

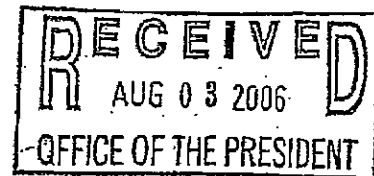
Report to  
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students  
of  
Gallaudet University  
Washington, District of Columbia

Prepared following analysis of the institution's  
Periodic Review Report

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## Evaluation of the Periodic Review Report of Gallaudet University

### Introduction

Gallaudet University enjoys and fulfills a unique mission as the world's only liberal arts university designed to educate deaf and hard of hearing students. This identity strongly influences the institution's learning model, facility use and planning, faculty recruitment, student enrollment projections, source of funding, budget priorities, and nearly every other aspect of university life. This evaluation of Gallaudet's Periodic Review Report (PRR) is completed, therefore, with both accepted standards for liberal education and with the unique mission of this particular university equally in mind. And it is completed with sincere appreciation for the breadth and depth of the PRR, which reflects well on the tremendous efforts of the 14-person steering committee, particularly during a time of leadership transition.

The last decennial self-study and Commission team visit occurred in 2001, which resulted in a decision to reaffirm accreditation as well as a follow-up report by April 1, 2003, to document steps taken to address the issue of governance. The university completed the follow-up report, which was accepted in June of that year with a request for a follow-up letter by December 1, 2004. That progress letter was accepted in March of 2006. The PRR is submitted with a request for re-affirmation of accreditation.

Total headcount enrollment at Gallaudet in Fall, 2005, consisted of 1,913 students (1,247 undergraduate, 466 graduate, and 103 professional studies). Approximately 280 of these are non-matriculated students. Twenty-nine percent of the student population is comprised of minorities. Since 2001, there has been a decline in regular undergraduate enrollment but modest increases in professional studies and graduate programs. The academic division of the university is divided into a College of Liberal Arts, Sciences and Technologies and a Graduate School and Professional Programs unit. They offer 40 undergraduate majors, an Honors Program for gifted students and developmental courses in English and math for remedial instruction. Graduate programs include masters, doctorates, and graduate certificates. Seventy-five percent of all courses have an online component.

### Major Institutional Changes and Developments

*Leadership:* Dr. I. King Jordan, appointed the university's first deaf president in 1988 (following a controversial short-lived appointment of a hearing person) announced that he is retiring as President in December, 2006. Dr. Jane K. Fernandes, the current Provost, was selected by the Board of Trustees as his successor, a decision that was greeted with internal protests and external media coverage. The incoming president will therefore face significant challenges, particularly as the PRR notes that "many of the issues that surfaced when Dr. Fernandes was appointed president have been simmering for some time and are not really about Dr. Fernandes" (p. 5).

Strategic Planning: An academic planning process began in 2002 and resulted in a document titled *New Directions for Academic Affairs*, modeled largely on the AACU's *Greater Expectations* document. *New Directions* has been supported by the *Diversity Strategic Plan* and *Liberal Education at Gallaudet University*. These documents contributed to the creation of eight strategic goals that were approved by the Board of Trustees in May, 2005.

*Finances:* The University is uniquely dependent on Congressional appropriations for approximately 70% of its operating budget (approximately \$100 million annually for the university and its Clerc Center). The PRR notes that these appropriations have increased at a higher-than-expected rate over the past five years. The University also enjoys an endowment fund of over \$164 million dollars, an impressive amount for such a small institution. Despite the addition of a new Student Academic Center (2002) and plans for the building of the Sorensen Language & Communication Center (2008), the university has no debt.

*Curriculum:* The University approved a new Master of Arts in International Development in early 2006. Programs and services to foster English literacy have been added, including a Tutorial and Instructional Program (to replace English Works!), as well as online tutoring and writing advice, a walk-in tutoring lab, and developmental English classes linked with Freshman Year Seminar. General education requirements remain a large portion of overall requirements, although these have been somewhat reduced in certain programs.

*Faculty:* Gallaudet faces the ongoing challenge to hire and retain deaf faculty without becoming overly dependent on their own graduates as a source for such faculty. (This challenge was noted by the Commission Team in the 2001 visit.) This challenge has been partially addressed through the President's Fellows Program, which has achieved only moderate success. A creative pre-tenure track option allows more time for faculty to prepare before engaging in the tenure process. Gallaudet is in the enviable position of having a pool of 230 full-time faculty (tenured and non-tenured), which means that there are only 8.3 students (including part-time students) for every full-time faculty member.

*Assessment:* The University is engaged in considerable activities regarding assessment, some internally created and others externally imposed (by accreditation bodies or governmental oversight commissions). However, the PRR notes that "an implementation plan has not yet been developed and significant effort will be required in the area of assessment...." (p. 35). A new position for coordinating assessment has been established but needs to be filled. Faculty development funding for training in assessment has been requested.

*Library:* After a vacancy of several years, the University hired a new head librarian in Fall, 2005. Funding for library operations has not increased in the past five years, despite the Commission Team's recommendations. Membership in the Washington Resource Library Consortium and proximity to the Library of Congress are advantages that Gallaudet employs. The library remains an area with significant challenges, particularly

due to Gallaudet's role as the repository of important archival collections for the deaf community. Other than the installation of a new security system, none of the recommendations from the 2001 visitation team have received adequate attention.

## Response to Recommendations from the 2001 Decennial Review

### Organization, Administration and Governance

The University expressed "shock and incredulity" to the observations by the 2001 Commission Team that the governance structure was convoluted, ineffective, and undermining of the appropriate authority of the administration. Nevertheless, the University agreed to participate in a process of review. Two external consultants were engaged to review faculty governance structure and shared governance, made recommendations in three broad areas (enhancing trust, improving communication and clarifying roles), and addressed structural issues within the formal governance system. In March, 2005, the Commission accepted the University's progress report organized around the changes that followed from these recommendations.

Ironically, this process, while apparently edifying to the University, seems not to have resulted in a reduction in the number of committees. The PRR even makes reference to a number of committees or task forces that were apparently newly created in recent years. Given the size of the institution, there remains an impression of excess bureaucracy in the documents that were reviewed.

### Faculty

Efforts are ongoing to ensure that the faculty is more diverse (e.g., that its members include a greater percentage of non-Gallaudet graduates). The PRR notes that the percentage of those for whom Gallaudet was the institution at which they earned their highest degree has declined in recent years; however, the doctoral programs at Gallaudet are fairly small so one should not anticipate that many Gallaudet faculty would earn their highest degree there. It would be interesting to know how many of the new faculty members were nonetheless alumni of Gallaudet's undergraduate or master's programs.

Through the creation of the President's Fellows Program, minority doctoral students during their final year of dissertation work (particularly those who are deaf/hard of hearing) are brought to Gallaudet for a one-year teaching appointment and mentoring program in order to increase the potential pool of qualified new faculty applicants. There have been 20 such participants to date, four of whom have been hired as full-time tenure-track faculty.

The Guidelines of the University Faculty were revised in 2003 to include full-time pre-tenure track (PTT) appointments. This creative strategy allows PTT faculty up to three "extra" years to meet requirements before their tenure decision, with reduced teaching load and no service requirement. To date, 11 PTT faculty members (55% deaf or hard of hearing) have taken advantage of this opportunity. An *ad hoc* faculty committee has

recommended greater consistency in relation to these incentives (particularly in regard to hearing faculty who are completing dissertations). The University continues to focus on this issue.

The PRR notes that while new faculty members are assigned mentors within their home departments, "there is no written standard for the mentors and each department tailors the role to the needs of the faculty member and the department." A coherent university-wide faculty mentoring program would be a very helpful asset to Gallaudet in its faculty development effort.

### Curriculum

*Literacy and English competency:* Following the recommendation of the Commission Team in 2001, the Freshman Year Seminar (FYS) became a required course in 2002 but that program was subsequently suspended in Fall, 2003. It will be re-instated in Fall, 2006. The PRR is unclear about the reasons for its suspension and reinstatement.

There have been multiple other initiatives in this arena. In 2002, *English Works!* was merged with the Tutorial Center to form a new unit called Tutorial and Instructional Programs (TIP). The budget for this program was increased by 45%, a teaching assistant was added to each developmental English class, and an online tutorial lab, *Smarthinking*, was created for use by upper level and graduate students. The Department of Applied Literacy offers multi-level courses in English, some with additional lab requirements. A developmental English course was linked with FYS to form learning communities, and summer workshops were created for faculty who teach developmental English.

*General education courses:* The Commission Team recommended in 2001 that the University consider reducing the number of required general education courses. Other than a reduction in the Bachelor of Science core curriculum, this has not yet been accomplished. The PRR notes that the Task Force on Liberal Education developed a report proposing a more interdisciplinary approach to liberal education, with one possible outcome being a reduction in the number of general education courses. The reviewers hope that this "possible outcome" will become a much higher priority in the decision-making agenda.

*Options for "most ambitious" students:* Some additional interdisciplinary honors courses and capstone courses have been added but there has been no broad-based change in approach. If Gallaudet is to adequately address the new competition it has encountered since the mid-1990s, it will need to more intentionally address the needs of its more academically-qualified students or lose them to other institutions.

*Options for early exit:* In addressing this recommendation, the Academic Affairs Planning Committee apparently focused its attention primarily on the question of whether or not to create associate degrees (and chose not to do so). Instead, they have decided to formalize a few articulation agreements with junior colleges, which action does little to address the needs of Gallaudet students who are withdrawing or being dismissed from

—their academic programs. The need for an “honorable exit” remains for students who matriculate into this open enrollment institution and find themselves unable to succeed.

### University Library

Little progress has been made on the 2001 Team recommendations. The University Librarian retired in 2002 and a permanent replacement was not hired until September, 2005. During this time, a new security system was installed, which should help to address some of the concern about the loss of valuable materials. Most other Commission recommendations were not formally addressed. Work is now underway and must continue, particularly in light of Gallaudet's unique population (and its resource needs) and Gallaudet's commitment to doctoral-level education in a school of fewer than 2000 students.

The PRR makes a spirited defense of Gallaudet's decision to not increase its library budget to reflect the percentage of operating expenses typical of other institutions of similar size. The PRR notes instead that their operating expenses are significantly greater, due to the special needs of the population served, than those of other institutions. This argument against a formulaic approach makes sense, particularly since their financial reports indicate an annual expenditure of roughly \$68,000 per student (full and part-time included). Nevertheless, it is imperative that Gallaudet demonstrate a fresh and re-invigorated commitment to library staffing, acquisition, and retention of resources.

### Technology

Middle States commended the University in 2001 for its technological infrastructure for learning. In so doing, the Team identified four technology issues (communication, coordination, training, planning), all of which have been well addressed:

- *Communication:* Email has been upgraded and has become very dependable. A *Daily Digest* minimizes broadcast emails. A campus portal has been implemented and is widely used for admissions applications, transcript access, class registration, access to grades, and class schedules.
- *Coordination:* A new Academic Technology Advisory Committee reviews current tools and helps in planning and goal-setting. Responsibility for the website was transferred from Marketing to Public Relations, with a “new look” unveiled in Fall, 2005. There is a new standard hardware configuration and a Technology Helpdesk is the first point of contact for those with technological problems.
- *Training:* Technology training for academic applications is an area of strength. Faculty use technology to enhance teaching and learning, particularly through the Blackboard Content System, which was deployed university-wide in 2005 and integrated into approximately 75% of courses (well above the national average). Students receive technology guides by mail and are trained during orientation, in FYS, and through the e-Learning lab.

- *Planning:* IT planning and funding priorities appear to be better aligned with strategic objectives.

### Linkage between Strategic Planning and Budgeting

The University receives the bulk of its operating budget from Congress and must therefore maintain strategic planning and assessment processes that comply with the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). This external review provides a powerful incentive for the University to maintain an effective strategic planning and assessment process. Internally, the decision-making process is coordinated by the University Budget Committee (UBC), whose members represent various constituencies.

The budget process begins with the President's announcement of priorities, which arise out of the strategic planning process. The University operates on a five-year budget cycle, which permits some level of mid-range financial planning while maintaining the flexibility to make annual adjustments in light of external or internal pressures.

### **Major Challenges & Opportunities**

One major challenge at the moment is the presidential transition from Dr. Jordan to Dr. Fernandes, which has revealed not only some concern about Dr. Fernandes' leadership style and qualifications but also some additional internal fault lines that were only suggested by the PRR. Given the concern of the Commission Team in 2001 regarding governance issues in the University—and despite the work of the consultants in the intervening years—the reviewers wonder about the extent to which current controversies are steeped in ongoing debates about governance.

While presidential transitions are often seen as opportunities for parties to seize the initiative on one or more issues of concern, it is noted that Dr. Jordan's ascendance to the presidency in 1988 was preceded by a similar firestorm (regarding the Board's original candidate for the position). Whether or not two similar scenarios in twenty years together constitute a pattern, it is a matter of concern that the learning environment, reputation, and mission of Gallaudet University not suffer during this time of transition. It is our hope that the internal issues that have been brought to the fore by this appointment will be adequately and appropriately addressed in the months ahead, with the intention that the University will emerge as it did after the appointment of Dr. Jordan—stronger, healthier, and more energetic.

### **Enrollment and Finance Projections**

One of the recommendations from the 2001 Team was that the UBC "re-examine the assumptions underlying its budget and revenue projections with a particular emphasis on projected levels of the federal appropriation." (This was particularly in response to an apparent \$1.5 million reduction in unrestricted net assets in the 2000 budget. Gallaudet noted that the apparent reduction was the result of two accounting decisions.) Since then, the University has projected an annual two percent increase in federal appropriations but

actual increases have been as high as five percent. Simultaneously, there has been a seven percent tuition increase over the past five years; this rate will now moderate to three percent annually to further enrollment goals.

The University's endowment fund has been strengthened considerably over the past five years, despite the post-911 crunch, but the University is still as dependent today as it was in 2001 on federal appropriations for its operating revenue. As noted earlier, the cost per student is very high, which discourages the University from exceeding its goal of a maximum headcount of 2000 students. A new admissions policy allows up to five percent of entering students to be hearing students who want to work with the deaf, which should help address a general decline in undergraduate enrollment over the past five years. Gallaudet noted with some satisfaction that the incoming class in Fall, 2005, was the largest it had been in some time.

### Evidence of Outcomes Assessment

Much of the impetus toward assessment at Gallaudet is driven by standards of professional accreditation bodies (16 different organizations 'accredit Gallaudet programs). In such cases student learning objectives are linked to the standards of their profession. Learning assessment instruments in use at Gallaudet include capstone courses, thesis evaluations, portfolios, standardized tests, professional certification exams, course examinations, field observations, journals, group projects, and presentations. It should be noted that some of these are learning *activities* that, while evaluated, are not necessarily assessment tools. Learning activities must be intrinsically linked to learning outcomes and the means of evaluation reflect institutional or programmatic learning objectives in addition to course-specific outcomes.

Other data generated on campus include alumni surveys, marketing survey, NSSE surveys, and a campus climate study. There is little evidence that these efforts are integrated with each other or with the strategic planning process.

The Center for Academic Programs and Student Services (CAPSS) has developed an assessment plan that links its six academic programs to the center mission of CAPSS and the University strategic goals. This is seen as a model by which a university-wide assessment infrastructure can be developed. The reviewers are encouraged by the creation of a position to be responsible for coordinating assessment efforts across the university, although that position had not yet been filled when the PRR was compiled.

In short, the necessary components are in place—a coordinator role, a model from which to build, external accreditation standards, and a range of internal tools that are already in use. What appears to be lacking at this stage is coordinated implementation and a clearly defined process for making appropriate use of assessment data. The PRR does not adequately describe how learning assessment results have been shared, how these might lead to decisions and improvements, or how assessment results are reviewed as vehicles for institutional improvement.

## Conclusion

Gallaudet University is a uniquely-resourced and uniquely-focused institution of higher learning. The reviewers appreciate the degree to which the original mission of the University still provides meaning to its priorities and activities, even as it generates new questions about culture, leadership, and learning during a time of transition for both the University and the deaf community in the United States. There is much to appreciate here. Gallaudet is strong financially, as a result of generous Congressional appropriations and successful fundraising efforts. For its size it has a very large pool of committed faculty and a wide range of academic offerings. The University is to be particularly commended for its efforts in technology, which would doubtless be the envy of other institutions of similar size and scope.

The preceding pages have consisted largely of observations drawn from the PRR and other documents provided by Gallaudet University to the reviewers. The following are suggestions and recommendations from the reviewers to the university. Suggestions for institutional improvement "constitute peer consultative advice" and "are provided to support and assist the institution in its self-improvement efforts" (Handbook for Periodic Review Reports, p. 19). These are offered in that spirit:

- Recognizing that the Middle States Commission on Higher Education has accepted the progress reports from the University regarding governance concerns expressed by the 2001 Visitation Team, the reviewers nonetheless suggest that these discussions continue with a view toward streamlining the committee structure and nurturing healthy relationships between faculty and administrators.
- The University should continue and strengthen its efforts to recruit a more diverse faculty pool, including a larger percentage of faculty members with no previous connection to Gallaudet. Vibrant institutions need to find a balance between continuity with the past and the infusion of new ideas and perspectives.
- It is as yet unclear the level of commitment the University has toward literacy and English competency programs nor what form those efforts will take in the following years. It would be helpful with the next review opportunity to read that these efforts have been strengthened, stabilized, and successful.
- It is suggested that the University create a coherent university-wide mentoring program for new faculty members and hire a faculty development coordinator to provide leadership to this and other development efforts.

Recommendations "are reserved for aspects of an institution where, in the reviewer's judgment, ongoing attention and improvement is required in order to continue meeting the Commission's accreditation standards" (Handbook for Periodic Review Reports, pp. 19-20).

- *It is recommended that a comprehensive and strategic learning outcomes assessment process be created as soon as feasible and documented through a progress report submitted to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education on April 1, 2008. The report should indicate how outcomes assessment is being conducted, how the data gathered are being shared, and how learning assessment results are utilized in decision-making.*
- *It is recommended that the Gallaudet University "review and act upon all recommendations contained in the 2001 Library Program Review Team Report" (from the Chair's Brief of the 2001 Evaluation Team Visit) that have not hitherto been addressed. Of particular concern here is the library budget; Gallaudet has rejected the formulaic approach recommended by the evaluation team. It must therefore develop another funding approach that would meet the same objective—that of significantly strengthening the library's resources for the years ahead.*
- *It is recommended that the University once again explore how to create an "early" or "honorable" exit strategy for undergraduate students who may not succeed in an open admissions environment. The creation of articulation agreements to assist in the transfer of students to Gallaudet does not adequately address the needs of students who may need a transfer from Gallaudet.*
- *It is recommended that the University seriously and promptly address the excessive general education requirements of the undergraduate programs. The reviewers were disappointed that this recommendation from the 2001 Visitation Team had not been appropriately or adequately addressed. Either the Task Force on Liberal Education or some other such body should be assigned responsibility and given the authority to introduce changes in a very timely manner.*

In closing, the reviewers once again express their appreciation for the opportunity to review, encourage, and challenge the Gallaudet University community through this Periodic Review Report process.