

The College of Saint Rose



Abridged Self-Study Report
Based on Report Prepared for
MSCHE Evaluation Team Visit
February 2023

A Note About This Document

This abridged version of our Middle States Self-Study document is designed to provide a quick overview of the contents of our report. It only provides an outline of what is in the actual report. While this outline can give you sense of the findings of the various working groups that examined each standard, it does not provide the depth of information and analysis found in the self-study. Faculty, staff, and students are encouraged to read the complete self-study as it provides the evidence, data, and documentation on which our self-study assessments and recommendations are based.

This summary is excerpted from our self-study document and is organized in the same manner as the original by standard chapters.

Contents

Introduction	4
Standard I: Mission and Goals	5
Standard II: Ethics and Integrity.....	6
Standard III: Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience	7
Standard IV: Support of the Student Experience.....	9
Standard V: Educational Effectiveness Assessment	10
Standard VI: Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement.....	11
Standard VII: Governance, Leadership, and Administration	12

Introduction

We are undertaking this self-study at a time of change and challenge for higher education, and for The College of Saint Rose in particular. This process of self-reflection provides the opportunity to re-evaluate our effectiveness in fulfilling our mission and to reaffirm our role as a college committed to transforming the lives of our students.

In multiple conversations with the College community, President Marcia White has been consistent in declaring that we are moving forward to ensure the future of the College and the important work that we do with our students. The College continues to look for ways to address the challenges we face. Many difficult issues have already been met head-on, and, as discussed above, the College has made a several changes to ensure that we will continue to fulfill our mission. A new strategic plan, adopted in 2021, provides a road map to the future that is grounded in our mission and history. The strategic plan specifically addresses our challenges through goals focused on academic excellence, student success, community, and fiscal strength.

While the College still faces challenges, particularly in regards to financial matters, under the leadership of President White, a dedicated and committed faculty and staff continue to support our students and mission, moving the College forward on all fronts. These efforts look to ensure that we can continue to serve students and the community for another century.

Standard I: Mission and Goals

The College meets its purpose within the context of higher education and its mission across the campus, from the academic experience to the student experience. We remain committed to our mission and to fulfilling that mission in the work that we undertake with our students, our community, and with our faculty and staff. Despite limitations of resources and the imposition of a world-wide pandemic, the College's mission remains central to our planning, to our work, and our identity. The mission is demonstrated in our academic offerings and in activities designed to support scholarly inquiry and creative activity, such the College's student research conference, contributions to *The Journal of Undergraduate Research*, working real crime cases in the Cold Case Center, or taking part in the team-based Fed Challenge competition. College units, such as the Office of Community Service and the Office of Spiritual Life provide students with opportunities to fulfill the mission in external settings to "serve the dear neighbor."

Decisions and priorities are made through the lens of the mission, and goals are set to reflect that mission. Regular assessment ensures the College is meeting these mission-based goals. Although at times changes in the higher education environment and availability of resources have shifted the way the mission is delivered, creative thinking and resourcefulness that prioritize the mission have allowed the College to find new ways to meet its goals.

Standard I Areas for Improvement and Innovation

While the College continues to fulfill its mission, this work has been affected by both program and personnel reductions, and by the COVID-19 pandemic. The College has made adjustments to ensure that we continue to implement our mission in all the work that we do. As we emerge out of the pandemic there is an opportunity to re-examine our processes and resources ensure that they align with our mission. One issue that affects all areas of the College and that is vital to fulfilling our mission is ensuring adequate staffing. In order to ensure that we continue to provide necessary to meet our mission, we recommend that:

- The College assess current staffing in light of historical staffing data kept by Human Resources. This analysis could specifically address the ratio of staff relative to enrollment. Any such analysis would need to recognize that the student enrollment is only one element affecting staffing needs. For instance, regardless of student numbers, the College still requires a Title IX Coordinator. Such an analysis could form the basis of a staffing plan going forward; and,
- The College explore succession options for Director-level and above positions. The succession plan would identify if a current employee or employees could succeed to an open position on an interim or regular basis and, if so, if any staff development is required to ensure readiness. The plan would identify how an open position's responsibilities would be covered, if no current employees have the experience/skills/qualifications to provide coverage. Such analysis would enhance the current process of ad hoc evaluation of staffing needs.

Standard II: Ethics and Integrity

The College of Saint Rose is committed to providing an environment characterized by ethical behavior, integrity, and respect for diversity. The College is consistently faithful to its mission, honors its contracts and commitments, follows its policies, and is both transparent and truthful with internal and external stakeholders. The College provides clear information to students on cost and financial matters, including a web series that offers clarity on financial aid terms, processes, and procedures.

The College conducts its business ethically and with integrity by following its stated policies and procedures in its normal day-to-day practices and in its efforts addressing problems. Where necessary, the College has revised policies and procedures to reflect current circumstance, changes in regulations and to better support and serve the College community. This is demonstrated in its response to recent concerns regarding racial justice that resulted in revised policies and procedures related to bias complaints. The College's approach to program eliminations in 2020 demonstrates its ability to work collaboratively on sensitive issues and ensure that policies are followed.

Standard II Areas for Improvement and Innovation

The College is committed to providing an environment characterized by ethical behavior and integrity. The College should continue its efforts to build a diverse community of employees, particularly in the faculty and administration ranks, that is reflective of the diversity of our student population. The work that the College has done in the past few years related to diversity and equity have supported a climate of justice and equity. To ensure that the College continues to operate ethically, we recommend that:

- The College build upon efforts to enhance our campus community continuing to analyze needs, develop resources, examine policies, and inform all parties regarding ethical practices in regards to issues of diversity and equity;
- The College develop and implement a policy-on-policy review to ensure that all policies are kept up to date and relevant;
- The College examine competitive base salaries, compensation, and benefits as part of a larger staffing plan; and,
- The College revive the Integrity Committee.

Standard III: Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience

The College of Saint Rose provides students with rigorous and coherent learning experiences driven by the College's mission and consistent with higher education expectations. The College's 2021-2024 Strategic Plan identifies academic excellence and student success as top priorities for the institution. With its engaged and accomplished faculty and excellent student support services, the College is continually working toward these goals. Throughout their careers at Saint Rose, undergraduate and graduate students are provided with clearly stated guidelines for timely progress to graduation and they are given academic, logistical, and emotional assistance to help them achieve their academic and professional goals. The College offers a thoughtful and rigorous educational experience that provides students with the skills and knowledge to pursue their professional ambitions, better advocate for themselves and others, and become well-rounded citizens of the world.

The College fulfills the criteria as outlined in Standard III as well as the requirements of affiliation related to this standard. Well-designed and assessed programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels, as well as a strong Core curriculum and well-credentialed faculty, ensure that students engage in rigorous and coherent learning experiences that prepare them for active, effective, and fulfilled lives. As evidenced by the recommendations in this standard, the College needs to continue to assess its ability to support programs and students, particularly as regards retention and student supports.

Areas for Improvement and Innovation

As the core business of The College of Saint Rose, the academic programs provide opportunities of improvement and innovation. To support underprepared or struggling students, the College should consider offering the Strategies for Academic Success courses (CDS 021 and CDS 022) to students before their GPA falls below 2.0 and to offer them to new students prior to the start of their first semester. To ensure participation in these classes, the College could also explore offering them as for-credit classes.

The working group also makes the following recommendations for Standard III:

- Turnover in the ranks of faculty, staff, and administration is an acknowledged concern of the College, as noted in the 2021-2024 Strategic Plan. To lessen the disruptive impacts of turnover on institutional processes responsible for maintaining the rigor and coherence of the student learning experience, the group recommends a two-pronged approach. First, the College should take measures to identify areas of responsibility central to the student learning experience and ensure that areas are always sufficiently staffed. Second, the College should examine staffing to identify critical functions and exempt these from future hiring freezes. In the past, the College implemented hiring freezes on open positions in order to address budget deficits. While effective in generating savings, the freezes resulted in increased workload, and, at times, to additional resignations;
- The effects of the decrease in programs and faculty resulting from the program elimination process have not been fully explored. Due to the interconnections between terminated and remaining programs and impacts on invisible workload of faculty, the group recommends that the College conduct research into the impacts on the student experience of these reductions. It is recommended that the College proactively and systemically seek input from remaining programs to evaluate the actual effect on the College's mission, student learning experience, and faculty scholarship and service. Insights gained from this process should be used for future decision-making and to work toward a vision of what the College as an institution and community should be in the future;
- To support the College's efforts with retention and improving graduation rates, it is recommended that a process be established to obtain feedback from students and advisors on the effectiveness of the four-year plans. The information gathered from such an effort can help the College improve these four-year plans in ways that better assist students on their paths to graduation; and,

- The College's Institutional Assessment Working Group and the Liberal Education Assessment Committee have recommended that the College work to continue to increase response rates for the annual SLOAs. These rates could be increased by 1) the hiring of an assessment director and 2) compensated training for faculty on both the software used for assessment and the creation of reports and how to read, understand, and assess those reports. These two recommendations also support the assessment feedback loop that supports continued improvement.

Standard IV: Support of the Student Experience

The College of Saint Rose fulfills the criteria as outlined in Standard IV, providing effective support of students regardless of their program or level of preparation. The College attracts and supports students whose interests align with the College's mission and values. In order to encourage student retention and persistence, the College provides an engaging student experience grounded in our mission. Effective and coherent support systems, co-curricular activities, and supportive staff ensure an environment conducive to learning and student growth. Supports and programs are regularly reviewed and the results of these assessments are used to improve our work with students.

Despite recent financial challenges and the COVID pandemic, the College has maintained a commitment to creating a student experience that is positive, supportive, mission-focused and provides "the opportunity to cultivate their creative and spiritual gifts in a diverse learning community that fosters integrity, interdependence, and mutual respect." The institution regularly assesses its student support programs, including components offered by third-party vendors, and uses findings from these assessments to improve continuously the student experience.

Areas for Improvement and Innovation

The College continues to support the development of the whole person, providing many opportunities for engagement and growth. The suggestions noted in this report will provide for continued improvement in the areas covered by this standard. Some changes have already been made. The Division of Student Development underwent organizational transitions in the summer of 2021 which carried throughout the 2021-2022 academic year. With each professional staff vacancy, the College took the time to re-evaluate the roles that existed compared to the needs of our students and make recommendations on how we could better serve our students. To further support the student experience, we suggest that the College:

- Further support underprepared or struggling students through analysis of staffing needs in all academic support areas and develop plans to ensure adequate staffing levels;
- Increase the visibility of the Office of Financial Aid by organizing on-campus presentations to promote Financial Aid programs, notably the Federal Work-Study Program. In addition, the College should consider establishing a Scholarship Office to serve as a one-stop shop for students seeking scholarships to continue their undergraduate education or pursue a graduate degree;
- Consider reinstating the Pathways program to help students to build bonds of friendship that help enrich their educational experience. Re-establishing these programs would support student retention and help address goals and tactics in the College's strategic plan;
- Consider establishing a customized orientation for transfer students to ensure a smooth transition into their desired degree program to better support transfer enrollment and retention and explore enhanced advisement for students in accelerated degree programs; and,
- Consider collecting and reporting program-specific post-graduation data.

Finally, as noted in this Standard discussion, information on student's experience with third-party providers is limited. The College should consider collection and assessment of data related to third-party providers.

Standard V: Educational Effectiveness Assessment

The College meets the standards for effective educational assessment through clearly defined educational goals at all levels of the institution. Grounded in our mission and based on established institutional goals, our existing assessment practices annually evaluate academic, administrative, and institutional effectiveness. In-depth program reviews are undertaken on a seven-year cycle. Taken together, these assessments ensure that programs are rigorous and relevant, that students are supported in achieving curricular goals. These assessments inform institutional decision-making and the setting of clear goals for improvement. Continuing targeted training on data collection and analysis will improve the institution's ability to continuously improve our undergraduate and graduate program and the services we offer our students.

Areas for Improvement and Innovation

While the College of Saint Rose has been both intentional and effective in its use of assessment instruments across the college environment, not all of the recommendations made in the 2019-2020 College of Saint Rose Assessment Update have been fully implemented. Assessment efforts overall have been hampered by a lack of continuity. While progress was made with the hiring of the College's first Director of Assessment in 2017, the position has remained unfilled since the summer of 2019. As noted in the Liberal Education Assessment Report, "there is a need for consistency in the creation of reports of outcomes that are ultimately posted to SharePoint/Chalk and Wire" (SV.C2: Annual Assessment Report 2019-2020).

Assessment practices will increase in efficacy as the institution continues to enhance internal communication (Strategic Plan Objective 3.3) and utilizes reorganization strategies to support efficiency and distribution of assessment responsibilities (Strategic Plan Objective 4.6). In order to further improve our assessment practices we suggest:

- That the College include assessment as part of new employee orientation, defining both the needs and expectations that allow for the improvement of the institution (Strategic Plan Objective 2.4, Tactic 2.42).;
- That the institution attempt to reduce complexity in achieving assessment goals by choosing new technological systems that integrate with existing systems (Strategic Plan Objective 2.4, Tactic 2.41);
- That the College consider developing of a system of quantitative data collection and analysis at the program level to provide further evidence of how assessment practices are used for program improvement. For example, collect data on how many recommendations were made and how many were acted on in a particular reporting cycle. This information would complement our current data and could enhance our analysis;
- That the College provide hands-on training in the software used for assessment to help ensure consistency and cohesiveness in the process. This will be particularly important as the College shifts to the use of Watermark, the new ePortfolio software, through which the SLOAs and SOARs will be completed and,
- That the College complete the development of a process for regular assessment of the Liberal Education Core, including a calendar that ensures that the program is reviewed on a regular basis and updated as necessary.

Finally, we suggest that the College fully implement a recommendation from the more recent assessment report to enhance the assessment feedback loop to ensure that units are receiving thoughtful and substantive feedback on their assessments, thus fostering continuous institutional improvement," needs more attention.

Standard VI: Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement

The College of Saint Rose meets the criteria in Standard VI in the areas of financial planning, resource allocation, mission alignment, transparency, resourcefulness, accountability, and effectiveness. The College of Saint Rose consistently reviews its plans and processes at every level of the institution, from the President's Cabinet to academic departments, as well as individual members of the Saint Rose community, including faculty, administrators, and staff. By using our three-year strategic plan, the College provides the community with a framework for decision-making and planning for a successful future. The College's planning and resource allocation processes supports Institutional Priorities 1, 2, 3, and 4.

The College maintains a strong foundation comprised of thoughtful processes and well-built facilities to support its goals as an academically challenging yet supportive environment for students, faculty, and staff that exemplifies the founding values of the College. These processes will continue to be important as the College continues to deal with revenue challenges resulting from the effects of demographic realities on enrollment. The College is committed to financial discipline in order to address declining enrollment and a structural operating deficit. Management is evaluating and implementing the aforementioned strategies to fund the College's expenses and growth to achieve a level of revenue adequate to support the College's cost structure going forward.

Areas for Improvement and Innovation:

As described above, the College relies on numerous policies and procedures in planning, resource allocation, and institutional improvement. In order to ensure that policies and processes are efficient and meeting our needs, and to enhance constituent participation, we suggest:

- That the College implement a policy on policy review. This would ensure that policies and processes are as effective as possible. Currently, the College has a draft of such a policy which should be reviewed, updated, and approved; and,
- That the College continue discussions of ways to expand participation in the budgeting process, such as the use of a Budget Advisory Committee, as noted above, or an expanded role for SPPC in the development of multi-year budgets

Standard VII: Governance, Leadership, and Administration

The College fulfills the criteria as outlined in Standard VII as well as the related requirements of affiliation. The institution's governance, leadership, and administration meet their purposes and support the College in fulfilling its mission and vision. Processes of shared governance in the Faculty Manual and the by-laws of the Board of Trustees document interdependent processes of governance between the faculty, administration, and the board. Recent experiences within the College, as well as the external environment, inform continuing assessment of these processes, including by a task force reviewing the College's academic structure, by a committee of the board examining its by-laws, and by students, staff and alumni assessing student government. Assessment of the organization and its process is healthy and highlights the institution's commitment to improvement. In drafting this section, the Committee worked collaboratively with a group of Trustees including the Board Chair and the President. One area that was identified for greater clarity was the presidential search and assessment process, which could include a periodic evaluation in which the Trustees seek input from the campus community.

Areas for Improvement and Innovation

Shared governance is a part of the effective working of the College, and ensures that we are able to serve our students and fulfill our mission. During the pandemic, much of the work of governance at all levels of the College shifted to virtual modes. The College can build upon this experience to enhance our governance processes and address Strategic Plan Goal 3 to foster an engaged, inclusive, and supported community. In order to support our strategic objectives to foster a shared sense of purpose and to enhance internal communication we suggest:

- That the College explore ways of using technology to ensure full participation in governance processes that might not be possible in a strictly face-to-face environment. Our experience during the pandemic shows that governance participation can be supported through technology;
- That the Faculty set up a committee to assess satisfaction with the operation of the shared governance process. The assessment could be done every other year. We also suggest that the Board facilitate a periodic college-wide assessment of the President, perhaps aligned with the President's contract renewal process. This should include a regular review of the governance document and Faculty Manual; and,
- That the College develop processes through which all employees can have a role and voice in the shared governance of the institution.