic planning, resource allocation, and academic program review."



The Current Situation

As described in the previous chapter, mission, and initiatives are now inseparably linked by the strategic plan.

Making use of Dr. Mantie's needs prioritization project, mentioned above, and other appropriate input, the Planning Budget Leadership Group reviews all departmental requests and prioritizes planning and budgeting within specific sub-headings from each of the five goals of the strategic plan. The resulting reports and documentation provide the principle administrators with additional tools for budgetary decisions and future planning. It is too soon to comment on the success of this new approach, however, we are confident it will better link the processes of strategic planning, resource allocation, and academic program review.

Task forces often assess the institution’s curricular direction. For example, the Liberal Studies Task Force recently presented the faculty with a number of possibilities for the Interdisciplinary Studies curriculum. A sound rationale, supported by the determination of potential demand, helped the faculty make an informed decision to adopt one of the task force’s alternatives. Other examples of active academic task forces are the Internationalization Initiatives Task Force, which is working on a review of international programs and campus activities, and the Four Credit Task Force, which recently reviewed the impact of changing to a four-credit model.

Many of our nationally or regionally accredited programs continue to refine and extend assessment initiatives. For example, business, criminal justice, education, psychology, and social work programs regularly use a combination of nationally and locally designed surveys to review student outcomes. The eleven academic departments with programs approved by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) require evidence-based assessments, and they report a growing interest in using similar approaches in their non-teaching programs. Finally, the College of Graduate Studies continues its rigorous assessment of programs in athletic training, business, education, mental health, and school counseling in order to maintain national accreditation for each program.

The General Education Committee mandated student evaluations as a part of the new general education program. A sunset review process ensures that all courses bearing a general education label continue to achieve the goals described in the program. In addition, it is formulating a program review of the First Year Seminar, the program’s foundation course.

The Near Future

The Planning Budget Leadership Group will continue to work with all departments to align planning, budgeting, and assessment. Academic departments, in particular, will work on coordinating the planning of programs and curriculum to meet our stated goals for student success, quality, and excellence. Plymouth State University will participate in the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) and it is likely that the all the schools within the University System of New Hampshire (USNH) will also participate.

The General Education Committee has made progress with evaluating the program. This fall, as described in the “Areas of Special Emphasis” portion of this report, we will be piloting the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) instrument

to determine if this is the most effective tool for assessing our general education program.

Dr. Mantie is working with a software developer to design and test a computer application that will provide data to assist in departmental planning. We are hopeful this initiative, along with the new strategic plan, will greatly assist the integration of many currently disparate planning practices. The new strategic planning system will address standard 2.7: "The institution determines the effectiveness of its planning and evaluation activities on an ongoing basis. Results of these activities are used to further enhance the institution's implementation of its purposes and objectives."

3. Organization and Governance

Each constituency—student, operating staff, professional and technical, and faculty—has its own governance structure with active and effective communication between the groups.

Areas of concern expressed by the 2003 visiting team: “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.” [Dimitrios S. Pachis 10/2003]

An Area of Special Emphasis: “...ensuring that the campus governance system balances efficiency of accomplishment with opportunities for participation.” [Terrence J. MacTaggart, 3/28/2004]

Plymouth State University is part of the University System of New Hampshire (USNH) but remains largely autonomous in its governance. The *USNH Policy Manual* clearly delegates authority to the administration. At both the undergraduate and the graduate level, faculty have jurisdiction in all academic matters not otherwise prescribed by the board of trustees. Each constituency has its own governance structure with active and effective communication between the groups. Student representatives sit on the General Education, Curriculum, and Academic Affairs committees. Faculty in the

College of Graduate Studies have a governance structure roughly paralleling the governance structure of the rest of the faculty.



Recent Activity

We have significantly revised the faculty governance structure. For example, the work of three committees in our old structure—Academic Advising, Academic Review, and Academic Standards—overlapped and affected each in ways that, over time, had become increasingly redundant. By consolidating these three into one smaller committee, we believe we have greatly streamlined faculty governance and increased its efficiency. However, changes are much broader than this one example illustrates. The Executive Council, the principal policy-making and oversight body situated between individual committees and the full faculty, has been eliminated. It has been replaced by the Steering Committee, comprised of the chairs of the principal policy-making committees, the faculty speaker, and the speaker-elect. This committee has no policy-making responsibilities but it does continue an important role in governance oversight as well as provide an important forum for communication among the various committees. We encourage the reader to refer to the Areas of Special Emphasis portion of this report for more detail.

The *Faculty Handbook* is now up-to-date. As part of the ongoing restructuring of faculty governance, responsibility for keeping track of future change now officially lies with the Faculty Welfare Committee.



The Current Situation

As evidenced by the increased number of candidates for election to the policy-making committees, changes in governance appear to have ignited the interest of faculty in serving on the new key committees.

President Steen has contributed to changes within the university's governance structure. For example, the newly created Planning and Budgeting Leadership Group (PBLG), with representatives from all constituencies on campus, seeks to marry the planning process with the budgeting process. In the past, planning was done by one group and budgeting by another. Now, a single committee targets both planning and budgeting initiatives with less redundant information gathering processes and a more unified approach to reaching our mission's goals.

The remaining campus governing bodies—Operating Staff (OS), Professional and Technical (PAT), and Student—continue to function effectively. In addition, the University Leadership Team, comprised of the speakers for all four constituent groups, meets with President Steen monthly to discuss issues with campus-wide implications. The open communication between the president and campus leaders brings an increased sense of shared governance. President Steen has also worked to improve communication with the town of Plymouth by including townspeople on many university committees.

Student participation in governance (including graduate student participation) is currently exceptionally good. The student senate has been very successful in finding representatives for most committees. Student leaders regularly attend, observe, and report at faculty meetings. The student speaker is a member of both the University Leadership Team and the Joint Cabinet, and he attends their monthly meetings.



The Near Future

Efforts to streamline the governance structure have facilitated participation that is more meaningful. With the increased communication among the various constituencies and the centralization of many policy-making activities, we believe we are more efficiently focusing our limited resources on realizing the strategic plan.

As we rely more on evidence for decision-making, we will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of our governance. The Governance Implementation Task Force will survey the faculty concerning the effectiveness of recent reforms, with particular emphasis on the Steering Committee and the Academic Affairs Committee. The extent to which resource allocation matches the priorities identified in the strategic plan will be another measure of success. Because effective governance requires broad participation from the various constituencies, we hope and expect to see more competition for all committee positions.

We are now facing a challenge that we have outgrown our academic organizational structure. Should the university break into separate administrative groups, such as specialized schools and colleges? How will we reorganize so that the results will be effective and efficient? How might possible academic restructuring contribute to the wise expenditure of time and financial resources? We look forward to addressing the challenges these questions pose for the near future.

Meanwhile, we believe we have made a thorough, effective, and rapid (at least by usual institutional standards) response to NEASC's concerns about governance.

4. Programs and Instruction

Areas of concern expressed by the 2003 visiting team: "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." [Dimitrios S. Pachis 10/2003]

Plymouth continues to undergo curricular transformation. This chapter is divided into undergraduate, graduate, and distance education programs to give a picture of all levels, locations, and means of delivering programs and instruction.

Undergraduate Programs



RECENT ACTIVITY

Since the last accreditation visit, Plymouth State University continues to undergo curricular transformation with program additions and deletions.



THE CURRENT SITUATION

Plymouth State approaches program development with an

explicit focus on growth in a context of student demand. The addition of high enrollment programs in *Criminal Justice* and *Communication and Media Studies* exemplify this strategy.



THE NEAR FUTURE

We must carefully examine the continuation of low demand programs in recognition of fiscal constraints. Elimination of certain majors is one possible strategy, and another is cross-department collaboration to enhance department profiles and enrollment. For example, the Business Department and the Languages and Linguistics Department are exploring a joint program in international business. The addition of new programs based on student demand is also likely, as has occurred with the creation of a program in Environmental Science and Policy that will become available this fall.

During the 2006-07 academic year an ad hoc faculty group raised the issue of whether or not the institution should move from a three-credit to a four-credit curricular model. In the fall of 2007, the faculty governance Steering Committee created a formal credit-model task force. The task force recommended a four-credit model in spring of this year. Since it was thought that moving to a four-credit model might force us into simplifying programs, action on this issue was held in check while we awaited the faculty vote. However, now that the faculty have officially rejected the four-credit model, the vice president and provost for Academic Affairs will direct all academic departments to engage in critical self-examination with the explicit goal of a less complex curriculum.

General Education

This topic was targeted as an “Area of Special Emphasis” in NEASC’s reaccreditation letter. “...implementing the new general education program and evaluating its success” [Terrence J. MacTaggart, 3/28/2004]



RECENT ACTIVITY

The 1985 general education program that focused on the acquisition of content-based knowledge has been phased out.

The graduating class of 2008 is the last cohort under that program. See Areas of Special Emphasis.



THE CURRENT SITUATION

In April 2003, the faculty approved the implementation of a revised general education program. The program consists of three parts: (1) *First-year experience* courses—English composition, a mathematics foundation course, and a seminar on critical thinking, (2) *Directions* courses—to

focus on skills-based approaches to different ways of considering and understanding human experience, and (3) *Connections* courses—to develop basic skills at a more advanced level both inside and outside of the major. Full implementation of the program took effect in the fall of 2005.

A key feature of the new program is the separation of skills-based Directions courses from the major. Previously, most general education courses could be double-counted as both major and general education requirements. This rule allowed departments to require students to take specific general education courses to fill the requirements for a particular major. A student who subsequently changed majors could be penalized by this policy if required to take different general education courses to satisfy the new major—leading to a disturbing trend of the “majors killing the general.” The current program avoids this problem; students now retain all twenty-four to twenty-six credits of their general education Directions credits regardless of a change in major.

A related issue that needs to be addressed is curricular complexity.

Many of the courses in the new program are unique to our institution, and therefore, they may have no comparable equivalent at other colleges or universities. Staff members in the Office of Undergraduate Studies, the department overseeing the program, work diligently along with department chairs to ensure flexibility when applying transfer credits.



THE NEAR FUTURE

A key component of the new general education program is a commitment to assessment. The program document as passed by the faculty explicitly stipulates an expectation for assessment.

One mechanism for assessment is course evaluation instruments. We evaluate all general education offerings with instruments specifically written to assess course objectives.

Departments and faculty must submit the data generated from these evaluations as one piece of a larger assessment mechanism, the sunset renewal application. The General Education Committee assigns every course in the program a sunset date—a date the course automatically loses its general education status. The semester prior to sunset, department chairs or individual faculty must bring evidence to the General Education Committee proving their courses still meet the criteria for which they were initially approved. Each course shows evaluation data, sample student work, and a syllabus. The syllabus must make explicit reference to how the course serves the goals of the general education program

and list expected outcomes. Courses retaining their general education status through this process receive another four years of legitimacy. Departments may still offer courses losing their general education status; however, the registrar assigns them new numbers, and they no longer fulfill general education requirements.

We will be implementing a third assessment mechanism for the 2008-09 academic year—the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) instrument. The university has contracted with CLA to begin a cross-sectional examination of students' performance on the cognitive and learning dimensions pertinent to our primary general education program goals: critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, problem solving, and written communication.

In addition, Plymouth hired Dr. Elliott Gruner in the fall of 2007 as director of the first-year English composition program. Dr. Gruner brings a wealth of assessment experience to his role and has already teamed with the directors of the writing center and the Writing Across the Curriculum program to submit a grant proposal focused on creating a multi-dimensional, long-term, sustainable, and comprehensive system for assessing student writing.

Academic Advising

"Student advising remains worrisome." [Dimitrios S. Pachis 10/2003]



RECENT ACTIVITY

Full-time faculty members serve as students' academic advisors.

Students may also access resources available at the Undergraduate Advising Center. The implementation of several new initiatives targets the improvement of academic advising.



THE CURRENT SITUATION

Key advising issues include improving advising effectiveness, especially through faculty training, and the exploration of new advising initiatives.

All newly hired faculty members participate in an orientation program that includes a hands-on advising session led by staff members from the Office of Undergraduate Advising and a veteran faculty member with a dedication to quality advising. Aware that the advising training offered during new faculty orientation is incomplete, the Frost Center for Learning and Teaching Excellence, our faculty development center, offers programs and advising workshops throughout the academic year.

Every spring all faculty members complete a report used as a basis of evaluation by the administration. In 2000, the provost and vice president for Academic Affairs revised the reporting sheet to include a section on advising practices and initiatives. A copy of our mission statement now accompanies distribution of the form.

Unfortunately, the Academic Advising Committee had no authority to create new policy, and therefore, it had little to no practical influence over advising concerns. With the restructuring of faculty governance, the committee merged with the Admissions Policy Committee, the Academic Standards Committee, and the Academic Review Committee, forming a new body named the Academic Affairs Committee. This new committee has full policy-making authority and now brings issues of academic advising squarely into the governance process.



THE NEAR FUTURE

In 2006 and 2007 the student senate surveyed levels of satisfaction with advisers and the advising process. They shared the results with the university system board of trustees as well as the Academic Affairs Committee. Overall, the survey revealed satisfaction with advising and overwhelming satisfaction with the Undergraduate Advising Center. However, the survey did reveal concerns with individual faculty advisors. Future changes to the advising system will likely emerge from careful review of survey results.

In the fall of 2005, we offered a pilot program to enhance advising for students entering without a major. The College of University Studies program, now beginning its fourth year, offers intensive developmental advising, career counseling, and an academic home for a self-selecting cohort of deciding students. Housed in Mary Lyon residence hall and sharing a common space with the Undergraduate Advising Center, the program is poised to expand services to a greater number of deciding students—seventy-two in AY 2008-2009.

Graduate Programs

An Area of Special Emphasis: "...ensuring the ability to support the planned expansion of graduate programming." [Terrence J. MacTaggart, 3/28/2004]



RECENT ACTIVITY

The College of Graduate Studies has launched several new degrees and programs, expanded classroom space, and increased enrollment to approximately 2,700 graduate students.

Partnerships have been a cornerstone in the academic programming for the College of Graduate Studies and we have developed new partnerships both inside and outside of New Hampshire. Within the state, we have formed an articulation with Franklin Pierce University (FPU) allowing our Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies (CAGS) candidates to complete their Doctor of Arts degree at FPU by transferring eighteen credits of our CAGS courses directly into their doctoral program. The Center for School Success has become a partner in the delivery of a concentration in the Neurodevelopmental Approach to Teaching. The College of Graduate Studies continues to attract partnerships with individual school districts and the Southeast Regional Educational Services Center (SERESC) as well. We have also developed educational partnerships outside of New Hampshire—Brown University for professional development in literacy, and the American Museum of Natural History in New York for science education.

Lamson Library and Learning Commons has expanded its services and the Writing Center welcomes graduate students. The College of Graduate Studies has increased the number of fellowships and assistantships, and it has established a Master of Education Scholarship Award and a Graduate Research Fund to support graduate students.



THE CURRENT SITUATION

Our ability to support expanded graduate programming is evident.

Through the expansion and improvement of facilities, the addition of staff and full-time graduate faculty members, improvements in the use of Web and portal technologies, and thoughtful reorganization, the College of Graduate Studies continues to provide excellent graduate programs attracting increasing numbers of students.

The M.S. degrees in Environmental Science and Policy, Athletic Training, Applied Meteorology, and Biology meet the needs of a variety of graduate students in the sciences. Programs in Science Education and Athletic Training that were within the M.Ed. program have become M.S. degree programs. The M.A.T. degrees in Art Education and in Science Education were added to address the needs of education certification candidates in those disciplines, and the Ed.D. in Leadership, Learning, and Community—building upon the established Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies—has been approved by the university system and the New Hampshire State Legislature. We will soon be

We regularly analyze our operations and programming based on course registration, recruiting, admissions and graduation reports, exit survey and course evaluation data, and internal as well as external reviews of our processes.

submitting a substantive change proposal to NEASC as we seek accreditation.

Within the M.Ed., new programs in Heritage Preservation and Organizational Approaches to Transformation and Healing (OATH) complement two long-standing programs—Heritage Studies, and Paths and Approaches to Transformation and Healing (PATH). To assist in meeting state critical shortage certification areas, we have established new specialist credential programs in both Library Media and School Psychologist. The M.B.A. program has increased its enrollment by consolidating schedules and offering certificate programs, and we boast a number of award-winning students in the national competition of the Small Business Institute.

Finally, our counseling program achieved the distinction of being the only accreditation the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) recognizes in New Hampshire.

Our programs in guidance counseling, mental health, and school psychologist continue to grow, and the number of faculty devoted fulltime to the graduate counseling program increased to four in the past year.



THE NEAR FUTURE

The College of Graduate Studies continuously evaluates marketing, recruiting, admissions and enrollment, and academic progress. It has also developed an updated business plan in line with the newly published strategic plan. We regularly analyze our operations and programming based on course registration, recruiting, admissions and graduation reports, exit survey and course evaluation data, and internal as well as external reviews.

In response to the need for additional office space and improved access to student services, the College of Graduate Studies will soon move to a building adjacent to the main campus. Also in response to the need for expanded off-campus facilities and locations, the college has leased a building in Concord and recently expanded the space to accommodate a large population of current and potential students. For the same reasons, we have submitted an application to the Vermont Department of Education for approval to offer graduate courses in our neighbor state.

Distance Education



RECENT ACTIVITY

We have been using technology to support instruction since

1990. As faculty and student interest in online learning has grown, so has the number of courses we offer. Consistent with our mission to provide educational opportunity to residents of New Hampshire and New England, online and blended courses are increasing educational opportunities. At the undergraduate level, we established the Frost School of Continuing and Professional Studies in 2006 to provide easier access through evening, weekend, and online courses. The College of Graduate Studies, too, has continued to expand its online course offerings, and this year, NEASC approved our plans to offer 50 percent or more of the program requirements for a limited number of our bachelor's and master's degrees.

PSU has made the institutional commitment to provide the technical

infrastructure, faculty training, and student support services necessary to provide an academically sound distance-education program. The courses and degree programs offered online are the same as those offered in traditional face-to-face formats, and they are subject to the same quality assurance procedures. The faculty, too, are the same fulltime and adjunct faculty who teach day and evening classes, and they are subject to the same employment guidelines.

INSTITUTIONAL
COMMITMENT

The university provides a robust technological infrastructure with the

equivalent of approximately ten T1 lines. A one-stop Web-based portal, myPlymouth, provides students, faculty, and staff with single-sign-on access to their email, calendar, campus announcements, library resources, online learning tools, registration, and student information systems. We employ the Blackboard Learning Environment Enterprise Limited License, formerly known as *WebCT Campus Edition 6*, as our Learning Management System (LMS). This LMS is integrated with the student information system (SunGard HE Banner) allowing the automatic creation of user accounts, a course shell for every registered course, and automatic enrollment of registered students.

TECHNOLOGY:
STUDENT AND FACULTY
SUPPORT

Lamson Library and Learning Commons is the home of the computer HelpDesk, library and information technology resources, and the Office of Teaching and Learning Technologies (OTLT). Professional staff and student technicians provide (in person, by phone, or via email) more than one hundred hours per week of rapid responses to questions regarding MIS, networking, and other technical issues.

All faculty replacing more than 33 percent seat time with online instruction must complete a faculty-training program through our Office of Teaching and Learning Technologies. This individualized training addresses the tools and functions of the LMS, best practices for online teaching and learning, and how to build online courses. In addition, librarians work closely with the OTLT and faculty on linking to electronic resources and ensuring copyright compliance.

PROGRAMMING

As described above, the Frost School of Continuing and Professional Studies offers non-traditional students access to courses and degree programs through evening, weekend, online and blended formats. Currently, the only bachelor's degree program available 50 percent online is the B.A. in Communication Studies, offered through the Frost School of Continuing and Professional Studies. The College of Graduate Studies (CoGS) has many online offerings including courses through external partnerships, and it has received approval to offer the MBA and the M.Ed. programs 50 percent or more online beginning in the fall 2008. The curricula for any programs offered online will be the same regardless of delivery method.

ASSESSMENT

Online course evaluations and assessment of online learning are in the early stages of development. The OTLT has been instrumental in developing an online course evaluation instrument designed to provide student feedback on the online learning experience.



THE CURRENT SITUATION

We have responded to the increasing demand for undergraduate and graduate online courses and programs by increasing offerings and by receiving NEASC approval for the delivery of online programs. Support of the technological infrastructure and the employment of the required personnel demonstrate our institutional commitment. However, in order to move forward with online education, we need a clear vision for the role online teaching and learning will play. This includes short and long-term strategic plans for adding resources, attracting the best faculty, and scheduling courses. To date, we have relied on the intrinsic motivation of individual faculty members to teach online without mandates, special remuneration, or course page developers. If we are going to increase online courses and programs, we will need to address planning and delivery, particularly how to recruit skilled faculty and how to support them in making the most effective use of technology.

COMMITMENT

Faculty with a personal interest in teaching with technology developed and taught our initial online offerings. Thus, much of what has developed arose from a grass-roots initiative. While faculty have been historically well supported by our strong technological infrastructure and by the Office of Teaching and

SUPPORT

Learning Technologies (OTLT), the OTLT now needs to have its own budget in order to strategically update instructional technology and software. While Blackboard, although expensive, has been an effective LMS, alternative learning management systems, including open-source systems, now merit consideration.

Electronic services and support are available to students taking courses online, but we must expand the online registration service (now available only in the fall and spring) to the Winterim and summer terms. We also need to develop reliable electronic processes and procedures to reduce those required in-person encounters (e.g., forms requiring faculty signatures in order to add courses) that cause difficulty for many distance learners.

There has been a pilot of online course evaluations, but we still need a consistent approach that will ensure a high student response rate. Currently, not all faculty comply with the requirement to gather student course evaluations.

ASSESSMENT



THE NEAR FUTURE

The increasing enrollment of working and adult learners foreshadows a higher demand for online degree programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. We plan to ensure the continuing success of online offerings and other technology mediated instruction with the following actions:

- **Develop a clear vision** of the role that online learning will play at PSU including short-term and long-term strategic plans.
- **Resolve the issues of faculty incentives** for course development, intellectual property rights (i.e., who owns online courses), and support for faculty in course building (e.g., with course page developers).
- **Establish clear organizational structure** for a fully staffed Office of Teaching and Learning Technology with its own budget.
- **Commit the resources** necessary to implement online procedures, particularly for registration and payment during Winterim and summer sessions.
- **Commit to a schedule of course offerings** enabling students to complete their degrees in a timely manner.

5. Faculty

We are committed to creating a vibrant group of diverse, competent, and dedicated scholars and teachers.

Concerns expressed by the 2003 NEASC visiting team: "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." [Dimitrios S. Pachis 10/2003]

In line with PSU's stated goals of student success, faculty support, and excellence, we are committed to recruiting, hiring, and retaining a competent and diverse group of scholars.



Recent Activity

To assist recruiting and hiring, various steps have clarified working conditions and have provided support to new and current faculty members. These steps assist in developing

both competency in scholarship and excellence in teaching. Diversity, workload, and funding are the current focus of much attention.



The Current Situation

As observed by the 2003 visiting team, the imminent retirement of a significant proportion of the senior faculty opens an opportunity for diversification by race, ethnicity, gender, and other protected categories. At the full-professor

level, males still outnumber females almost three to one; twenty-one are female and fifty-six are male. However, at the associate and assistant levels the ratio is equal.

We have taken the opportunity to diversify when hiring new faculty. We reviewed Human Resources practices and made strategic changes to our advertising process—using inclusive language in ads, and expanding our advertising to journals and professional organizations likely to attract more minority candidates. A recent hiring rate of 27 percent minority or international faculty (thirteen of forty-nine positions) highlights our success.

In addition, the President’s Commission on Diversity completed a review of campus diversity initiatives in 2006. To enable progress towards being a multi-faceted and inclusive institution, we have funded three credits of release time. The provost awards a Diversity Faculty Fellowship annually to encourage work with students, other faculty, and staff on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusiveness.

We plan to continue our successes in attracting a more diverse candidate pool and in further diversifying the faculty.

The Internationalization Task Force was created to internationalize the campus and provide increased opportunities for bringing visiting diversity scholars to campus. The task force, made up of a broad range of campus representatives, actively supports numerous additional initiatives for faculty and students.

WORKLOAD

In 2003, our *Self-Study* reported 171 full-time faculty; we have increased that number to 191. The increase has helped reduce our reliance on overload pay and adjunct faculty. The provost and the president are actively working with department chairs on approaches to reducing the ongoing concern of faculty workload.

The recent faculty rejection of the proposal to move to a four-credit course model eliminates one possible approach to workload reduction. Nevertheless, necessary curricular revision is likely to contribute significantly to addressing the issue.

The Promotion and Tenure Task Force is reviewing processes and procedures. Frequent updates keep the faculty informed of their progress as they examine internal and external sources and move toward final recommendations.

SCHOLARSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By helping faculty, staff, and administrators seek funding opportunities, the Office of Sponsored Programs has more than doubled the level of external funding from \$1.3 million in 2003 to \$2.8 million in the past year. It assists with pre-award planning and proposals, and it administers awards for research,

instruction, and outreach projects. The office also serves as a liaison to our external partners, ensuring compliance with regulations and monitoring post-award financial management. We value this work and support continued growth in the area of sponsored programs.

To further support and recognize scholarship and pedagogy, Academic Affairs has increased funds for faculty professional development from \$40,000 to nearly \$80,000 in the 2008 fiscal year. Additionally, the provost has created a Research Advisory Council (RAC). The council, composed of faculty and staff, advises the provost in her efforts to create a work environment where “faculty thrive in their scholarly and creative endeavors as well as service to the region and beyond.” The RAC recently awarded its first round of annual Faculty Research Development Grants. Funding includes release time for faculty research, student employment, and graduate assistantships.

The Frost Faculty Center for Learning and Teaching Excellence continues to provide on-campus workshops addressing a variety of topics dealing with effective teaching.

In addition to the longstanding Distinguished Teaching award, two recently instituted annual awards, Distinguished Scholar and Excellence in Faculty Service, honor faculty members and serve to heighten the awareness of their multiple roles. Last year, we added an annual Distinguished Adjunct Teaching award.

Since becoming a university, PSU has founded several new centers focused on regional service, outreach, and research: The Center for the Environment, the Center for Rural Partnerships, and the Center for Active Living and Healthy Communities. Along with the Judd Gregg Meteorology Center and the Institute for New Hampshire studies, these centers represent the majority of our funding success.



The Near Future

We will continue supporting the faculty in their pursuit of teaching and research goals by providing resources for enhancing skills, knowledge, and dispositions. We also plan to continue our successes in attracting a more diverse candidate pool and in further diversifying the faculty.

The office of Sponsored Programs will be moving under the provost’s direction this summer. This will provide a closer connection between research activity and academic affairs.

The five centers listed above will all continue to serve a regional mission and provide opportunities for faculty to engage in regional service and scholarship.

6. Student Services

The division of Student Affairs again refined its mission in accord with the evolving mission, values, and guiding principles of the university.

Areas of concern identified by the 2003 visiting team: "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." [Dimitrios S. Pachis 10/2003]

In 2005-2006 the entire Student Affairs staff engaged in a collaborative process leading to this statement: "The mission of the Plymouth State University Division of Student Affairs is to develop students as critical thinkers, ethical decision makers, and contributing members of society; to influence students to live healthy lives."



Recent Activity

The philosophy of the division is based on the preeminence of learning and the concepts of holistic human development and experiential learning. The work of the division supports and complements the academic mission; it establishes direct relationships between academic and personal development, between service and individual growth, and between the campus and the larger community. Co-curricular programs and services engage students and help prepare them for gratifying and productive lives.

This new mission helps the division refine its focus on student learning and engagement and further strengthens our foundational beliefs and values held since 1988. We believe:

- **Each student** is unique and has worth and dignity.
- **Bigotry cannot be tolerated.**
- **Feelings**, personal circumstances, and out-of-class environments affect learning.
- **Supportive and friendly community life** and involvement enhances learning.
- **Freedom to hold beliefs** and to doubt and question must be guaranteed.
- **Effective citizenship** should be taught.
- **Students are responsible** for their own lives.

(Adopted with revisions from "A Perspective on Student Affairs," NASPA, 1987).

Three organizational changes since the last NEASC report reflect these values. Athletics now reports to Academic Affairs reinforcing the National Collegiate Athletic Association's Division III "student first" philosophy aligning us with the teacher-coach, classroom-laboratory model. University Police has been renamed Public Safety, and the chief is now Director of Public Safety underscoring our focus on prevention education and community policing. Women's Services and Gender Resource is now more descriptively named S.A.G.E. (Sexuality, Anti-Violence, and Gender Equity).

Over the past two years, every department within the division completed comprehensive activities, programs, and service reviews

Over the past two years, every department within the division completed comprehensive activities, programs, and service reviews assessing alignment with our mission and our priorities of student learning and service. The assessment increased our sensitivity to fiduciary responsibilities and to the educational expenses incurred by students and their families, and it helped focus the division's energy and material resources on our mission. Guidelines for completing these reviews required each department to determine High/Low Student Demand and the High/Low Quality of activities, programs, and services by seeking input from departmental colleagues and students served, and by reviewing assessment results (EBI, ACHA, CORE, NESSE, etc.). In addition, we used the Council on the Advancement of Standards Frameworks for Assessing Learning and Development Outcomes as an assessment model. The process

helped us focus our activities and address the 2003 NEASC concern that staff members serve on numerous committees causing a drain on personnel.

In our last report, we also stated a continuing need to address diversity recruitment and retention. Our ongoing initiatives include PASSPORT, an early arrival orientation program for first-generation and low-income students; our Latino Initiative that recruits in Manchester, Nashua, and Boston; diversity recruitment scholarships; an international recruitment contract; retention achievement scholarships for international students; and numerous co-curricular diversity programs. New efforts include the hiring of an undergraduate Diversity Fellow in each residence hall; minority recruitment in Florida; international recruitment in South America; global meals added to dining selections; expansion and dollar increase of diversity and international scholarships; and the signing of a contract with ELS Language Services to begin offering programming September 2009. The establishment of an International and Minority Enrollment Enhancement working group chaired by the vice president for Student Affairs has assisted these new efforts.



The Current Situation

With the completion of our award winning 347-bed Langdon Woods facility and the renovation of Mary Lyon Hall, we have expanded the capacity and living style options for students. The demand for on-campus housing no longer exceeds availability.

STUDENT BEHAVIOR

Concerns related to student behavior in off-campus residential neighborhoods have seen a reversal with increased university housing capacity and a policy revision requiring first and second-year students to live on campus. This has led to improved relations with our host community.

Other off-campus concerns included alcohol-related behavior and Greek-letter social organizations located near residential neighborhoods. We now augment our alcohol education program with Alcohol-Wise, an online program required of all first-year students prior to enrollment. A four-year moratorium on Greek organization expansion and a thorough study of the Greek system concluded in December of 2007. We continue to recognize the few existing organizations, but we will not allow expansion of new chapters. Early response to these initiatives from both the town and the campus communities has been positive.

Financial Education

A new outgrowth of departmental assessment is our Financial Aid

department's \$SMART Program, which educates students about loan debt and financial management. Ongoing individual counseling is our response to the burden of escalating student loans.

Student response to educational efforts aimed at environmental responsibility has been very positive. *Doing It in the Dark*, an energy conservation competition among residence halls, raised student conservation awareness and saved nearly 12,000 kilowatts of electricity. Students have also embraced our introduction this spring of a trayless cafeteria to reduce water usage, food-waste, and electricity.



The Near Future

The Student Affairs division's new mission and our departmental assessment of activities, programs, and services will continue to guide our work and afford us informed opportunities to affirm the best of what we do. We

will continue to improve, to commit to deeper analysis, and to eliminate human and material resource expenditures on unnecessary or low student interest or low quality activities. Our goal is to create savings, reallocate opportunities, and reduce costs.

As our co-curricular programs emphasize their importance, we anticipate continued improvement in student behavior resulting from:

- **the implementation of Alcohol-Wise**
- **reduced loan indebtedness** (due, in part, to \$SMART)
- **enhanced diversity** in student enrollment associated with multiple new enhancements in recruitment and retention
- **strengthened town-gown relations** related to on-campus housing policy revision and new construction
- **engaged and environmentally aware students**

Evidence will come from assessing outcomes of these efforts, and will depend in part on our resource commitment to these new priorities.

7. Library and Other Information Resources

Achieving our role in the campus mission with no new staff and growing service demands required three critical actions. These included the integration of ITS and Lamson Library into a learning commons; the reassignment of librarians and staff; and the reassessment and redeployment of library services.

Concerns expressed by the 2003 NEASC visiting team: "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." [Dimitrios S. Pachis 10/2003]

Although broad enough in scope to include academic support services—such as Plymouth Academic Support Services (PASS), the Writing Center, Classroom Technology, and Academic Learning Technology—the Lamson Learning Commons is fundamentally the integration of Lamson Library’s traditional role in curricular support and Information Technology Service’s role in facilitating the educational computing needs of faculty and students.



Recent Activity

The Lamson Learning Commons can claim a number of new programs and initiatives since the 2003 *Self-Study*. In addition to continuing support of the curriculum, we expanded functions in the library to include the addition of a new

department—the Michael J. Spinelli Jr. Center for University Archives and Special Collections. Other new programs and initiatives include the Lamson Library Print Series; the Commons Café Student Artwork program; the Beyond Brown Paper digitization project of historical photographs; the implementation of Scriblio software (adopting usability studies with a content management system); extending library hours; and a new emphasis on public outreach. We have also contributed to better town-gown relations by waving library card fees for year-round residents of Plymouth and Holderness.

The centralized support center brought about by the merging of the library and information technology has proven to be a success internally, by expanding job duties and increasing some salaries, and externally, by creating a one-stop-shopping service desk. Academic research assistance and technological support are now usually available seven days a week either online, by phone, or in person.

The integration of the library with ITS and the re-tooling of certain job duties was unpopular with a few employees and led to some voluntary attrition. Departures allowed for new hires and further reevaluation of positions. The learning commons personnel reorganization freed one faculty librarian from a traditional role of managing the circulation desk. Her reassignment to the position of outreach librarian, well suits her interests and skills. The previous outreach librarian filled the newly created position of special collections librarian, thus providing professional management of the Michael J. Spinelli Jr. Center for University Archives and Special Collections. In addition, one staff member moved from Technical Services to assist in the archives and special collections. That Technical Services position remains vacant, and we have either halted or incorporated into the duties of others in the department less than essential processes and services.

In addition to the reorganization of personnel, we reassessed the library's public and technical services. Some low-demand services were discontinued or, like the periodical service desk, eliminated. The HelpDesk took over other essential services.

The evolution of the research process—from manual searching of print format bibliographic citations to instant online access to full-text journal articles—marched in step with our increase in databases. Three years ago we defined a new periodical policy and accomplished a major transition from print indexes to, whenever possible, full-text online access. The initial savings from discontinuing print journals allowed for increased online access. As a result, our materials budget has made a dynamic shift from acquiring materials in print to securing online licensing and maintenance fees.

TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT

Instructional technology support has grown within the learning commons to meet the unprecedented increase in demand. Four staff members from ITS and the Office of Teaching and Learning Technologies have re-located to offices adjacent to the learning commons. Their collaborative faculty development efforts encourage and support the integration of technology into the traditional classroom as well as improve hybrid and online courses.

We are currently developing ways to integrate a greater librarian presence into the Blackboard learning management system. Librarians can connect directly with faculty and students in the online course environment where they can lend an immediate ear to student research needs. Additionally, closer course involvement affords librarians opportunities to respond more effectively to faculty research and course content development expectations. We foresee an expansion of this innovation, and so far, it has proven especially helpful to graduate students.



The Current Situation

In the past two years, the changes described above have resulted in a 46 percent increase in library visitors and a pronounced increase in access to our online resources and digital projects. We are especially pleased with our concerted outreach effort to the residents of Berlin, New Hampshire, through the Beyond Brown Paper digital project. Responses to the historical photographs now available on the Web range from heartfelt nostalgic reminiscence to the research-valuable identification of people and tools.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment is critical to the library's changing role. What we may think users want and what they actually need may be completely different. With limited financial and human resources, it is important to evaluate services and to focus on the real needs of the greatest number of users. As part of our assessment mission, a librarian recently finished a sabbatical project examining the assessment of the learning commons. In addition, we have compiled and published facts in a study supporting library importance in the first-year experience. Our current integration projects and plans for future online innovation reflect the findings in both studies; we are on the right track.



The Near Future

We have addressed expansion without jeopardizing service.

However, this is only a cautionary appraisal since an investment in our growing online resources, digitization efforts, and archival inventory processes requires financial support. In a recent librarian and staff ranking of needs, the three highest priorities were additional staffing, training, and a larger budget. The ultimate goal is to ensure sufficient resources and services to support our academic mission—providing students with research materials and skills, and the related technological capabilities necessary for lifelong learning and success.

8. Physical and Technological Resources

Since the last accreditation visit, the university completed development of the 2004 Master Plan that received approval from our board of trustees.

Concerns expressed by the 2003 NEASC visiting team: "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 9:00A.M. to 2:00P.M. or so contributes to academic space problems." [Dimitrios S. Pachis, 10/2003]

Built upon the 1992 Master Plan, our new comprehensive university-wide plan will continue to expand the walking campus concept, add six hundred new beds to the residential life program, and complete a number of other projects to increase, update, and enhance academic space. In addition, we have undertaken a detailed review of deferred maintenance issues as part of an inter-campus University System of New Hampshire program. This program is expected to be very expensive; nevertheless, our board of trustees supports our efforts to find solutions to funding problems and to continue to address major deferred maintenance issues.



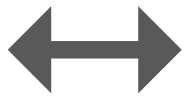
Recent Activity

In the spring of 2007, President Steen signed the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment statement. Accordingly, we will actively support steps to

make our campus climate neutral and to expand topics of the environment throughout our curriculum.

We have increased our investment in supporting the institution's network and computer infrastructure.

In 2006, we established the Frost School of Continuing and Professional Studies to meet the needs of working professionals. As a result, we are making better use of our facilities with evening and weekend offerings.



The Current Situation

A great deal of progress has been made on the 2004 Master Plan. Results include a broad range of accomplishments and instances of national recognition. As mentioned in chapter 6,

we are proud that the Langdon Woods residence hall won gold certified status from the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System—its second highest rating.

We have replaced the majority of our underground steam conduit and related heating infrastructure and we have completed the renovation and landscaping of the grounds and walkways in front of Hyde Hall.

We completed an entire renovation of our oldest and most popular residence, Mary Lyon Hall. This \$15 million investment incorporated many of the same environmental elements we learned from Langdon Woods. Our focused master plan calls for replacing our aging athletic and academic facilities on the Holderness campus with the new ALLWell Center. This five-phase project will ultimately include health, physical education, recreation, classrooms, and offices. As part of the ten-year plan, this project will not only transform our educational and community recreation facilities, it will also dramatically enhance the aesthetics of the entrance to the main campus and capitalize on the natural beauty of our surroundings. Phase I, an ice arena, is already in the design development stage.

ASSESSING MAINTENANCE NEEDS

Over the past four years, we have invested a significant amount of time, energy, and funding in addressing deferred maintenance projects. Along with the other

University System of New Hampshire institutions, we have completed a facilities deferred maintenance audit and are pleased to report a very favorable FOCI index score (15). Some of the projects included replacing:

- **roofs** on eight buildings with R-30 roof insulation
- **over 2,000 fluorescent and exit light fixtures** with high-energy efficient systems
- **eighty-five percent of our underground steam distribution** system with a high-energy efficient tunnel system, which will save energy and last three times longer than its predecessor
- **all of the windows in Rounds Hall, Pemigewasset Hall, the president's house, and several non-traditional apartments**
- **eight water-heating systems, several motors for air handling, and major air handling equipment for Hyde Hall**

PROFESSIONAL ASSESSMENT AGENCIES

To provide assessment services and recommendations to support strategic asset management and capital planning for Plymouth State University, Keene State College, and the University of New Hampshire, the University System of New Hampshire used two companies in 2007 and 2008—Sightlines LLC of Connecticut, and VFA, a Massachusetts based company. Sightlines' mission is to provide campus leadership with the ability to link facilities operating strategy and financial capacity. VFA is the leading provider of integrated software and services for facilities asset management and capital planning. The results of these assessments determine Physical Plant planning initiatives and are available from Kelly Kemery in the Physical Plant Office.

COMMITMENT TO THE ENVIRONMENT

The president's signing of the commitment to the environment, our subsequent formation of the President's Commission on Environmental Sustainability, and earning a gold LEED certification have motivated the institution to take even stronger action. We have:

- **developed new academic programs** related to environmental sustainability
- **received a grant from the U.S. Forest Service** for a feasibility study to convert our oil based heating and co-generation systems to biomass
- **committed the campus to pursuing environmental protection initiatives** (such as meeting LEED criteria for all new construction and facility rehabilitation)
- **adopted the Energy Star purchasing program**

- **encouraged recycling and energy reduction competitions** in the residence halls

We believe these actions, among numerous others, will allow us to meet our environmental goals of education and sustainability.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES INFRASTRUCTURE

Significant improvements were made to technology and information systems infrastructure. The main fiber backbone to the campus was upgraded in the summer of 2006. Along with that came network switch upgrades to many of the older residence halls, providing those buildings with higher speed access and the capacity to meet the growing demands of students seeking multimedia resources over the Internet.

Information Technology Services replaced a number of aging storage services for our main information systems (Banner, WebCT, email, Web pages, etc). By taking advantage of new virtual memory storage, our new hardware leverages more resources into smaller, scalable servers using significantly less power. Additionally, we installed new processing servers this past spring.

New network-management software, the Bradford System, better monitors the wide variety of computers and devices on and off campus. Bradford is software-independent, and functions first as a consultant and then as a systems integrator. The Bradford System captures each wireless and residence hall connection at an initial login, ensures that the computer has current security requirements, and places an agent on it to keep it updated. This has helped to reduce the incidence of viruses and malware.

There has been significant progress on the early foundation of Banner, the student and alumni information system installed in 2002.

THE *myPLYMOUTH* PORTAL

A new communication strategy for the campus is centrally located in *myPlymouth*. Through the *myPlymouth* Web portal, students, faculty, and staff all access a host of online services: course registration, financial aid, billing, career services, internal employee forms, and more.

Not only does the campus have a highly regarded, state-of-the-art Web portal, ITS staff have expanded portal access for consumers and graduates. Once they indicate an interest in Plymouth State, prospective students can easily access a customized view of information catering to their needs. As graduates, they can

receive information, online career services, networking opportunities, and notices of special events directly from our alumni and development offices.

The ITS staff who developed the *myPlymouth* portal are sought after as conference speakers and as consultants.

RELOCATING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Information Technology Services moved its HelpDesk operation out of Hyde Hall to Lamson Library in September 2006 as part of the integrated service plan described in the previous chapter. The learning commons now boasts the combination of technology support with more traditional front-line library services—circulation, reserves, and information. We did not simply juxtapose these two services, but integrated them into a new unit jointly managed and funded by the library and ITS. The resulting learning commons has attracted the interest of other New England schools, including Tufts, Nazarene, and others, who have visited the Lamson Learning Commons to learn from our experience.

Growth in the use and complexity demands of email required a replacement of a venerable but dated system. In 2006, ITS installed Zimbra, a communication suite, which, in addition to email, provides networked calendars, shared documents, contact lists, and task management capabilities.



The Near Future

Our 2004 Master Plan has received a great deal of support from USNH and we believe this support will continue. As mentioned above, construction on the ice arena and welcome center complex will begin this fall. We are working with the University System of New Hampshire to make sure that phases two through five of the ALLWell Center construction plan are the number-one system-wide capital improvement priority. Preparation has already begun for presenting the state legislature with the related capital appropriations requests for 2010.

Our board of trustees is committed to finding new funding to reduce deferred maintenance through annual investments in repairs and renovation. One option under review includes a combination of student fees and state capital appropriations; this option would address our future deferred maintenance needs and keep us from falling further behind.

Commitment to the environment, a recurring theme in this report, is a vital goal for our community's future. The enthusiastic and hardworking President's

Commission on Environmental Sustainability has us moving in the right direction; we are confident that thoughtful planning will meet our environmental goals.

In the next few years, additional improvements will enhance and secure our technological infrastructure. Wireless network access will continue to support the campus, and we are ever watchful for new and emerging technologies to aid our mission. Among these technologies are identity management systems that will better handle increased online services by collecting data critical to our security plan—such as who is using our infrastructure, for what purpose, and for how long.

COMMUNICATION

Information Technology Services plans to implement a unified messaging service to address changing communication habits. We are basing the unified messaging service on the premise that students will inevitably insist upon their own means of communication with each other and with the university—email, cell phone, instant messaging, online social networks, or some as yet unknown method. Perhaps a few may even opt for the increasingly archaic landline telephone.

WebCT's Blackboard serves as our current learning management system. While a default path to Blackboard will be retained with a future upgrade, the short- and long-term costs to the university will be significant. Consequently, it is prudent for the Technical Advisory Group to explore other options and alternatives.

Finally, ITS will build a second data-processing site to allow for the ongoing expansion of digital assets and online services—mitigating the risk of failure to the current single data-processing site.

9. Financial Resources

Our operating margin has grown steadily from a low of -0.1 percent (2003) to 6 percent (2007), and has exceeded our benchmark goal for each of the past three years.

Areas of concern expressed by the 2003 NEASC visiting team: “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.” [Dimitrios S. Pachis 10/2003]

Area of special emphasis: Assessing Plymouth State’s “overall fiscal well-being, in light of the institution’s designation as a university and its expanded mission, without likely prospect of significant additional financial resources from the state.” [Terrence J. MacTaggart, 3/28/2004]

Our overall financial stability has improved since our 2003 *Self-Study*. Major activities leading to this improvement included enrollment growth, program enhancement, sustained improvements in retention and graduation rates, and increases in the number and amount of grant and partnership activities.



Recent Activity

Our endowment has grown over the past few years and ended last year at \$6,156,441. However, both the institution and the University System of New Hampshire Board of

Trustees agree that we need to improve our development activities as a way of creating new revenue sources.

STATE APPROPRIATION AND FINANCIAL INDICATORS

Despite our growth in new revenues, we remain concerned that our faculty salaries are falling behind those of our comparators. We are also concerned over the uncontrollable increases in energy, deferred maintenance, and health care costs.

Primary financial strategic indicators demonstrate our improved financial stability. These indicators, reviewed annually by our board of trustees, are benchmarked against the Moody A-2 bond-rating group of nation-wide campuses. Our *operating margin* has grown steadily from a low of -0.1 percent in 2003 to 6 percent for the most recent year ending June 2007, and has exceeded our benchmark goal for each of the past three years. Our *unrestricted financial resources to operations* has grown from a low of 11.6 percent in 2003 to 23 percent in 2007, exceeding our benchmark for the past two years. *Total financial resources per FTE student* has also grown over this same period—from a low of \$2,639 to a high of \$5,778. Though we have not achieved the benchmark for this measure, we have made steady improvements toward meeting the goal. *Unrestricted financial resources to debt* has also shown continued improvement. However, due to debt resulting from our new Langdon Woods residence hall and major repairs and renovations to Mary Lyon Hall and Grafton Hall, we have not attained our benchmark goal in this area either—but we are close.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

The primary reason for the financial improvements has been our continued focus on strategic planning, which continues to be a strong element of institutional process for growth and development.

Various plans over the years have focused on improving the services and the support students receive. We believe these improvements have played a role in an undergraduate enrollment increase of 333 (FTE) students in the past five years. The mix of in-state and out-of-state students has remained fairly constant—about 60 to 40 percent.



The Current Situation

Undergraduate first-year to sophomore retention rates have increased from 73 percent in 2003 to 78 percent in 2007.

Undergraduate graduation rates have increased by 12 percent

in the last five years. Significantly, our first-year undergraduate class numbers have remained stable; the majority of the growth has been in our upper-class students—a tribute to our retention efforts.

GRADUATE PROGRAM AND ENDOWMENT GROWTH

Our graduate programs have continued to grow. Graduate enrollment increased from 5,476 in 2003 to 6,748 in 2007: an increase of 216 (FTE) students. The program continues to expand into new spaces and new sites across the state. The recent opening of the 2 Pillsbury Street location in Concord allows continued growth without straining our main campus facilities, and it opens new markets in the southern part of the state.

The board of trustees has made fundraising and endowment growth a priority. Our endowment has grown by 115 percent since 2003 as a result of both market growth and new endowed gifts. Last semester, they awarded a one-time funding measure of \$1 million to help us focus on building the staff and support services necessary to make the new capital campaign a success. Our campaign goal of \$15 million will fund the new ice arena and welcome center complex and also help build the endowment.

GRANTS AND SCHOLARLY INITIATIVES

Total grants in 2003 of \$4,406,272 have grown to \$6,720,786 in 2007. A significant part of this growth relates directly to two new centers: the Center for the Environment, and the Center for Rural Partnerships. These initiatives contribute to our mission as a regional comprehensive university and generate new grants helping to support the centers as well as to provide additional regional support.



The Near Future

Full-time faculty salaries, competitive at the time of the last accreditation report, have fallen almost 6 percent behind our comparators' averages. The retirement of large numbers of long-term faculty, and the hiring of new, initially lower-earning and younger faculty, has been one reason for the drop. Despite these positive steps, we need to invest even more in our full-time ranks in order to continue to attract and retain faculty.

Our part-time faculty salaries have also fallen below the New Hampshire marketplace averages since the 2003 visit. To address this, part-time faculty were awarded a salary increase this spring, and the institution is working on a plan to make additional increases.

ENERGY COSTS AND DIFFERED MAINTENANCE

Energy costs have been growing at rates far outstripping inflation. Since 2003, our utility costs have grown by 77 percent—from \$2,716,212 to \$4,805,469. It does not appear that the market for oil and electricity is going to change. During this time, we have invested a significant amount of money in deferred maintenance projects in the interest of conserving energy (see chapter 8). Our efforts have been successful. The carbon inventory process shows that while our costs continue to rise, our eCo2 emissions per square foot have decreased by 18 percent.

Deferred maintenance is a serious concern for both the university and the university system board of trustees. Over the next fifteen years, the cost of maintaining the campus will grow considerably—in part because of inflation but also because of the age of our facilities. We have completed a full deferred-maintenance study, and we are working with our board of trustees as we plan for funding the future.

AUDITOR

Price Waterhouse Coopers conducts our annual audit. The most recent audit was positive for both our regular financial audit and our A-133 audit. The financial goal is to provide resources to meet or exceed our mission while maintaining overall financial stability.

10. Public Disclosure

Plymouth State University has adopted a policy of providing transparent communications. The goal is to be accurate, consistent, and timely with all communication—regardless of the subject.

Areas of concern expressed by the 2003 NEASC visiting team: “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.” [Dimitrios S. Pachis 10/2003]

We strive to create a clear understanding of our academic programs and to extend partnership opportunities for cultural enrichment and economic development with the North Country and Lakes Region.



Recent Activity

We have made significant enhancements to the Office of Public Relations including the hiring of a new director in September of 2006. The office has been restructured into three areas—publications, media relations, and Web services. The restructuring has resulted in several personnel and procedural changes: the creation of two new positions to manage the website—Web administrator and Web technician; the hiring of a veteran journalist to manage media relations; the hiring of a third full-time graphic designer; and the development and refinement of internal processes improving efficiency and ensuring excellence in service and products.

A newly created Communication Task Force reviews all communication means, methods, and messages. The task force's ongoing charge is to develop strategies enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of communications. This task force developed and implemented our first comprehensive internal communication program, *P-Link—keeping the campus connected*. Another newly created ad hoc group, the Emergency Communication Task Force, reviews existing emergency communication capabilities and procedures. A communication committee oversees the implementation of the task force recommendations.

A NEW WEBSITE DESIGN

May 2007 saw the completion of a comprehensive redesign of our website improving appearance, clarity, and functionality [<http://plymouth.edu>]. The redesign incorporated parity of focus and treatment of all departments and constituencies including the public. New content management software enables direct departmental involvement in regular review and updating of online information. The expanded internal Web portal service, *myPlymouth*, includes alumni services and public relations.

The improved website incorporates:

- **the undergraduate *Catalog***
- **information about transferring course credit**
- **the mission statement**
- **emergency procedures**
- ***PSU Alert***—the new emergency text message/e-mail alert system
- **online-only versions of several university publications** such as the annual report, and *Plymouth Week* newsletter
- ***ThisWeek@PSU***, the university's comprehensive online events calendar
- **the College of Graduate Studies' upgraded Web pages**

In addition, an online publications toolkit is in development to ensure consistency and quality.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

In keeping with its mission, the university has placed a greater emphasis on improving community outreach. A new cabinet-level position was filled in 2006—the Executive Director of University Relations. This position oversees the Office of Public Relations, the Silver Center for the Arts, and the university's legislative affairs.

The executive director soon established three new outreach initiatives: (1) the Business Liaison Office—providing direct access to resources for businesses,

organizations, and local communities, (2) the Office of Conferences and Events—coordinating all conference and event functions on campus, and (3) the *Live, Work, and Innovate in Rural New Hampshire* series—inviting businesses and organizations to present and discuss their particular opportunities and challenges to interested students and faculty. The institution has worked to elevate its reputation by amplifying its media relations efforts, increasing advertising and public radio underwriting, and responding appropriately and rapidly to public inquiries.



The Current Situation

The restructuring of the Office of Public Relations has increased staff productivity and project quality. Two publications recently received highly competitive regional awards, and the media relations team has increased the number of positive story placements in local, regional, and national media. We recognize the dynamic cultural shift in America where now over 60 percent of all prospective student applicants' first contact with a university occurs online. Significantly, the improvements to the website have increased both the number and quality of our applicants.

The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment has implemented a comprehensive strategic plan incorporating all planning components into the budgeting process. The office's associate dean has extraordinary professional expertise to assess and evaluate our data management and analytical capabilities.

The executive director of the new Office of University Relations, Stephen Barba, has brought a wealth of experience and credibility through a distinguished forty-year business career in New Hampshire. Mr. Barba conducted a comprehensive analysis of our active relationships with the state's largest corporations, and he has raised our state profile through active engagement with multiple organizations, events, and communities of interest.

In the College of Graduate Studies, two new positions manage Web publications and overall media and advertising.



The Near Future

We have demonstrated a strong commitment to providing clear, accurate, comprehensive, and timely information to all of our constituencies on and off campus. In the past two years, new institutional capacity to research, assess, produce, service, and disseminate information has both resulted from and led to new professional staffing in the highest levels of the administration. Concern for

accurate and unambiguous information is of salient interest as we design new programs and policies. We anticipate that elevated emphasis and increased capacity for effective communications will produce a more seamless and consistent understanding of our mission.

We recognize the critical importance of our public image to our mission. People need to know and trust the university as a vital member of the New Hampshire community. They also need to see consistent evidence that we are faithfully pursuing our mission. Businesses, organizations, and local governments need to appreciate our commitment and willingness to work as a partner for the enrichment of our culture and the development of our economy.

In pursuit of core priorities, major plans for the next five years include: selecting a new vendor to create recruiting materials emphasizing data driven decisions regarding recruitment; developing and implementing a comprehensive communication plan in concert with our new strategic plan; and developing a new comprehensive public relations plan.

11. Integrity

PSU has either maintained or improved upon those areas relating to the Integrity standard since the 2003 Self-Study. There have been substantial changes in communication venues in the past few years.

*Areas of concern expressed by the 2003 NEASC visiting team:
“Handbooks affecting all types of university employees are not online.
Efforts and responsibility for improving faculty and student diversity are scattered among academic and administrative departments.” [Dimitrios S. Pachis 10/2003]*

Through the *myPlymouth* Web portal, all campus constituencies have access to many types of information. At both the University System of New Hampshire (USNH) level and at the local campus level, the secure Human Resources website includes exhaustive lists of policies regarding employment, recruitment, compensation, and more.



Recent Activity

The Office of Public Relations has established a comprehensive internal communication plan, implemented *P-Link* and other internal print, Web-based, and telephone communication channels. The Communication Task Force and Emergency Communication Task Force have overseen the formation of an Emergency Response Policy. The Environmental Health and Safety website, <http://www.plymouth.edu/fsb/safety/safety1.htm>, contains vital information on safety issues such as fire safety, employee “right to know,” pet policy, and related subjects.

THE PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON DIVERSITY

The President's Commission on Diversity maintains a website prominently displaying the mission statement of the group and their various activities.

The site also links directly to the Diversity Resources website, which includes links to student groups as well as campus departments dealing with issues of diversity [<http://www.plymouth.edu/main/diversity.html>].

Human Resources uses publications with diverse readership to attract minority candidates. Advertising frequently targets such publications as *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Education*—two journals featuring diversity advertising options—as well as *Hispanic Outlook* and *Women in Science and Mathematics*. The website now links two internal diversity information sites. The Women's Services and Gender Resource Center has been appropriately renamed S.A.G.E. (Sexuality, Ant-Violence, and Gender Equity) better reflecting the center's mission.

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Students easily access *The Student Handbook* online, receiving notification of its presence every semester; changes are highlighted for clarity. Our *Community Standards and Policy Expectations* document is posted online, and the student senate voted a resolution creating a Riotous Behavior Task Force—lest the title cause alarm, the intent is to forestall riotous behavior and to create policy to hold students accountable should any occur.

Residential Life's Diversity Fellow Program includes hiring a student to fulfill this role in each residence hall. Other initiatives relating to diversity include PASSPORT for low-income and first-generation incoming students; recruitment in larger urban areas in New Hampshire and in Boston; the Latino Initiative; and recruitment in Florida and South America.

Information Technology provides students with ample information and warnings of consequences of illegal music and file sharing practices. The telephone emergency text alert system assists in quickly alerting students regarding life and safety issues.

Changes to the faculty governance system have had sweeping affects. The newly created University Leadership Team, composed of the president, and the speakers of the Faculty, Professional Administrative and Technical (PAT), Operating Staff

(OS), and Student Senates, now engage the entire community in oversight and campus governance.

Websites provide access to the PAT and OS handbooks [<http://www.usnh.edu/hr/staff-handbooks.html>]. The provost's Academic Affairs website hosts the *Faculty Handbook*, up-to-date as of December of 2007 [<http://www.plymouth.edu/acadaff/>]. Human Resources (HR) also collaborated with the university police (now called Public Safety) to present the Safety in the Workplace workshop. To this list, we can add HR's offering of a supervisor-training workshop—Managing Staff - ADA, FMLA, and Worker's Compensation. This program increased awareness of federal and state leave laws to ensure supervisors' compliance with all non-discrimination laws and practices.



The Current Situation

We have conducted discriminatory harassment awareness training for all faculty and staff. The training, offered online and in-person, achieved 96 percent participation. This program covered all aspects of harassment and discrimination, including sexual harassment.

Safety and well-being of students, faculty, staff, and the residents of the surrounding communities is a top priority. The emergency plan provides information and instructions for almost any emergency. Communication, information, and preparation are at the heart of the emergency plan.



The Near Future

Further improvements to the internal communications system are forthcoming. Human Resources employees are participating in the creation of a training program for unlawful harassment. We have used this training for the past few years and are now working to share it at the USNH level.

The office of the vice president for Student Affairs will be forming a working group on international and minority enrollment. We are increasing alcohol awareness by requiring all first-year students to complete the online Alcohol-Wise program.

Our Next Five Years

President Sara-Jayne Steen

In June of 2006, I became Plymouth State University's 14th president. On arrival, I asked a series of questions about what is core to Plymouth State University, what should be changed, and what the dreams might be. At the same time, strategic plans for every unit on campus were brought forward; they were thoughtful and exciting and were ready to be assimilated and prioritized.

Now, after two years and significant discussion across campus and with wider stakeholders about our mission as a regional comprehensive university, these ideas have been debated, refined, and integrated into a strategic plan. We have come together to articulate how to, in Chancellor Reno's words, "make mission an action verb." This five-year strategic plan focuses on goals associated with programs; student success; faculty and staff support; and partnerships and engagement with the community and region, all components of a vibrant regional comprehensive university, as well as goals for the physical, technological, and financial resources that will help us to achieve the first four goals.

Most significantly, over the next five years we will move that plan forward, through conscious prioritization and with an awareness that although we cannot

be everything to everyone, we can and will do well what we do. Some of the items address points that were raised in the NEASC report.

Action Points

- **We have streamlined governance, and we will have fewer committees offering genuinely meaningful participation.** For example, we have created a Planning and Budgeting Leadership Group to develop and prioritize tactics on behalf of the institution to help us move the strategic plan forward. We will refine this process and continue to develop ways to bring planning and budgeting together on behalf of the strategic plan, including data-informed decision making and program assessment.
- **We will further the discussion of faculty and staff issues such as workload, promotion and tenure standards, and compensation, including compensation for our adjunct faculty members, and move to implement our plans.** We were pleased this year to receive a national Sloan Award for faculty flexibility, to add awards for teaching, scholarship, and outreach and engagement; to provide increases for adjunct faculty; and to mitigate increases in health insurance costs. Our promotion and tenure committee will report next year.
- **We will complete and implement a comprehensive communications plan,** bringing together our Web and print publications, and more importantly bringing together our university relations, public relations, alumni affairs, and development communications plans so that we are on message and delivering materials to stakeholders in effective ways. This process is under way.
- **We have examined our graduate programs and funding and put plans in place. Funding for scholarship and professional development has increased, and information on scholarship is now collected and disseminated.** Sponsored Programs will be moving to the office of the provost and vice president for Academic Affairs, and a new Research Advisory Council will be developing appropriate policies. We will continue to emphasize the integration at all levels of teaching supported by strong research, scholarship, and creativity coupled with engagement.
- **We are in the quiet stages of a comprehensive campaign to provide additional endowment dollars for scholarships and stipends, faculty**

and staff development opportunities, and capital projects and programming. This is one part of enhancing our fiscal well-being and margin of excellence, while maintaining our concern for student access and affordability. Over the next five years, we will be restructuring our advancement team and carrying forward the Imagine a Way campaign.



Part V: Appendices

Student Success: The E Series

Student Success: The S Series

Public Disclosure

CIHE Data Forms

