



Middle States Commission on Higher Education

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Report to the Faculty, Staff, Students, and Administration of Gallaudet University

by a Team Representing the Middle States Commission on Higher Education

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accompanied by

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Gallaudet University is a private liberal arts institution in Washington DC offering certificate/diploma, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs. Its primary mission is to serve the deaf and hard of hearing. In addition to its Washington campus, it operates Regional Centers at Flagler College in St. Augustine, Florida; Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kansas; Kapi'olani Community College in Honolulu, Hawaii; Northern Essex Community College in Haverhill, Massachusetts; and Ohlone College in Fremont, California. It has been accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education since 1957.

This visit followed Gallaudet University's submission of a monitoring report requested by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education by April 1, 2008, documenting substantive, detailed, and compelling evidence of the following:

1. compliance with Standard 1 (Mission & Goals), including successful implementation of an effective mission;
2. compliance with Standard 2 (Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal), including successful implementation of the strategic plan;
3. compliance with Standard 4 (Leadership and Governance), including effective shared governance;
4. compliance with Standard 8 (Student Admissions and Retention), including successful implementation of a comprehensive enrollment management plan that addresses student recruitment, retention, graduation, and placement and that supports the mission and strategic plan;
5. compliance with Standard 14 (Assessment of Student Learning), including implementation of a documented, organized, and sustained process to assess achievement of institutional and student learning goals that includes direct evidence of student learning;

6. a climate that fosters respect among students, faculty, staff, and administration for a range of backgrounds, ideas, and perspectives (Standard 6);
7. the academic rigor of degrees offered (Standard 11); and
8. the institution's further response to recommendations from the 2001 evaluation team report.

During its visit, the team met with:

- President Robert Davila
- Provost Stephen Weiner
- Officers of the Student Body Government and Graduate Student Association
- Council on Undergraduate Education
- Council on Graduate Education
- President's Communication Committee
- Diversity Team
- Academic Quality and Accreditation Committee and University Budget Committee
- Assessment Director, Assessment Advisory Board, Assessment Fellows, and Assessment Coordinators
- Work groups on shared governance and diversity & healing
- Department chairs
- Deans
- Enrollment management staff
- Director of Institutional Research
- Representatives of the faculty and staff
- Representatives of the students
- Representatives of the Board of Trustees

The team extends sincere thanks to members of the Gallaudet University community for their gracious hospitality, for their active participation in the visit, and for their contributions to the monitoring report. We are also grateful to everyone for your willingness to accommodate significant last-minute changes in the schedule of the visit. We realize that these changes were disruptive, but we felt they were essential in ensuring that we would be able to hear as many voices as possible during our short visit. Special thanks are extended to Judy Berglund and Pat Hulsebosch for their tireless, unfailingly cheerful, and superb efforts to coordinate all the logistical arrangements for this visit and to the interpreters who made communication during the visit possible.

The Middle States team that visited Gallaudet University a year ago observed in its report that the Gallaudet community has embarked on a long, difficult journey that could not be completed quickly or easily. Gallaudet has made enormous progress in a number of critical areas in a short period of time, and we commend the University for that progress.

The team's conclusions regarding the standards under review are as follow:

Standard 1 (Mission and Goals)

The team finds that Gallaudet University meets this standard. Gallaudet's new mission "clearly defines its purpose within the context of higher education and indicates who the institution serves and what it intends to accomplish" and has now been "developed and recognized by the institution with the participation of its members and its governing body." Gallaudet's new strategic goals are "consistent with the aspirations and expectations of higher education" and "clearly specify how the institution will fulfill its mission."

Commendation:

- Virtually everyone with whom the team spoke is familiar with the new mission and strategic goals.

Standard 2 (Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal)

The team finds that Gallaudet University meets this standard. Gallaudet University "conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals," has developed "objectives to achieve them, and utilizes the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal."

Commendations:

- Gallaudet University now has an operational strategic plan with mission, vision, strategic goals, operational objectives, and some benchmarks.
- Resource allocations must now be clearly tied to assessment evidence and the strategic plan in order to be considered for funding.
- The Gallaudet community has taken down the wall that historically separated the University from the higher education community and has built bridges to higher education organizations and colleges and universities. This has led to better-informed planning and decision-making in a variety of fronts.

Standard 4 (Leadership and Governance)

The team finds that Gallaudet University meets this standard. Gallaudet University has "an active governing body" and an increasingly "well-defined system of collegial governance including written policies outlining governance responsibilities of administration and faculty" that "clearly defines the roles of institutional constituencies in policy development and decision making."

The team notes, however, that many ad hoc groups are doing good work but are not integrated into the governance structure, raising questions about their long-term viability. The Shared Governance chart appended to the monitoring report lumps many of the groups—both within and without the formal governance structure—into single

“cells” that do not make clear their functions and how they interrelate. The accompanying table appears to have outdated information on the composition and function of each group.

Commendations:

- Faculty, students, and staff collaborate with one another to a far greater extent than in the past.
- Students, faculty, and staff report greater involvement in institutional decisions that affect them.
- Students report that they have seats on more institutional committees.
- The composition of the board of trustees has been broadened and diversified, and the board is in the preliminary stages of planning an open, deliberative process of searching for Gallaudet’s next president.

Recommendations to ensure continued compliance with this standard:

- Institutionalize, as appropriate, the many advisory and academic groups by making them—or their successors—formal parts of the institutional governance structure.
- Develop clearer and more current statements of the functions and responsibilities of each governance entity—the Faculty Senate and its committees, advisory groups, administrative groups, individual administrators, and the Board of Trustees—and articulate more clearly the relationships among these entities.

Collegial suggestion:

- Continue efforts to embed new communication strategies within Gallaudet’s governance structure in order to maintain them when institutional leadership eventually changes.

Standard 6 (Integrity)

The team finds that Gallaudet University meets this standard. The University generally appears to demonstrate “adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies.”

The team is concerned, however, about the limited evidence of “a climate that fosters respect among students, faculty, staff, and administration for a range of backgrounds, ideas, and perspectives” and “equitable and appropriately consistent treatment of constituencies.”

Regarding climate, the team recognizes that campus climate cannot be changed overnight, but it is nonetheless disappointed by the relatively slow pace of progress in this area:

- The current Diversity Team was only constituted in January.
- The Office of Ombuds was only recently filled.
- The Campus Climate Survey was completed only shortly before the team’s visit.

- The campus community appears to be slow to respond to the results of the Campus Climate Survey last fall and this spring, which reveal a less than positive perceived climate and little if any change over time.

The team reiterates the concern of the last team that the lack of a respectful climate is likely the root cause of the protests, the most difficult problem facing Gallaudet University, and the one that will take the most time to resolve.

Regarding equitable treatment, the University has processes for handling student discipline, academic integrity, faculty grievances related to appointment, tenure, or promotion, and violation of laws or regulations related to employment. It does not, however, appear to have a clear procedure by which students or employees can seek to have other kinds of complaints addressed, such as those on issues of discrimination or perceived inequities within or outside of the classroom. In this context, the team notes that one of the Fundamental Elements of Standard 9 (Student Support Services) calls for “records of student complaints or grievances.”

Among climate and equity issues, the “elephant in the room” is the presence of a spectrum of communication modalities across the Gallaudet community and, indeed, the entire deaf community. The success of Gallaudet’s new mission will depend on understanding and addressing how current Gallaudet community members now communicate. But the team found no evidence that any individual or group at Gallaudet is explicitly charged with focusing on understanding and addressing the diversity of languages and modes of communication used by Gallaudet students, faculty and staff and by the deaf and hard of hearing population. There appears to be no systematic efforts underway to collect data on current communication modality preferences, trends in preferences, or the prevalence of discrimination based on those preferences.

Commendations:

- Students’ “sense of belonging,” as measured by a published survey, is at the highest level in five years.
- The campus community is clearly moving from a “silo” to institutional mentality.

Recommendations to ensure continued compliance with this standard:

- (Reiterating the recommendation of the last team) Accelerate efforts to develop and implement evidence-based plans to foster a campus climate in which everyone, regardless of background, culture, hearing level, or preferred means of communication, is welcomed, embraced, supported, respected and valued.
- Plan and implement strategies to identify the communication modality preferences of students, faculty, staff, and prospective students.
- Develop and implement promptly a comprehensive university policy to address complaints of discrimination.
- Create an office of social equity, staffed by a professional in the field and empowered to implement and enforce policies on discrimination and integrate

the work of the Ombuds Officer, the Fellow on Diversity Initiatives, and the EEO Officer.

Collegial suggestions:

- Plan to conduct short, relatively frequent “snapshots” of campus climate so that information on the effectiveness of new initiatives can be gauged in a timely manner.

Standard 7 (Institutional Assessment)

The team finds that Gallaudet University meets this standard. The University has developed a benchmarking assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals, although the process is incomplete, with a number of benchmarks to be articulated, clarified, and/or implemented.

Much of the work of institutional assessment is conducted by the nascent Office of Institutional Research, while the Office of Enrollment Management has developed a significant amount of effective and useful institutional research information on current and prospective students. The Institutional Research staff brings considerable expertise in educational research methodologies but not in institutional research, which is a different discipline. Perhaps as a consequence, the Institutional Research staff appears to focus more on conducting validated research studies than on obtaining and providing transparent snapshots of relevant data.

Recommendation to ensure continued compliance with this standard:

- Complete the process of identifying strategic plan benchmarks and implement them fully so that the university's progress in achieving its new strategic goals can be measured routinely and systematically.
- Ensure that all institutional research staff have appropriate expertise in current institutional research methodologies.

Standard 8 (Student Admissions and Retention)

The team finds that Gallaudet University continues to meet this standard, which states that “The institution seeks to admit students whose interests, goals, and abilities are congruent with its mission and seeks to retain them through the pursuit of the students’ educational goals.”

Commendations:

- Studies of factors affecting student retention have already led to planned improvements such as increased support for first-year students, including those in entry-level mathematics courses.
- Faculty and staff are very much involved in student recruitment activities.

Standard 11 (Educational Offerings)

The team finds that Gallaudet University meets this standard, which states that “the institution’s educational offerings display academic content, rigor, and coherence that are appropriate to its higher education mission” and that “the institution identifies student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings.”

Commendations:

- Gallaudet University has made laudable progress in improving the academic rigor of its programs, and it anticipates making additional advances in the coming year.
- The entire campus has increased its focus on reading, writing, and critical thinking. Institutional and program-level outcomes are strongly aligned in terms of these skills.
- The curriculum is becoming more interdisciplinary, allowing students and faculty to see coherence in academic offerings.
- Gallaudet is beginning to document the rigor of its offerings with newly-developed rubrics for assessing key skills such as writing, ASL, and critical thinking.

Collegial suggestion:

- Use experiences with current students to plan to articulate graduation proficiency requirements in English and ASL.

Standard 14 (Assessment of Student Learning)

The team finds that Gallaudet University meets this standard. In most academic programs and in the new general education curriculum, learning outcomes have been articulated, assessments have been implemented, and assessment results have been used in tangible ways to improve teaching, learning, planning and decision-making.

Commendations:

- Overall, Gallaudet University’s work on assessing student learning is superb and could serve as a model for other institutions.
- Gallaudet University has an exceptional level of faculty “buy-in” and a strong culture of assessment.
- A major factor in the success of student learning assessment at Gallaudet is the expectation that assessment results must form the basis of resource requests.
- Another factor in the success of Gallaudet’s assessment efforts is the intense investment in professional development, including the establishment of an assessment office, an assessment advisory board, assessment fellows, and assessment coordinators; attendance at assessment conferences, workshops, and institutes; and the funding of consultants, publications, and campus events.

- Work on assessing student learning is a factor in merit evaluations.
- The University has appropriately recognized that the foundation of successful student learning assessment is clearly articulated statements of expected student learning outcomes, and it has encouraged the faculty to focus on this.

Collegial suggestions:

- Consider submitting proposals to assessment conferences and publications to share Gallaudet's successes in implementing assessment and developing a culture of assessment.
- Focus on keeping assessment processes sustainable over the long term, in part by aiming to streamline reporting as much as possible.

Summary

The team commends Gallaudet University for its many significant accomplishments that have led to nothing short of a complete transformation in how the University conducts much of its business. The monitoring report and our interviews with faculty, students, administrators, and board members demonstrate that Gallaudet has made major progress in addressing each of the concerns identified by the Commission. This did not come about without a tremendous amount of hard work across the University, and we applaud you all for your energy and your commitment to Gallaudet.

The next steps in the accreditation process are as follow. We will submit this report to President Davila within one week, and he may choose to submit an institutional response by no later than May 15. The monitoring report, team report, and institutional response will then be reviewed by a member of the Commission on Higher Education, who will recommend a Commission action to the Committee on Follow-Up Activities at its meeting in late May. The Committee's recommended action will then go on the agenda of the full Commission meeting in mid-June. Recommended actions can and often do undergo changes at these meetings, so we cannot predict what the Commission's June action will be.

We all wish you success and continued progress in the months and years ahead.