



**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 of Higher Education**

Dr. Stephen Sweeny, President, College of New Rochelle, *Team Chair*  
Dr. David Rubino, Special Assistant to the President, Seton Hill University  
Ms. Lisa Marsh Ryerson, President, Wells College  
accompanied by  
Ms. Linda Suskie, Vice President, MSCHE

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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; Kapialani 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.

The team is highly impressed with Gallaudet's extraordinary resources and magnificent facilities, which may well rank among the finest of any institution in the country. The team is also struck by Gallaudet's warm, nurturing environment; during the visit Gallaudet was repeatedly characterized as "home."

This visit was conducted in response to action taken by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education on November 16, 2006, to acknowledge receipt of the Periodic Review Report and the staff-requested information report on governance and climate due November 9, 2006, to express serious concern regarding recent developments at the institution, to postpone a decision on accreditation, and to direct a small team visit by January 12, 2007. The Commission acted further to request a supplemental information report, due by March 1, 2007, on (1) the effectiveness of shared governance including presidential search process, (2) nurturance of a climate that fosters respect among students, faculty, staff, and administration for a range of backgrounds, ideas, and perspectives, (3) mission review and implementation of a comprehensive institutional strategic plan, (4) implementation of a comprehensive enrollment management plan that addresses student recruitment, retention, graduation, and placement, (5) evidence of the academic rigor of the degrees offered, and (6) procedures for ensuring that changes and issues affecting the institution are disclosed accurately and in a timely manner to the Commission. An additional visit may follow submission of the supplemental information report. The Commission acted further to request a monitoring report, due by April 1, 2008, documenting (1) the institution's further response to recommendations from the 2001 evaluation team report and (2) implementation of a documented, organized and sustained

process to assess the achievement of institutional and program-level student learning goals that includes direct evidence of student learning.

During its visit, the team met with:

- Interim President Robert Davila and his staff
- Interim Provost Michael Moore and his staff
- The MSA planning committee
- Representatives of the faculty and staff (with perhaps 200 or more in attendance)
- Representatives of the students (with perhaps 100 in attendance)
- The entire Board of Trustees

The team thanks the Gallaudet University community, especially President Davila, Provost Moore, and their staffs, for their gracious hospitality in hosting this visit. The team is cognizant that this visit was scheduled at a particularly busy time, with the President formally assuming his position only one week earlier, with a high school basketball tournament and university student orientation occurring concurrently, and with Spring classes scheduled to begin the following week. The team is grateful to the entire University community for accommodating and actively participating in the visit at this time.

The purpose of the visit was:

- to convey personally the Commission's serious concern regarding recent events at Gallaudet University,
- to explain the Commission's standards for accreditation,
- to explain what is requested in the Supplemental Information Report due March 1, 2007, and
- to discuss potential Commission actions and the timeframe for them from this point forward.

During the visit, the team repeatedly expressed that the free, open, and unfettered exchange of ideas is the hallmark of an accredited institution. The team further stressed that closing an institution through protest, preventing or intimidating students from attending class, or precluding the open exchange of ideas brings the institution out of compliance with Middle States' accreditation standards, and any further such actions will have dire consequences in terms of accreditation.

The team further observed that there is great fragmentation within the Gallaudet community regarding its mission, leading to concerns about the mission's viability, and the team urged the Gallaudet community to consider reviewing the mission.

The team also observed that the shared governance structure is unclear and may be ineffective. The team therefore stressed the need for the University community to review and evaluate the effectiveness of its governance structure.

The team further noted that Gallaudet's historic isolation from the rest of the higher education community has not served it well, especially in recent years when expectations and initiatives in higher education have changed dramatically. The team strongly encouraged the University to

become a more active participant in the Middle States Association and other relevant higher education organizations.

The team encouraged the Gallaudet community to use the preparation of the Supplemental Information Report as an opportunity for broad-based dialogue across the University community regarding the University's mission and to aim to develop a report that can be a template for an operational plan for the University over the coming 18-24 months.

The team requests that Linda Suskie, Middle States staff liaison to Gallaudet University, visit Gallaudet after the Supplemental Information Report is submitted, to discuss and validate the Supplemental Information Report. Other individuals may accompany Ms. Suskie on this visit.