Briefing of the Report of a Comprehensive Evaluation Visit to Marquette University
(September 30 – October 2, 2013)

Overview

In fall 2013, a team of eight peer evaluators conducted a comprehensive evaluation on behalf of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) for the purpose of reaffirmation of accreditation for Marquette University. Its assessment of the many and varied aspects of our academic and nonacademic operations evolved from a careful reading of the Self-Study Report along with an on-campus visit that included general observations and meetings with more than 500 faculty, students, and staff.

Beginning with the site visit, the team’s initial comment when on campus regarded the unique circumstance that the visit was occurring 10 days after Marquette’s president announced his resignation. The team requested an interview with incoming Interim President Father Wild, who in fact, made himself available for the duration of the visit. He noted that the Reaffirmation of Accreditation Initiative took place over a 2½-year period, involving widespread campus involvement and investment in the process.

For its part, the site visit team reviewed the self-study document as well as more than 100 evidentiary documents. Based upon that understanding and in conjunction with many on-campus interviews with the board of trustees, staff, faculty, alumni, and students, the team affirmed the integrity of the self-study report.

Approximately eight weeks after the visit, the team sent a draft report to Marquette University, providing an opportunity to correct any factual errors identified at that time. The team chair subsequently forwarded the corrected report, along with team recommendations, to the Institutional Actions Council of the Higher Learning Commission for consideration and final disposition. This document summarizes the findings and evaluation of the HLC.

As there are several confidential references in the team report, that document itself will not be shared publicly. Nonetheless, a synopsis of the team’s evaluations, major conclusions, and recommendations is being provided to fulfill the goal for transparency that has been sought throughout the entire reaffirmation process.

This document is arranged to parallel the site visit team’s evaluation of Marquette University’s compliance with five primary criteria: (1) Mission; (2) Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct; (3) Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support; (4) Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement; and (5) Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness. It is worth noting that each criterion includes multiple core components and subcomponents. The site visit team is required to render a determination for each of the five criterion, as well as for each core component, indicating that it is either (a) Met, (b) Met with concerns, or (c) Not met. In addition, the team reviewed evidence to ensure Marquette was in compliance with federal requirements.
Criterion One: Mission - The site visit team concluded that Marquette met this criterion with concerns. While three of the four core components were fully met, one core component, “The institution understands the relationship between its mission and the diversity of society” was “Met with concerns.” As a result, the criterion itself was also “Met with concerns.”

Strength of Mission

The team indicated how students and alumni alike said the university’s mission was the reason for attending Marquette. The team further noted that, “transferring the missional ethos of the university into the hearts and lives of its students is a tremendous challenge” but one that Marquette “understands and embraces enthusiastically.” The team added that, as evidenced in Marquette’s recently crafted strategic plan, “helping and aiding students to grasp and/or understand the Ignatian religious philosophy is a high institutional purpose; strategic and intentional.” The report commends the university for its use of the four pillars (excellence, faith, leadership, and service) and tagline “Be the Difference” to express the essence of the Marquette experience. In its summary statement on mission, the team stated: “The University celebrates and embraces the Ignatian tradition as the core of its mission with zeal and vigor” and added: “The ethos permeating the greater Marquette University community gives the university a unique niche within the realm of American higher education and should be protected and honored.”

Diversity

Nonetheless, and specifically with regard to the core component that was “Met with concerns,” the site visit team pointed out that while the university increased the percentage of minority tenure and tenure-track faculty since 2004 from 12 to 16 percent, there was a decrease in minorities across all participating faculty from 10 to 9 percent. It also was indicated that the ratio of male to female faculty at the rank of professor is greater than the national average (5:1 versus 4:1). The team remarked that individuals on campus who represent various departments and programs charged with implementing campus-wide diversity initiatives, voiced concern that diversity did not always appear to be a priority for the university. On the basis of additional interviews, the team perceived “a campus sentiment that the role of the affirmation action officer is overly limited in faculty recruitment and hiring processes.”

Summary

Justifying its overall determination as to why Criterion One was “Met with concerns,” the site team concluded, “Since the last HLC visit in 2003, the issue of diversity has been at the forefront of discussion across the campus. The university has been consistent in its pursuit of a richly diverse campus... The evidence suggests that, though the commitment to embrace diversity has been unanimous, progress towards operationalizing its commitment has been less than sufficient. There lacks a comprehensive and intentional plan to actually achieve diversity.”
As such, the site visit team recommended follow-up with the HLC in the form of a monitoring report on development of a campus-wide diversity plan; that report is due by June 2015. The Institutional Actions Council of the Higher Learning Commission later accepted this recommendation.

**Criterion Two: Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct** - The site visit team determined that Marquette fully met this criterion, which includes five core components.

**Responsible Operations**

Team review of Marquette’s various handbooks “showed the inclusion of policies and procedures to guide the behaviors of the members of the University community to ensure that decisions and activities reflect high levels of integrity.” The team noted the availability of *Ethics Point* and indicated that audits confirmed the university’s ethical behavior relating to fiscal activities. The report mentions that Marquette has implemented a plan to provide appropriate training and oversight in the responsible and ethical conduct of research, while the team observed during interviews a serious attention to compliance and academic integrity within Marquette Athletics. Findings reflect that Marquette presents itself clearly through bulletins; the financial aid website includes information to help students finance their education; and the university complies with the federal Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Crime Statistics Act. The team’s review also confirmed the board of trustee’s attention to its fiduciary and legal responsibilities.

**Faculty Matters**

Upon review of the university’s Statement on Academic Freedom in the *Marquette Faculty Handbook*, the team indicated it was “adapted from the Statement of Principles of Academic Freedom officially endorsed in 1941 by the American Association of Colleges and the American Association of University Professors.” Also related to faculty, the team reported how during the open faculty meeting, individuals stated, “The promotion and tenure processes are transparent and well-known among faculty.” At the same time, concern was expressed about the lack of female faculty moving from the rank of associate professor to full professor. In that context, the team remarked that grievance policies and procedures are in place in the faculty, student, and employee handbooks.

**Research and Academic Integrity**

The team report describes how the vice provost for research is the university’s research integrity officer, responsible for ensuring adherence to research tenets by faculty, students, and staff; integrity in research activities is also protected through Marquette’s Research Misconduct Policy and Procedures. The team identified several campus resources that help promote research integrity, including the Office of Research Compliance, the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program, the Raynor Library, and the Graduate School. With regard to academic honesty, the
team recognized that while the university has policies and procedures in place, greater attention to academic integrity has been made a priority by the provost.

**Summary**

In its summary, the site visit team stated: “A culture of integrity and ethical conduct is well-established at Marquette University. Commitment to this ethos is demonstrated by school/college department codes of conduct and policies/procedures that are aligned with the overall university policies and codes. Embedded, and best articulated by the student code of conduct-ethos statement, is the expectation that a culture of integrity is only successful if ‘created by the active contributions of every member of the Marquette community…and in turn creates a campus ethos that calls us to act with integrity and compassion.’ There is strong evidence that the university has intentionally addressed expected conduct for all its constituents.”

**Criterion Three: Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support** - The site visit team determined that Marquette fully met this criterion, which includes five core components.

**Curriculum and Learning Outcomes**

The team noted that a review of documents along with interviews demonstrated how faculty regularly review the curriculum as a whole as well as all individual courses to ensure each remains current and relevant. The team recognized alignment between Marquette’s mission and its six institutional undergraduate learning outcomes. Although commenting on how graduate student learning outcomes are less clearly delineated, the team recognized that “it was evident in syllabi review that this leveling does exist and the graduate outcomes associated with leadership, service, faith and global citizenry undergird the graduate curriculums of all programs.”

**Core Experience**

With regard to undergraduate programs, the team remarked that they “provide an appropriate blend of general education requirements, major requirements and electives.” It was added that Marquette “offers a wide range of courses guided by an Ignatian perspective” and the UCCS Review Committee has a “well-developed and ongoing plan to review each of the nine core knowledge areas once every four years.” Regarding graduate programs, the team stated that “graduate/professional programs build on core content/knowledge of the individual field of study through advanced courses in the theory and methodology of the field as well as research methods of inquiry for the field.”
Diversity Programming

The team mentioned that Marquette “offers a variety of both curricular and co-curricular activities that enhance students’ awareness and appreciation of diversity.” Marquette’s University Core of Common Studies, Service Learning Program, Office of Diversity and Inclusion, Gender and Sexuality Resource Center, and Office of International Education were specifically referenced as contributing factors.

Scholarship Resources

Observing that Marquette broadly defines scholarship expectations for its faculty within the Faculty Handbook, the team acknowledged how the university supports several research centers and institutes. In addition, faculty and students are supported in their scholarship and research endeavors through sabbaticals and travel funds, grant writing assistance through workshops, tutorials, and one-on-one consultations.

Faculty Qualifications

The site visit team indicated that Marquette “has a well-qualified faculty with appropriate doctorates, professional, or other terminal degrees in their disciplines” and elaborated, stating that faculty “demonstrate an appropriate commitment to scholarly productivity.” From the student perspective, the team wrote that “both undergraduate and graduate students uniformly report that faculty are excellent teachers, that they care about their students, and that they are willing to help students be successful learners both inside and out of the classroom. Students reported that they are receiving an excellent education at Marquette, and that they enjoy working with faculty.”

Academic Support Services

Several of Marquette’s support services were specifically noted in the report, including the Raynor, Memorial, and Law Libraries; Ott Memorial Writing Center; Educational Opportunity Program; Athletic Department’s Academic Center; Office of Disability Services; Counseling Center; and University Career Services Center.

Student Advising

Regarding student advising, the site visit team noted multiple surveys that had been conducted over the past several years, which indicate wide discrepancy between colleges and dissatisfaction among 30-40 percent of students. These data were substantiated in student interviews where “numerous advising concerns were raised” and advising services were described as “uneven in their effectiveness.” Several students described advisors who are knowledgeable, accessible, and helpful. Others described advisors who “do not seem well-prepared or knowledgeable in the Common Core courses and goals.” The team indicated that students sense there is a lack of training for faculty regarding the advising function.
Student Involvement

The report indicates there are more than 270 student organizations at Marquette, and 85 percent of graduating seniors acknowledge participation in at least one student organization during their time on campus. The team further noted that more than 80 percent of Marquette students participate in community service, commenting how this is a higher rate than in most other colleges and universities across the country.

Summary

In its summary statement, the team wrote: “The university and program outcomes, as well as those associated with the Undergraduate Core of Common Studies demonstrate Marquette’s commitment to developing graduates with both breadth and depth of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to function as stewards of a global community and competent in their chosen profession. Marquette demonstrates both an infrastructure (e.g., curriculum committees) and well-defined processes (e.g., program review cycles/processes) to insure that its curriculum is both current and relevant while aligning with Marquette’s core values and mission.”

Criterion Four: Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement - The site visit team determined that Marquette fully met this criterion, which includes three core components.

Program Review

With 33 program reviews occurring since the last reaccreditation visit, the team took note of how responsibility for program review has moved during the last decade from the Graduate School to the Office of the Provost. The report supports the fact that the new, streamlined process seeks to “eliminate duplication of effort, reduce the work required of the academic unit or program, focus on the strategic issues of the academic unit or program, and better align program review with the schedule for specialized accreditation.”

Ensuring Academic Standards

It was noted that “evidentiary documentation and interviews affirmed that faculty, from their respective colleges/schools, govern academic decisions” related to prerequisite courses, transfer credit, and articulation agreements. Further, the report identifies Marquette’s articulation agreements with Fox Valley Technical College, Waukesha County Technical College-Marquette, and Gateway Technical colleges.

Specialized Accreditation

Reviewers pointed out that 10 of Marquette’s 12 colleges/schools have programs that hold specialized accreditation. The team indicated: “A review of all recent accrediting body letters and/or reports for each of the programs suggests no sanctions.” Further, “Reports from the
accreditation bodies list numerous strengths, generally with only minor weaknesses” and that “all have been accredited for the maximum period of time allowed by their respective agencies.”

Evaluating Success of Marquette Graduates

The team noted that Marquette conducts a Graduating Senior Survey and an Alumni Survey while some colleges administer an exit survey to graduating students. In addition, Marquette monitors pass rates in national licensure and certification exams, and a review of these pass rates demonstrated that they are significantly above national averages, which “shows clearly that students are well prepared for these exams and suggests that they are well prepared for the profession as well.”

Student Learning Assessment

With regard to assessment of student learning, reviewers pointed out that a 2009 focused visit on assessment was required as a result of the 2004 comprehensive visit. The 2009 team concluded Marquette’s response to the 2004 team report was “immediate, appropriate, and sustained through the focus visit.” The recent site visit team went on to note: “In the four years since the focused visit, MU has continued to demonstrate a strong commitment to the assessment of student learning,” specifically referencing the hiring of a full-time assessment director and the switch to a more flexible recording system (ARMS) to record program goals, measures, and aggregated assessment results. As further evidence of progress, the team added, “Conversations with faculty reveal substantial involvement of faculty in the assessment process,” including “faculty-driven program improvements that result from the assessment process.”

Nonetheless, the site visit team also highlighted some areas for attention with regard to perceived assessment shortcomings moving forward. These include curriculum maps to identify the courses in which students have the opportunity to achieve each learning goal, rubrics to assess student performance, and benchmarks to derive meaning from the data.

Summary

The team summarized its evaluation of Criterion Four, noting that to continue progressing toward a fully-realized culture of assessment and continuous improvement, Marquette needs to “expand assessment to the business side of the university and integrate assessment into the planning and budgeting process for the university.” The summary statement also points out Marquette’s commitment to educational improvement through attention to retention, persistence, and completion rates of its degree-seeking students. The team, however, also recommended that “Marquette invest in a data warehouse for data cleansing and storage and a business intelligence tool for data analysis and reporting.”
Criterion Five: Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness - The site visit team determined that Marquette fully met this criterion, which includes four core components.

Fiscal Resources

In its resource discussion, the team described Marquette’s “strong endowment that produces approximately 4 percent of the university’s fiscal year operating revenue.” The team also mentioned factors such as Moody’s A2 rating and stable CFI scores as evidence of Marquette’s financial planning and flexibility. The team additionally commented on the university’s strategic plan, “Beyond Boundaries,” which “addresses evaluation of current opportunities for growth, retention and efficiencies to further inform and strengthen the financial viability.”

Strategic Plan

With regard to the recently approved strategic plan, the team remarked how the governing board of trustees “is knowledgeable about the institution’s financial and academic health.” The team, however, went on to note, “at this point a formalized, university-wide definition of strategic indicators and implementation of the planning process has not occurred.”

Shared Governance

The team acknowledged that since the last accreditation visit in 2004, changes have taken place related to shared governance at Marquette. As evidence, the report notes: “Marquette has taken action to make the governance system more transparent to the university community” and suggests, “this commitment and intentionality is evidenced in the redesign of the University Academic Senate (UAS).” The report elaborates how “interviews with key administrators, faculty, UAS members, staff and students, suggest that this infrastructure and reorganization has been a positive step towards open dialogue and shared decision-making in setting academic and institutional policies. Interviews with UAS members affirm that this process has improved the ‘faculty voice’ though, they admit, it continues to be a work in progress.”

Leadership and Stability

As to recent leadership changes at Marquette University, the team reported that four major themes constantly emerged through its interviews: (1) Father Wild is an excellent choice to serve as interim president, due to his institutional history and ability to relate to the Marquette and Milwaukee communities; (2) the interim provost brings over 20 years of administrative experience, and there is a strong degree of respect for her ability to serve in this role; (3) the governance model has been strengthened, enhancing the faculty voice on key issues affecting the academic enterprise at Marquette; and (4) the recent strategic planning effort was inclusive, which should help ensure its successful implementation. The team concluded: “These factors were consistently cited as key to fostering stability through the transition until such time as more stable top-level administrative personnel are in place.”
**Summary**

With regard to Marquette’s commitment to ongoing improvement, the team pointed to several pieces of evidence, including: (1) the university’s “self-reflection and response to previous HLC concerns and incidents impacting the entire campus community;” (2) systematic review of programs; (3) participation in the 2008-09 Foundations of Excellence National Select Cohort; and (4) use of surveys such as NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement), graduate and alumni surveys, and internal surveys such as those conducted through the Office of Auxiliary Services (Book Marq).

**Federal Compliance - The site visit team validated Marquette’s compliance with federal requirements.**

The team verified Marquette has policies and procedures in place for disabilities, veterans’ status, discrimination and harassment, sexual misconduct, program integrity, athletics, HIPPA, housing, and grade appeals, noting their publication in the Student Handbook. The team found Marquette to be in compliance with all federal requirements and offered no specific recommendations for improvement.

**Team Recommendation - No change in Affiliation Status, with the next comprehensive evaluation set for 2023-24.**

As rationale for this recommendation, the site visit team noted: “Based on a thorough review of the self-study document, its associated evidentiary documentation, interviews, and observations throughout the comprehensive evaluation visit, the team determined that Marquette University met the Commission’s Criteria for Accreditation.” The team reiterated perceived strengths around Marquette as a mission-driven university; sound fiscal stewardship; commitment to maintaining a physical environment that supports curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities; a strong faculty that “lives” the mission and helps “guide and shape” students for their roles in society; an improved culture of assessment; and an enhanced shared governance system designed to foster greater collaboration.