



Middle States Commission on Higher Education

3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104-2680

Phone: 267-284-5000 Fax: 215-662-5501 www.msache.org

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

by a Team Representing the Middle States Commission of Higher Education

Dr. Margaret Mary Fitzpatrick, MSCHE Commissioner and President, St. Thomas Aquinas College, *Team Chair*

Dr. Karen Kershenstein, MSCHE Commissioner and President, KWK Enterprises, Inc.

Dr. Thomas Raco, Professor of Art, National Technical Institute for the Deaf

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; 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 September 15, 2007, documenting in detail: 1) steps taken to improve, and detailed evidence of, the effectiveness of shared governance including the presidential search process; 2) steps taken to improve, and detailed evidence of, a climate that fosters respect among students, faculty, staff and administration for a range of backgrounds, ideas, and perspectives; 3) detailed evidence of mission review and implementation of a comprehensive institutional strategic plan; 4) detailed evidence of implementation of a comprehensive enrollment management plan that addresses student recruitment, retention, graduation, and placement; and 5) detailed evidence of the academic rigor of degrees offered.

During its visit, the team met with:

- Interim President Robert Davila
- President's Management Team
- Academic Affairs Management Team
- MSCHE Coordinating Council (MCC)

- Four work groups established by President Davila: Rigor & Assessment, Climate & Healing, Enrollment Management, and Mission
- Representatives of the faculty and staff
- Representatives of the students
- Chair and vice chair 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. Special thanks are extended to David Armstrong and Judy Berglund 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 last spring observed that the Gallaudet community has embarked on a long, difficult journey that could not be completed quickly or easily.

It commended the University community for its commitment to Gallaudet University, the energy and enthusiasm with which it undertook this journey, and the progress it had made in addressing areas of concern identified by the Commission.

We reiterate those commendations. Gallaudet has made tangible progress in a number of areas in a short period of time.

- You have drafted a new, clear, and focused mission statement and a new vision statement that build on Gallaudet's historic strengths.
- You have drafted the beginnings of a new strategic plan.
- You have drafted a new enrollment management plan including stronger admissions standards that are based on review of relevant data on student success.
- You have reestablished an office of institutional research and appointed an assessment director.
- You have developed and implemented a new general education curriculum with well-articulated learning outcomes.
- Rather than rely on existing tools, you are designing a new assessment of American Sign Language (ASL) as it is used in academic discourse.
- The board has engaged in a thorough and unvarnished self-assessment.
- The board has reached out to engage faculty and students in meaningful dialogue on communication and governance issues.
- Six new members have been appointed to the board, all with credentials that should help the board fulfill its responsibilities.
- You have made a number of improvements to the budget process.
- You have implemented several recommendations to improve relations between students and public safety officers.
- You have laid the groundwork to conduct a campus climate survey next spring.

- You have planned a number of assessments of student learning over the coming year.
- You appropriately recognize that the plans, assessments, and standards that you have developed are not set in stone but will be subject to revision once they are implemented.

These accomplishments are very real, and you should take great pride in accomplishing them.

The team also commends Gallaudet University for a clearly written and well-organized monitoring report. The team notes, however, that much of the report is descriptive rather than analytical and does not provide the detailed evidence requested by the Commission in a number of areas. The report does document that decisions on the new admissions standards, the board's new priorities, the new general education curriculum, and relations between public safety officers and students were based on careful analysis of data and information. The report does not, however, provide evidence that many other plans and decisions have been similarly based on careful analysis of solid evidence rather than anecdote or supposition. The team learned during its visit that many plans and decisions have indeed been based on analysis of available data and information, and the team urges Gallaudet to include summaries of such evidence in future monitoring reports

As you know, in June the Commission placed Gallaudet University on probation because of a lack of evidence that the institution is currently in compliance with accreditation standards regarding Standards 1 (specifically mission), 2 (specifically planning), 4 (specifically governance), 6 (specifically climate), 8 (student admissions and retention), 11 (specifically academic rigor), and 7 and 14 (assessment). The team's conclusions regarding these standards are as follow:

Standard 1 (specifically mission): The team finds that Gallaudet University partially 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 it appears to be in the process of being "developed and recognized by the institution with the participation of its members and its governing body." Because Gallaudet's mission focuses on bilingual education, and because its future is therefore predicated on the assumption that sufficient numbers of prospective students want to pursue a bilingual education, we urge the University to verify this assumption through appropriate research as soon as possible.

The team also notes that the new mission statement does not mention Gallaudet's historic mission of research on deaf language, history, and culture, although the new vision statement does. The team notes that Middle States Standard 1 expects a mission to "include support of scholarly and creative activity, at levels and of the kinds

appropriate to the institution's purposes and character" and suggests that the University address this expectation.

Standard 2 (specifically planning): The team commends Gallaudet University for its progress in developing a new strategic plan but, because the plan is incomplete, finds that Gallaudet University does not yet have evidence of compliance with this standard. Because the strategic plan is new and incomplete, and because the new budget is at this point merely a proposal, Gallaudet does not yet have evidence that the university "conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals, develops objectives to achieve them, and utilizes the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal." For the same reasons, Gallaudet does not yet have evidence that "implementation and subsequent evaluation of the success of the strategic plan and resource allocation support the development and change necessary to improve and to maintain institutional quality." A critical task will be developing and implementing benchmarks to measure the university's progress in achieving its new strategic goals. (The benchmarks identified in Exhibit K of the monitoring report document compliance with Middle States Standard 11, not the University's new strategic goals.)

Standard 4 (specifically governance): The team commends Gallaudet University for its progress in governance and finds that Gallaudet University partially meets this standard. Through interviews, the team found a strong commitment to shared governance and a heightened level of mutual trust and support within the Gallaudet community. The team also found that faculty and administrators were able to explain the procedures for policy development and approval. Faculty and administrators furthermore expressed great enthusiasm for new levels of communication between faculty, administration, and the board and felt that the concept of shared governance was greatly enhanced by this strengthened communication. The team also commends the board for completing a self-assessment, making plans stemming from the results, and adding a diverse array of well-qualified new members to the board.

While these accomplishments are commendable, the team found that Gallaudet does not yet have documented, systematic evidence of "a well-defined system of collegial governance including written policies outlining governance responsibilities of administration and faculty and readily available to the campus community" or documented, systematic evidence that its "system of governance clearly defines the roles of institutional constituencies in policy development and decision-making."

Indeed, Gallaudet's newly-established communication channels are largely ad hoc and not codified. There appears to be no comprehensive internal communication plan (the communication "plan" provided to the team lists only past town meetings and video blogs by the president; it does not provide systematic, ongoing plans for such events, for other communication events such as dialogues on bilingualism, or for less structured events such as informal student-board and faculty-board conversations). The team is also concerned that the institution was unable to provide any minutes of board

meetings since June, a period when a number of important non-confidential decisions have been made by the board, including an endorsement of the new University mission statement. In interviews with the team, faculty and staff repeatedly expressed the concern that, because new communication strategies are not embedded in Gallaudet's governance structure, Gallaudet runs the risk of seeing a diminution in these new communication strategies when institutional leadership eventually changes.

The team also notes that the university's administrative organization chart and governance organization chart are incomplete. The administrative organization chart, for example, does not include the Dean of General Studies Curriculum, the Director of Institutional Research, the Kendall schools, or the new position of ombudsman. The governance organization chart, meanwhile, describes only the Faculty Senate; it does not show the relation of the Faculty Senate to other institutional governance structures such as the board or the student governance system. The governance organization chart does not include a number of committees such as the Budgeting Committee, Parking Committee, Academic Quality Coordinating Committee, or Council for Equity in Employment.

The team therefore recommends that Gallaudet create clearer documentation of administrative and governance organization, structures and processes. This may entail a review of the university's bylaws regarding the board's responsibilities and protocols. The team further suggests that Gallaudet consider codifying in some appropriate way its new, successful communication strategies. In short, improvements to the University's governance structure are only beginning, and we look forward to future reports of progress in this area.

Standard 6 (specifically climate): The team finds that Gallaudet University is working toward "a climate that fosters respect among students, faculty, staff, and administration for a range of backgrounds, ideas, and perspectives" but cannot yet provide evidence that such a climate now exists. The monitoring report does report a variety of plans to improve campus climate, including:

- the field testing of a new campus climate survey that will be administered in Spring 2008,
- the creation of an Ombudsman office,
- the announcement of a seven-point diversity plan,
- recommendations prepared by the campus work group on climate and diversity,
- the launching of discussions on the university's new bilingual mission statement, and
- the commissioning of a study on freedom of expression practices.

The initiatives related to climate that are described in the monitoring report largely appear to be plans that are not yet fully implemented. With the exception of initiatives to improve relations between students and public safety officers, the team found little evidence that much has been put into practice so far in this critical area. The team is

concerned about Gallaudet's relatively slow progress in this area compared to progress with other standards because, in the team's view, the lack of a respectful climate is likely the root cause of the protests a year ago, the most difficult problem facing Gallaudet University, and the one that will take the most time to resolve. In this context, the team notes that interviews with students and the results of the recent pilot test of the new campus climate survey suggest that significant problems with climate are persisting.

The team is also concerned that the monitoring report does not provide evidence that the plans and initiatives intended to address climate issues flow from careful analysis of relevant data and information. (The sole exception is the initiatives to improve relations between students and public safety officers, which were based on an independent review by a former official at the U.S. Department of Justice.) Because these plans and initiatives do not appear to be based on solid, analytical evidence, the team is uncertain that these initiatives will be successful in resolving concerns about climate.

The team is additionally concerned that plans to address campus climate concerns do not appear to speak to the need for clear, consistent, appropriate, and enforced expectations for student conduct and the conduct of others, essential elements of a respectful climate. We suggest that Gallaudet to review its policies and procedures regarding grievances and student discipline as part of its attention to this standard and to compile and examine evidence of "equitable and appropriately consistent treatment of constituencies," as stipulated in Middle States standards.

The team is also concerned that discrimination based on one's hearing capacity does not appear to be receiving much explicit attention from the university. We thus urge the Gallaudet community to accelerate its 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.

Standard 8 (student admissions and retention): The team finds that Gallaudet University now meets 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." The team commends Gallaudet for establishing new and more rigorous admissions standards based on evidence of student success. While stronger admissions standards may lead to temporary enrollment drops, we believe that they will eventually lead to a stronger and more successful university.

The team also notes that the enrollment management work group and staff were able to cite an impressive array of evidence for recent decisions on strategies to recruit qualified students and to improve student retention. This evidence was largely not mentioned in the monitoring report, and we urge Gallaudet to include detailed evidence

of the basis for its enrollment management plans and decisions in future reports to the Commission.

The team reiterates, however, its concern that Gallaudet's new bilingual mission does not appear to be based on solid research showing that there are sufficient numbers of prospective students interested in bilingual proficiency to ensure Gallaudet's continued viability. We urge the university to undertake such research promptly.

Standard 11 (specifically academic rigor): The team commends Gallaudet University for its progress in improving the academic rigor of its programs through stronger admissions standards, new policies on academic integrity and progress, a new general education curriculum, reviews of many of the university's academic program curricula, and clear rubrics for assessing key skills such as writing, ASL, and critical thinking. The team especially commends Gallaudet University for its thoughtful redesign of the general education curriculum, which not only provides thorough study of core competencies but also enables students to pursue more upper-level study in their major, a minor, or other options.

The team finds, however, that Gallaudet University does not yet have evidence of full compliance with this standard because many of these initiatives are only now being implemented. The university community has not yet determined, for example, the level of ASL proficiency it will now expect of graduating seniors. It will take time to make sure that they are implemented as intended and that students are indeed achieving the general education curriculum's laudable goals.

Standards 7 and 14 (assessment): The team commends Gallaudet University for its progress in establishing learning outcomes and developing assessment plans and strategies. The team finds, however, that Gallaudet University does not yet have evidence of full compliance with these standards because many planned assessments have not yet been implemented and the monitoring report that will present assessment results and information on how those results are being used to improve teaching, learning, planning and decision-making is not due until April 1, 2008. We again remind the university community that assessment strategies must be developed and implemented not only for student learning outcomes but also for the goals in the University's new strategic plan.

To summarize our findings: The team commends Gallaudet University for its many tangible accomplishments over the past few months. The monitoring report and our interviews with faculty, students, administrators, and board members demonstrate that Gallaudet has made progress in addressing each of the concerns identified by the Commission. This did not come about without a great deal of hard work across the university, and we applaud you all for your energy and your commitment to Gallaudet.

Gallaudet University still has a significant distance to travel to resolve fully all the concerns of the Commission. We now encourage you to continue your hard work, as we believe that Gallaudet has the capacity to demonstrate full compliance with Middle States accreditation standards. As you continue your work, we remind you that the monitoring report due on April 1, 2008, must document substantive, detailed, and compelling evidence of (1) effective shared governance, (2) a climate that fosters respect among students, faculty, staff, and administration for a range of backgrounds, ideas, and perspectives, (3) successful implementation of an effective mission and strategic plan, (4) 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) the academic rigor of degrees offered and (6) 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. We therefore stress the importance of promptly finalizing and implementing the many plans you have developed, basing your plans and decisions upon compelling, systematic evidence and analysis, as you have already begun to do, and thoroughly documenting and explaining such evidence and analysis in future reports to the Commission.

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 October 23. 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 early November. The Committee's recommended action will then go on the agenda of the full Commission meeting in mid-November. Recommended actions can and often do undergo changes at these meetings, so we cannot predict what the Commission's November action will be.

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