

**Report to the  
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students**

**Clarion University  
Clarion, Pennsylvania 16214**

**by**

**An Evaluation Team representing the Middle States Commission on Higher Education**

**Prepared after study of the institution's self-study report and a visit to the campus on  
March 18-21, 2012**

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

It is a confidential document prepared as an educational service for the benefit of the institution. All comments in the report are made in good faith, in an effort to assist Clarion University. This report is based solely on an educational evaluation of the institution and of the manner in which it appears to be carrying out its educational objectives.

**AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT**

**President/CEO:**

Karen M. Whitney, Ph.D.

**Chief Academic Officer:**

Ronald Nowaczyk, Ph.D.  
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

**Chair of the Council of Trustees:**

R. Lee James

## I. Content and Nature of the Visit

### Institutional Overview

<b>Control:</b>	Public
<b>Affiliation:</b>	Unit of PA System of Higher Education
<b>Carnegie Classification:</b>	Master's – Larger Programs
<b>Degrees Offered:</b>	Certificate/Diploma, Associate's, Bachelor's, Master's
<b>Distance Learning Programs:</b>	Yes

**Accreditors Approved by U.S. Secretary of Education:** American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology; National Association of Schools of Art and Design, Commission on Accreditation; National Association of Schools of Music, Commission on Accreditation; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education; National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission

**Other Accreditors:** American Library Association (ALA), Committee on Accreditation; Association of Technology, Management and Applied Engineering (ATMAE); Commission on Accreditation for Respiratory Care (CoARC); AACSB International; American Bar Association; American Chemical Society Association; Childhood Education International Association; Small Business Development Centers; College Reading and Learning Association; International Reading Association; National Council for Accreditation of Coaching Education; International Association of Counseling Services, Inc. (IACS) an Accrediting Association; National Council Teachers of Mathematics; National Council Social Studies; National Council Teachers of English; National Science Teachers Association; Council for Exceptional Children; Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care, Inc. (AAHC); College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA) – University Writing Center.

### Instructional Locations

**Branch Campuses:** Venango\*, Oil City, Pennsylvania

**Additional Locations:** Beaver Valley Intermediate Unit, Monaca, PA; Cheney University Urban Education Center, Philadelphia, PA; Dixon University Center, Harrisburg, PA; Elk/Cameron Community Education Council, Saint Mary's, PA; Lawrence County Learning Center, New Castle, PA; Meadville Medical Center\*, Meadville, PA; Penn Highlands Community College – Ebensburg Education Center, Ebensburg, PA; Penn Highlands Community College – Richland Campus, Johnstown, PA; Philadelphia Free Library, Philadelphia, PA; West Penn School of Nursing\*, Pittsburgh, PA; Westmoreland Intermediate Unit #7, Greensburg, PA

**Other Instructional Sites:** Clarion County Literacy, Clarion, PA

\* sites visited by team members

## **2012 Self-Study Process and Report: Comprehensive**

### **II. Affirmation of Continued Compliance with Eligibility Requirements**

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

### **III. Compliance with Federal Requirements**

Based on review of the self-study interviews, the certification statement supplied by the institution and other institutional documents, the team affirms that the institution continues to meet the requirements of affiliation in the *Characteristics of Excellence*. The team further affirms that the institution meets relevant requirements under the Higher Education Opportunity Act 2008 related to distance education, transfer of credit, and credit hours.

### **IV. Evaluation Overview**

The visiting team arrived at Clarion at an interesting point in its history. It is undergoing a dramatic overhaul in administrative processes, led by a new president and chief academic officer. The University had in recent years experienced a significant degree of instability in its academic leadership (6 provosts in ten years) that has impeded its progress as an institution, especially as it relates to planning and institutional renewal, institutional assessment, and the assessment of student learning.

Clarion's aim to delegate responsibility for institutional progress across the University, and to build a culture of intentionality about what is important at the institution, is wise and achievable. It has many strengths to build upon as it does so – a history of market responsiveness and service to the region, a tradition of innovation in program delivery, a collegial atmosphere, a supportive faculty, and strong community support.

Clarion has been particularly challenged to conform to standard contemporary practices in institutional assessment and the assessment of student learning. While it seems to be headed in the right direction in these areas, there is so much work to be done that the University community will have to muster a concerted, sustained effort over a considerable length of time in order for the institution to have the data it needs to make sound strategic decisions, and in order for it to become more proficient in utilizing the data it gathers to foster institutional development. The assessment of general education is one of several institutional soft spots that require institutional attention and progress.

The team offers its observations, suggestions, and recommendations in a spirit of respect for the unique mission of Clarion, collegiality and a shared desire for institutional renewal.

**Chapter Name** Mission, Goals and Integrity

**Standard Addressed** Standard 1 Mission and Goals

*Clarion University meets this standard.*

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

The mission of Clarion University is evolving. While Clarion has remained focused on being the educational anchor institution of its region and its service to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, it has recently embarked on numerous initiatives intended to document program effectiveness and educational impact in new, specific ways, and to improve the manner in which the mission is manifested in the day-to-day experiences of Clarion students. These initiatives may bring significant change at an institution that is on the cusp of celebrating its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2017.

The adoption of a new mission and vision statement at Clarion in early 2012 is symbolic of a new era at Clarion. The new institutional leaders have set an ambitious agenda for reframing student learning at Clarion, and are to be commended for aiming high in their bold and energetic commitment to institutional renewal.

One of Clarion's hallmarks is providing access to higher education to the citizens of the local region and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and it addresses its public mission in a distinctive way. There is a growing awareness across the university of both the internal challenges Clarion faces and the changing dynamics of public higher education in Pennsylvania and beyond, and Clarion is priming itself to address these in both the short and long-term.

### **Significant Accomplishments**

Clarion is to be commended for reviewing and renewing their mission. The new mission statement that was developed through institutional discussion and approved by the Council of Trustees on February 16, 2012, is concise and strong, and the evaluation team found in its conversations across campus that the new mission statement appears to have been well received by the members of the Clarion community.

The vision statement emphasizes the integration of "high impact" educational practices into the student experience at Clarion, and this approach also seems to have broad support across campus.

The process has begun on campus to develop institutional goals that flow from the mission and vision statement, and it is expected that the new goals will begin to take shape later in spring 2012. This will be an important exercise in determining how the institution's mission and goals are manifested on a daily basis.

### **Suggestions for Institutional Improvement**

It was unclear to the evaluation team in their discussions across campus how the phrase "nationally recognized programs" in the new mission statement applies to the academic programs at Clarion that have not obtained specialized accreditation.

The Clarion University community might benefit from formally engaging in discourse on what is meant by the phrase "nationally recognized programs" in its new mission statement, in order to provide direction for institutional programs seeking such recognition.

As a culture of assessment is built at Clarion, the University is encouraged to frame their institutional goals in a way that their attainment is measurable.

**Recommendations:** None

**Requirements:** None

**Standard Addressed** Standard 6 Integrity

*Clarion University meets this standard.*

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

Academic freedom, intellectual freedom and freedom of expression all characterize the culture of Clarion, and the protection of these core values appears to be a high institutional priority. The evaluation team found no evidence of breaches of these basic freedoms to teach and learn.

The evaluation team heard various comments about perceptions that the current criteria for faculty promotion may not be sufficiently defined and the perception that this may allow for inappropriate influences to come to bear in the promotion process.

### **Suggestions for Institutional Improvement**

The University recognized through the self-study process that:

- the University should continue to improve the flow and accuracy of information between administration, faculty, staff, students and other constituents;
- a centralized, on-line university resource providing information on local faculty policies and procedures would be beneficial to the faculty; and
- consideration should be given to relevant methodologies to ensure the integrity of the institution's on-line courses.

The evaluation team endorses these findings for institutional improvement.

### **Recommendations**

The evaluation team recommends that the University conduct a formal review of the faculty promotion criteria to confirm that they are sufficiently defined, and that recent faculty promotion decisions affirm consistent treatment of all candidates for promotion.

It is also recommended that periodic assessment of other institutional policies, processes, and practices and their implementation be conducted in an on-going effort to ensure this aspect of institutional integrity.

**Requirements:** None

**Chapter Name** Planning, Resource Allocation, Institutional Renewal and Institutional Resources

**Standard Addressed** Standard2 Planning, Resource Allocation and Institutional Renewal

*Clarion University meets this standard.*

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

Clarion University of Pennsylvania has an experienced senior fiscal manager effectively overseeing its resources. Clarion has judiciously made improvements to the University infrastructure consistent with the fulfillment of the institution's mission, and mindful of issues of environmental sustainability.

The University is in the midst of a concerted effort to develop a series of institutional planning documents. The planning processes that are underway may help clarify institutional responsibility and accountability as it relates to planning, as this responsibility appears to be somewhat diffuse. The assessment of the effectiveness of planning, resource allocation and institutional renewal processes to date has been driven largely by the application of PASSHE-wide performance indicators.

### **Significant Accomplishments**

Clarion has recently instituted a new Responsibility Center Management (RCM) system as a means to foster greater financial accountability among the individual cost centers and departments (see Self-Study p. 20). Besides the President, the Vice President for Finance and Administration, his staff, and the Associate Vice President for Computing Services are to be commended for providing the infrastructure and support for RCM. While still in its nascent stage, the process has the potential for increasing responsibility and accountability for the stewardship of institutional resources across the institution.

Team interviews revealed that the renewal of the Institutional Research function at Clarion already appears to be reaping dividends for the institution in the area of planning. The continued provision of valid and reliable data via the office of Information Management and Institutional Research is critical to institutional efforts for renewal and transformation. The new director of this office has already produced a wealth of data – that was previously seemingly unavailable – that supports programs for student success.

### **Suggestions for Institutional Improvement**

The University recognized through the self-study process that:

- reporting tools, including modeling techniques and forecasting, should be made available to Responsibility Center managers and the university as a whole;
- training and workshops should be offered to provide opportunities for administrators, faculty, and staff, to develop expertise in RCM performance and assessment;
- the alignment of institutional initiatives with PASSHE performance metrics should be pursued in order to capitalize on opportunities for additional revenue;
- the development of a plan to ensure adequate computing resources for faculty and staff across Responsibility Centers would benefit the institution.

The evaluation team endorses these findings for institutional improvement.

**Recommendations:** None

**Requirements:** None

**Standard Addressed** Standard 3 Institutional Resources

*Clarion University meets this standard.*

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

Despite difficult fiscal times, senior financial administrators have effectively managed Clarion's finances. Financial reports show a budget surplus, and it also appears that Clarion is not overly extended in terms of debt obligations. Findings include:

- The campus has learning facilities adequate to its instructional mission. The Carlson Library is especially attractive, functional and well used.
- Instructional technology appears adequate for the institution's needs.
- Clarion has institutional controls to assure the correct allocation of assets.
- The University has established diversified revenue streams in the face of funding challenges.
- Several new, attractive facilities have added to the University infrastructure and added value to the University experience and advanced the University's commitment to environmental sustainability.
- Clarion, with leadership from PASSHE, appears to be making appropriate strategic decisions to support both administrative (i.e., PeopleSoft initiative) and academic computing (switch from Blackboard CMS to Desire2Learn) needs.

In short, Clarion seems reasonably well equipped and poised for a future that will be fiscally challenging if state revenue and support continue to decline.

### **Significant Accomplishments**

Capital projects, facilities and technology infrastructure improvements have moved the institution forward. Clarion has received its fair share of PASSHE capital funding and the Clarion Foundation has also been active in supporting new facilities projects, and the benefits the University has experienced as a result of its relationship with the Foundation appears to be quite noteworthy.

A significant reserve fund has been built up over the years to help the university weather what might be difficult financial times.

### **Suggestions for Institutional Improvement**

The University recognized through the self-study process that the development of a funding and implementation plan for addressing deferred maintenance might be an institutional priority. The evaluation team endorses this suggestion for institutional improvement.

In addition, the evaluation team encourages the institution to engage in the periodic assessment of the effective and efficient use of institutional resources as it seeks to establish a culture of assessment at Clarion.

**Recommendations:** None

**Requirements:** None

**Chapter Name** Leadership, Governance and Administration

**Standard Addressed** Standard 4 Leadership and Governance

*Clarion University meets this standard.*

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

Clarion shows evidence that it has active governing bodies at several levels (Council of Trustees, Faculty Senate and Student Senate). Practically all of the employees (faculty, administrators and staff) are represented by PASSHE-wide collective bargaining units. In addition, Clarion has a number of standing committees and councils (i.e., Academic Standards, Curriculum, Technology, Graduate Studies and Facilities Planning) that provide valuable input to university-

wide decision processes. It is noted that all university councils are essentially advisory to the President except for the Council of Trustees which makes its recommendations to the Chancellor of PASSHE and has specified powers related to recommendations from the President as described in ACT 182 of 1982 – Enabling Legislation of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education.

Clarion operates with a high degree of collegiality among its various administrative, faculty and student members. Indeed the team heard this often, and was able to confirm that a culture of collegiality permeates much of the interactions with faculty, administrators, students and visitors.

Clarion's leadership has fostered a climate of shared governance. There is sufficient independence to assure the integrity of shared governance processes. The leadership of various governing boards and councils appear satisfied that their voices are heard and taken into consideration by the administration. Academic program development, curricula issues, and facilities planning are examples of activities in which various university constituents appear to be actively engaged in governance processes. However, some of the charters and foundational documents for these governing bodies appear not to have been revisited for a number of years, and may not represent current institutional realities.

Clarion may be heading for difficult fiscal times if the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania continues to require significant budget savings from the entire public university system. Decisions regarding financial resources and academic program restructuring may test the collegial relationships that presently exist among the various shared-governing bodies and the administration.

### **Significant Accomplishments**

Clarion's new president and senior administration have taken on a number of new initiatives that have generated a good deal of activity for its governing bodies. Discussions on a new mission, new programs, curricula modifications, and budgeting processes have created a plethora of activities for the governing bodies to consider.

The Clarion Council of Trustees appears to be actively involved with the university. They are experienced community leaders aware of the University's strengths. They participated in the search for a new president and reported being pleased with her performance to date.

### **Suggestions for Institutional Improvement**

The University governing bodies should examine their original charters to determine whether the original provisions are still appropriate for Clarion today, and amend them as necessary, and, as stated in the self-study, the Faculty Senate in particular should engage in self-assessment.

The members of the Council of Trustees may want to consider strategizing on how to take on a more intentional advocacy role in the community and beyond Clarion especially as serious budget reductions loom throughout the Commonwealth.

The senior administration has moved forward with a number of important initiatives in a relatively short period of time. It is important that in order for these initiatives to proceed to fruitful conclusions, more deliberation and reflection may be required. The University's various governing bodies are the appropriate forums for this deliberation and reflection to take place.

Clarion is encouraged to engage in the periodic assessment of the effectiveness of institutional governance as it seeks to create a culture of institutional assessment.

The student role in institutional governance may be underutilized. Clarion is encouraged to engage in the assessment of the role of students in University governance.

**Recommendations:** None

**Requirements:** None

**Standard Addressed** Standard 5 Administration

*Clarion University meets this standard.*

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

Clarion shows evidence that it has an administrative structure appropriate to its mission. For twenty years (see Self Study p. 2), Clarion benefitted from stability in its chief executive officer, having had only two presidents, both of who moved the institution forward. The new president hired in 2010 appears to understand where the institution has been and where it has to go. She has engaged the university community to rethink its mission and goals. The senior leadership in academic affairs, finance and administration, and student and university affairs are experienced and well qualified to support the president and her priorities for Clarion.

The team has identified several concerns:

- The chief academic officer (provost) position has had significant turnover since the last Middle States Accreditation Team visit. The self-study (p. 2) indicates there have been six provosts in ten years. This instability in academic leadership at Clarion has impeded the university's progress related to academic planning, and the assessment of institutional effectiveness and student learning outcomes.
- Faculty, including department chairpersons, and senior administrators indicated that Clarion is challenged to effectively support faculty sponsored research and grantsmanship.
- While Clarion is to be commended for establishing a new Responsibility Center Management (RCM) system, department chairpersons and program directors expressed concern about the measures being used and see it as perhaps placing too much emphasis on costs and not enough on education benefits. Comments that RCM is "very complex" and at times "frustrating" and that it was being "rushed" were expressed.
- There appear to be a number of staff members with overlapping responsibilities for planning as indicated by their titles (i.e., Faculty Fellow for *Planning*, Assessment and Improvement, Director for Academic *Planning* and Budgets, Director for *Planning* and Assessment). It is not clear how these offices interact with one another, or who, ultimately, is responsible for planning at Clarion.
- The relationship of the Clarion University Foundation, which is a separate not-for-profit corporation, appears on the Clarion College Organization Chart.

### **Significant Accomplishments**

Clarion's senior administration has been able to move the university community relatively quickly to re-examine its mission, vision and core values through an inclusive process that allowed most constituents (students, faculty, staff, external community) to participate. A steering committee with the assistance of a consultant drafted the new university mission statement. The president has taken the initiative to establish a data-driven culture by creating new offices (Information Management and Institutional Research and Planning, Assessment and Improvement) that report directly to her. The recent offer of a new three-year contract for the

President is a testament to the momentum she has built at Clarion in the short time she has been at the helm of the institution.

A new provost has been hired who seems to be a complimentary partner for the president to reposition Clarion in the next decade. He has appropriate experience and a track record that appears to bode well for stabilizing this position.

The university is to be commended for its positive position in relation to PASSHE benchmarks on the diversity of institutional leadership.

### **Suggestions for Institutional Improvement**

The University administration needs to proceed deliberately with its Responsibility Center Management (RCM) system and strive to ensure that all constituents understand its mechanisms and details. At the time of this writing, a new “scorecard” was being developed that has the potential to assist in this endeavor. The Middle States evaluation team fully supports Clarion’s own suggestion in the self-study that professional development, training and greater clarity may be needed in order to move this initiative forward to a successful conclusion. The University should be prepared to adjust and fine-tune RCM implementation as needed.

The university is encouraged to ensure that their documents and publications identify the Clarion University Foundation as a distinct and separate entity from the University. As a separate 501(c)3 organization, it should not be reflected in the University’s formal organization chart.

Clarion is advised to review its organizational structure regarding academic and institutional planning to ensure its effectiveness in shaping the University’s planning activities. Clarion is also advised to re-examine the need for more intentional institutional infrastructure for supporting sponsored research and grants.

**Recommendations:** None

**Requirements:** None

**Chapter Name**                      Enabling Students to Build for the Twenty-First Century

**Standard Addressed** Standard 8      Student Admissions and Retention

*Clarion University meets this standard.*

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

The institution has established a number of minority recruitment initiatives, including recruitment partnerships in key urban areas such as Philadelphia and Harrisburg. However, the rates of minority students persisting to the attainment of a degree, as documented in the PASSHE System Accountability Report, fall significantly short of the rates for white students, and this is a concern of the visiting evaluation team.

The Building Bridges Program as described aims to facilitate communication and understanding among students of diverse racial backgrounds.

Winter Intersession on-line classes provide opportunities for students to enroll in courses to fulfill degree requirements, accelerate program completion, and take courses to improve GPA.

### **Significant Accomplishment**

A team representative visited the West Penn Diploma School of Nursing. Clarion's nursing program partnership with West Penn is an exemplary mechanism for increasing students into the pipeline of Registered Nurses in Pennsylvania.

### **Suggestions for Institutional Improvement**

The University recognized through the self-study process that it should develop a more robust enrollment reporting system, including metrics for monitoring target populations. The evaluation team underscores the need for a useful and comprehensive enrollment reporting system.

The institution should document the impact of all initiatives and strategies employed to improve (increase) student retention as it builds a culture of assessment at Clarion.

### **Recommendations**

The tracking of the retention and graduation rates of all Clarion students should routinely take place.

The university must develop a sustainable strategy to ameliorate the existing retention and graduation disparities between minority and majority students.

**Requirements:** None

### **Standard Addressed** Standard 9 Student Support Services

*The institution meets this standard.*

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

The institutional self-study documents as well as policy and procedural documents provided during the visit and discussions with various constituent groups indicate that the student support services at Clarion University are substantial and strong.

There are highly qualified professionals in a wide variety of support offices, both at the Clarion and Venango campuses. While administrative restructuring has been challenging, professional resources and leadership are aligned to address some identified areas in the self-study such as special admissions student support, minority student services, and aligning services so students and families know where to find support.

The proposed creation of new services such as the One Stop Center are expected to conserve institutional resources without compromising the personalized experience that students expect at Clarion University. Written policies and procedures are all available to students on the internet and through print media. The One Stop Center will in all likelihood improve the accessibility and dissemination of this information.

There are clear guidelines for appeals and other processes for students. The registrar's office provides for effective records management.

Institutional investment in student development programming, such as the proposed learning communities, should enhance the student development programming, particularly if it is linked to stated learning outcomes and includes an assessment component.

The staff in the student services areas and operational areas are appropriately creative in marshaling resources and have a reflective approach that promotes an understanding of best practices in the field. Their planning and evaluation endeavors inform continuing improvement.

The student affairs administrative functions regularly conduct five-year systematic reviews, and the functional offices regularly survey students. In the most recent review and during the self-study, these offices worked collectively to become more focused on closing the assessment loop by addressing assessment findings. The purchase of software to track these efforts may help expedite this endeavor.

### **Significant Accomplishments**

Recent efforts to promote the integration of student services and academic affairs hold promise for better addressing the needs of Clarion students. The examples are many, but efforts to shift orientation to the academic affairs area, or to establish first-year learning outcomes, illustrate emergent collaborative planning. The emergent early warning systems developed and supported by faculty to better support students who are at-risk with more directed approaches and interventions by student support offices, residence hall staff and athletics office, coaches or faculty are also significant initiatives.

The college's efforts to promote student success in three areas are also seen by the team as significant:

- The revision and renewal of the Greek system to move from previous poor completion and academic performance to better than the average grades and retention for this community.
- The attention given to promoting a healthy climate for athletics that promotes academic achievement with athletes, and particularly the unique connections between the honors program and athletics.
- The continuing inter-related efforts among many in student affairs to promote student health and wellness and reducing at-risk behaviors.

### **Suggestions for Institutional Improvement**

The team concurs with and endorses the findings in the self-study related to:

- encouraging offices to coordinate services and share information in ways that benefit students;
- developing a plan to maintain and improve technology and services for students with disabilities;
- reviewing the capacity of counseling and health related services in response to increases in enrollment and the demand for mental health services.

The evaluation team also suggests that the University focus greater attention on the predictability of student enrollment, student retention and course availability for students.

Focusing on improving academic advising is also encouraged. If online learning continues to be part of the solution for course scheduling for campus students, greater attention could be given to addressing the readiness for this mode by campus students and the quality across the offerings, especially in the summer and winter terms.

**Recommendations:** None

**Requirements:** None

**Chapter Name** Faculty – Dedicated to Serving Every Student as an Individual

**Standard Addressed** Standard 10 Faculty

*Clarion University meets this standard.*

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

The institutional self-study document and various procedural documents demonstrate that instruction, research and service are in compliance with this standard.

Clarion faculty have indicated that they hold teaching as their top priority and have expressed great pride in instructional excellence. PASSHE data indicates that the faculty is efficiently deployed.

High quality teaching and learning are the most significant criteria for promotion, as teaching constitutes half of the criteria used to determine promotion rankings.

Faculty duties and responsibilities are delineated in the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) between the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) and the Association for Pennsylvania State College and University Faculty (APSCUF). Provisions in the CBA include a broad and comprehensive range of topics, such as job rights, duties and responsibilities of faculty members, duties of chairpersons, performance review and evaluation, tenure, and promotion.

### **Significant Accomplishments**

The recent efforts in strategic planning, assessment, and transition into Responsibility Center budgeting have sparked major needs for faculty participation and leadership in more than 20 university-wide committees. Examples of the enthusiasm and dedication of faculty in support and participation of these initiatives abound, reflecting strong faculty commitment to university service.

The Provost has recently earmarked \$50,000 in new funds for faculty development, to be allocated to faculty presenting at conferences. An additional \$14,000 has been earmarked for conferences and webinars on teaching effectiveness. The institution is to be commended for taking this action, and the evaluating team concurs with the self-study recommendation that a program to support faculty professional development should be continued.

### **Suggestions for Institutional Improvement**

The institution should continue its examination of syllabus requirements to identify and systematize approaches to articulating student learning objectives in course instruction across the curriculum.

The evaluation team also concurs with the institution's self-study recommendation of a review of the university's promotion and sabbatical criteria to ensure alignment with the university's revised mission statement and strategic directions.

**Recommendations:** None

**Requirements:** None

**Chapter Name** Educational Offerings

**Standard Addressed** Standard 11 Educational Offerings

*Clarion University meets this standard.*

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

Based on the University self-study document, other institutional documents and interviews with the faculty and staff, the educational programs display appropriate rigor, in alignment with the University's mission. The University offers more than 90 undergraduate programs. Each degree program includes requirements for general education as well as requirements for the major field of study. The University's graduate programs extend the university mission and goals by offering advanced study to students in eight disciplines, both on the Clarion campus and at distance sites. The quality of the programs at both the graduate and the undergraduate levels is evidenced by the external accreditation of a number of these programs at both the undergraduate and the graduate levels. The institution is to be commended for its commitment to the external accreditation of its programs. However, evidence of assessment of student learning across the curriculum is sporadic.

### **Suggestions for Institutional Improvement**

The evaluation team affirms the findings of the self-study that the University should revamp the five-year program review process to increase usability of the Program Review Report for planning and assessment activities, and that year-end summary data from the Committee on Courses and Programs of Study (CCPS) should be collected and organized in a uniform manner and reported annually to the university community to assist with planning and assessment activities.

### **Recommendations**

Program goals should be stated in terms of student learning outcomes for all academic programs.

The incorporation of expected student learning outcomes in all course syllabi should be established as an institution-wide expectation at Clarion.

**Requirements:**None

**Chapter Name** General Education and Related Educational Activities

**Standard Addressed** Standard 12 General Education

*Clarion University meets this standard.*

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents and interviews with the faculty and staff, the University recognizes the importance of general education as is evidenced by its requirement that students in all undergraduate degree programs must earn general education credits. However, as stated in the self-study, "the current General Education lacks clear guidelines for continuous assessment and evaluation (p. 74)."

The Council on General Education, which is charged with recommending new general education courses and for recommending changes to existing courses, is in the process of developing a proposal for a new general education curriculum.

## **Suggestions for Institutional Improvement**

The Middle States team affirms the position identified in the self-study that the mathematics and English departments should review the methods for student placement in mathematics and English general education courses.

The Middle States team affirms the position identified in the self-study that the university should develop and implement an enrollment management plan for international students, articulating targets, goals, and strategies to recruit and retain international students, and that it should provide increased international student services as the demand increases.

The University is encouraged to ensure that syllabi for general education courses with multiple sections include the same goals, objectives, and expected student learning outcomes.

## **Recommendations**

The University should establish a manageable program of assessment of general education outcomes as part of the institution's overall plan for assessing student learning, and should use the results of such assessment for curricular improvement.

**Requirements:**None

**Standards Addressed**            Standard 13    Related Educational Activities

*Clarion University meets this standard.*

## **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

The University has a vibrant branch campus at Venango, currently celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> year. It is the oldest regional campus in PASSHE. The campus has a distinct set of offerings and services through multiple modes of delivery that are creative and complimentary to the University, but designed uniquely for the local community. Plans are underway to rebrand and solidify the structures to support this campus as a gateway for future innovative program development. This location clearly has strong leadership, and professionals, staff and faculty committed to community engagement. The programs and faculty meet the standards expected of the larger University.

The University has been a leader in the PASSHE system for innovative technology delivery, initially through video, and now through on-line education. Leadership of the program has predominantly been in the creation of full programs that are offered, very successfully at the graduate level and with specialized areas such as the RN/BSN.

The consistent integration of "high impact" practices into on-line courses is perhaps an issue that would benefit from additional analysis.

Programs have also been designed to attract adult students interested in degree completion such as those in liberal studies with several planned in areas such as accounting. These programs have academic and delivery standards that match those being offered on-campus. Academic deans provide academic oversight and faculty are engaged in their teaching. Support services for distance students are well integrated. The University is appropriately addressing issues of student identity, legal and regulatory compliance related to the delivery of distance education.

Team members visited two smaller additional locations where services are delivered for specific programs, particularly in the nursing and technology areas.

Students in need of remediation are being identified at entry and initial tracking and follow-up identified to promote tracking and success.

Prior learning assessment is handled predominantly at the college level. A recent effort has been initiated to make policies and procedures more consistent across the institution and transparent for students.

In a number of areas, the college had developed certificate programs. Requirements for the programs are addressed and curricular sequences are identified to meet the needs.

Clarion University has a strong tradition in on-line learning, particularly in the engagement of full programs at the undergraduate and graduate level. Efforts to expand this effort to courses for the campus-based students in the winter break and summer session have been met with uneven success.

Non-credit offerings of the University have been offered both at the Clarion and Venango campuses, but have recently been consolidated at the Venango campus.

The University, particularly through the Venango campus, has developed a number of contractual relationships and partnerships with programs in technology, health and nursing. These are consistent with the institution's mission and goals and academic oversight is provided. As these programs grow, attention to providing sufficient faculty resources will need to be addressed.

### **Significant Accomplishment**

The institution should be commended for the leadership in ascertaining community needs, creatively and quickly responding to these through innovative academic programs and affirming delivery methods to address these needs through creative partnerships. Relationships such as those at the Venango campus and other significant community relationships in Clarion and elsewhere seem highly effective in breaking down barriers to promote faculty, staff and student engagement with both local community and area industries. In this area Clarion may be seen as a model for the integration of higher education into the community for the future.

### **Suggestions for Institutional Improvement**

Clarion is encouraged to consider how to better integrate "high impact" practices into its on-line courses and the need for a more effective orientation program for students less prepared for this specific delivery method.

**Recommendations:** None

**Requirements:** None

**Chapter Name** Institutional Effectiveness and  
Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

**Standard Addressed** Standard 7 Institutional Effectiveness

*Clarion University meets this standard.*

## **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

With the arrival of Dr. Karen Whitney as President of Clarion in 2010, a new vision for the University rooted in data driven decision-making began to take shape. The appointment of a new Provost in 2011 further contributed to the development of a new vision for Clarion.

In the past, internal reporting on institutional data was decentralized, not systematic, and uneven.

In order to forward her agenda to focus on ongoing assessment and institutional effectiveness, the President appointed a Faculty Fellow for Planning, Assessment and Improvement (PAI), and both the University-Wide Assessment Committee and University-Wide Strategic Planning Committee were replaced by the Institutional and Student Learning Assessment Committee (ISLAC) chaired by the Faculty Fellow for PAI. The President also introduced the Accelerated Improvement Plan, which is the responsibility of the Faculty Fellow for PAI. The Faculty Fellow, whose stated responsibility is “to advance the assessment of institutional effectiveness and student learning outcomes at Clarion University,” has a two-year appointment, which is a concern for team members as it relates to the future continuity of the program. The stated function of ISLAC is “to help advance a sustainable culture of assessment at Clarion that is both valued and supported across all divisions.” Both of these initiatives signal that a major culture change at Clarion is underway. All of the available interview evidence indicates that the faculty for the most part welcomes these changes. The visiting evaluation team often heard statements of support for all of the planning that is occurring, and is impressed, in particular, with the implementation of Accelerated Improvement Planning in certain areas.

In her July 2011 500 Day Plan Status Report, the President spoke to an Institutional Leadership Goal of establishing a university culture of institutional planning, assessment, and improvement. Toward this end, a highly regarded consultant has been engaged to help the university complete four major university plans for the university and its principal administrative units (Academic Plan, Finance and Administration Plan, and Student Life Plan) by May 1, 2013.

The Division of Student and University Affairs has responded to these initiatives by developing a reorganization plan which included a new position, the Director of Planning and Assessment; establishing the Student and University Affairs Assessment Committee (SUA-AC); and pursuing the purchase of the CampusLabs software application to support the promotion of assessment and institutional effectiveness. This division is to be commended for its commitment to program improvement.

It is clear to the visiting evaluation team that Clarion has renewed its focus on ongoing assessment and continuous improvement. While we are encouraged by these efforts, as promising as these plans are and as committed as the leaders are, at the current moment the university lacks a systematic approach to assessing institutional effectiveness over the long term. The university has, at this point, embarked on the first mile of a challenging marathon run. The completion of this run will require persistence and time. While the University is advancing in its compliance with this standard, due to how long efforts at assessing institutional effectiveness has languished at Clarion, the evaluation team seeks continued assurance that it is carrying out its ambitious agenda to infuse the culture with a commitment to assessing institutional effectiveness.

## **Suggestions for Institutional Improvement**

The evaluation team concurs with the recommendations stated in the self-study report, consistent with Clarion’s commitment to institutional renewal, that it should initiate a systematic

administrative department program review process, and that it should establish a systematic assessment plan pertaining to the University's on-line offerings.

The team also concurs with the finding in the self-study report that information regarding post-graduation activities of students by program should be centrally tracked to inform recruitment, program review and accreditation standards and advancement.

Furthermore, the team affirms the need recognized in the self-study report for the University to develop a mechanism to facilitate the sharing of assessment best practices across the institution.

### **Recommendation**

Clarion should continue to proceed with its plans to implement a comprehensive, sustainable program of institutional assessment, in order to be able to fully document its effectiveness across the board.

### **Standard Addressed** Standard 14 Assessment of Student Learning

*Clarion University meets this standard.*

### **Summary of Evidence and Findings**

The assessment of student learning at Clarion University has traditionally been principally documented in the accredited programs in the College of Business Administration, the College of Education and Human Services, the School of Nursing and Allied Health, the Department of Applied Technology, General Education, and the College of Arts and Sciences. Clarion is a leader in PASSHE in accredited programs, and this is an institutional point of pride for which the visiting evaluation team commends the Clarion community.

The General Education Committee has had sixteen learning goals that were assessed at a rate of four per year over a four-year cycle. At the end of that cycle, the Committee concluded that sixteen goals were too cumbersome for assessing student achievement effectively. The Committee also felt as if it did not have clear guidelines for continuous assessment and evaluation. At the moment, the effort to assess student learning outcomes in some key University programs is foundering.

The visiting evaluation team is specifically concerned about the assessment of student learning outcomes in the programs in the College of Arts and Sciences. The College of Arts and Sciences Assessment Committee has a site on the D2L website of the University. It contains the mission statements for all of the departments, identified student learning outcomes for the departments, some PASSHE five-year program reviews, some assessment instruments, assessment plans, assessment results, and use of results. However, the assessment plans do not appear current, as there were 21 assessment plans on the website for the 2010 - 11 academic year, and eight for 2011 - 12. This speaks to the evaluation team's concerns about the sustainability of interest in assessing student learning outcomes.

Because the programs and courses in the College of Arts and Sciences support General Education and all of the accredited programs of the University, it is essential that there is a sustainable assessment program in place.

## **Suggestions for Institutional Improvement**

The visiting team concurs with recommendation from the self-study for Standard 14 that efforts should be made to improve communication across the university regarding the assessment of student learning outcomes within General Education, degree programs, and majors.

The visiting team also strongly encourages the institution to act now to utilize University resources to develop the infrastructure necessary to effectively assess student learning outcomes.

## **Recommendation**

The assessment of student learning outcomes is not a standard educational practice at Clarion. Plans are currently underway to develop a systematic, sustainable approach to assessing student learning outcomes. It is critical that Clarion continue to proceed with its plans to implement a comprehensive, sustainable program of student learning outcomes assessment, in order to be able to fully document its impact on student learning and tell its story as an agent of transformational change.

## **VI. Summary of Recommendations for Continuing Compliance and Requirements**

The team has a number of recommendations to ensure that Clarion is carrying out the activities it plans to implement and to ensure continued compliance with Middle States standards.

For Standard 6, *In the conduct of its programs and activities involving the public and the constituencies it serves, the institution demonstrates adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies, providing support for academic and intellectual freedom*, the evaluation team recommends that the University conduct a formal review of the faculty promotion criteria to confirm that they are sufficiently defined, and that recent faculty promotion decisions affirm consistent treatment of all candidates for promotion.

It also recommends that periodic assessment of other institutional policies, processes, and practices and their implementation be conducted in an on-going effort to ensure this aspect of institutional integrity.

For Standard 8, *The institution seeks to admit students whose interests, goals, and abilities are congruent with its mission and seeks to retain them through the pursuit of students' educational goals*, the evaluation team recommends that the tracking of the retention and graduation rates of all Clarion students should routinely take place.

It also recommends that the university develop a sustainable strategy to ameliorate the existing retention and graduation disparities between minority and majority students.

For Standard 11, *The institution's educational offerings display academic content, rigor, and coherence appropriate to its higher education mission. The institution identifies student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings*, the team recommends that program goals should be stated in terms of student learning outcomes for all academic programs; and that the incorporation of expected student learning outcomes in all course syllabi should be established as an institution-wide expectation at Clarion.

For Standard 12, *The institution's curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, and technological competency*, the team recommends that the University should

establish a manageable program of assessment of general education outcomes as part of the institution's overall plan for assessing student learning, and should use the results of such assessment for curricular improvement.

For Standard 7, *The institution has developed and implemented an assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals and its compliance with accreditation standards*, the team recommends that Clarion should continue to proceed with its plans to implement a comprehensive, sustainable program of institutional assessment, in order to be able to fully document its effectiveness across the board.

For Standard 14, *Assessment of student learning demonstrates that, at graduation, or other appropriate points, the institution's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals*, the team recommends that Clarion continue to proceed with its plans to implement a comprehensive, sustainable program of student learning outcomes assessment, in order to be able to fully document its impact on student learning across all academic departments.