

Report to  
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students  
of  
**Juniata College**

Huntington, Pennsylvania 16652

Prepared following analysis of the College's  
Periodic Review Report

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## I Introduction

Juniata College, a Pennsylvania liberal arts institution founded in 1876, has written and submitted a painstaking Periodic Review Report (PRR). Specifically, we commend the College for the extent to which it has responded to the recommendations of the previous decennial evaluation team and outlined the openness of the budget process that has established a procedure and time frame to ensure necessary links between planning and budgeting. Further, we thank the Juniata assessment team of faculty and administrators that fashioned this thoughtful PRR and has already begun to implement its findings.

**Mission Statement:** In early 2008 at the end of a long strategic planning effort, Juniata revised and published a new Mission Statement: “Juniata’s mission is to provide an engaging personalized educational experience empowering our students to develop the skills, knowledge, and values that lead to a fulfilling life of service and ethical leadership in a global community.” (PRR, p. 15). This new statement continues to reflect the College’s commitment to undergraduate education, emphasizing service and ethical leadership.

## II Responses to Recommendations from the Previous Decennial Evaluation

Juniata’s 2002 decennial Self-Study in preparation for the MSA/CHE 2003 visit chose to report on “the climate and the process” of student development through three selected topics: first-year experience, student engagement, and internationalization. The College has continued to do excellent work to create change and improvement in these areas. We affirm the finding of the 2003 MSCHE Report (p.75) that Juniata is a college "in which growth of the student is central" and apparent in many ways.

The Freshman Experience. In looking at the Freshman Experience program, the 2003 MSA-CHE visiting evaluation team was particularly concerned about lack of reliable outcome data specifically collected to analyze this important programmatic introduction to the College. Responding to this concern and to their own recommendations for improvement, the 2008 PRR team at Juniata returned to the Freshman Experience. Again they revisited the first year writing program known as the College Writing Seminar (CWS), freshman orientation, information literacy and class size, all important aspects of the First Year Experience.

Changes to the freshman experience first focused on the expansion and integration of orientation activities into the writing and reading programs. In addition, an extended ‘new student’ orientation was devised and led for an hour each week in Semester One by a specially chosen and trained student assistant. Faculty were encouraged to take part in the selection and training of these upper class assistants.

The PRR review team looked at freshman enrollments with special emphasis on the important variables involved in course selection and class size. The analysis found that large first year courses were clustered in the natural sciences and, to some extent, in

business subjects. Moreover, 59% of freshmen had four or more courses of 30 or more; 25% of them had at least one course with enrollment of more than 60. In response to the faculty discussion of this data, some departments committed to adding sections with previously high enrollment first year courses. Chemistry and biology revised teaching methodologies in their first year course, but in the end the faculty decided not to make further structural changes to the program. We suggest that the faculty return to the issue of class size across the whole curriculum, continuing its concern for first year student class size, but also focusing on upper division courses where class size may be insupportably low.

A separate task force was formed to reevaluate the information literacy program. Changes recommended and then implemented included an increased emphasis on the library with support from pre- and post-testing of the students' information literacy, and the agreement that competency tests would be completed by the mid-term break. Like libraries in colleges and universities everywhere, Juniata intends to stay current with new electronic opportunities in information literacy for teaching and learning.

**N.B.**: Assessment of student learning in the first-year CWS course accelerated with the appointment of a new Director. In its penultimate chapter, the PRR relates the outcome of its newly-instituted assessment program (first administered in academic year 2007-2008) where this report will address it as well.

### Internationalizing the Campus

International Programs were studied intensively by its dean and staff after the decennial MSA/CHE visit. The dean also commissioned an external assessment by the American Council on Education (ACE) that has been the stimulus for the creation of a formal planning and budgeting memorandum for the unit. Much as the College had planned, the number of international students on the campus has increased, as has the number of Juniata students studying abroad. Nonetheless, we agree that recruitment of international students and financial issues raised by study abroad programs must be resolved as soon as possible.

### Student Engagement

The decennial Self-Study and MSA/CHE evaluation visit prompted a College-wide curricular and co-curricular review. With differing responses from the faculty, the Task Force recommended that faculty:

- make mandatory a senior or integrating experience. This idea was approved but has not yet been addressed. We suggest that since the strategic plan calls for “a distinctive experiential learning opportunity” this impasse be confronted and resolved with due speed;
- develop uniform requirements for internships. After consideration, the faculty found that the practice in various departments were too dissimilar to regulate uniformly; we suggest that the faculty take up this issue again

in an attempt to create explicit expectations for internships across the board.

- encourage students to engage local, national and global communities. The College has implemented a requirement that freshmen attend at least five community events and write journals of their experiences.
- undertake community projects in courses. There has been significant increase in service learning and community involvement, some of which is supported by the Campus Compact;
- insure that special needs students receive the Student Affairs Special Needs publication. This information now appears on the Internet, as well.

We commend the College for creating a liberal arts symposium (JCLAS) to encourage student research and performance. The symposium and its role in assessment of student learning is addressed in the PRR's penultimate chapter, where this report will address it as well.

### Administrative Recommendations

Administration reviews for the PRR rightly focused on the primary mission of the College, "to offer excellent teaching and educational opportunities" to its students and to assess their impact.

They began their analysis by:

- responding to the call for more student diversity by adding a minority recruiter and improving the Unity House facility. The College now enrolls 10% students of color, including Americans and international students;
- initiating a search for a tenure-track position reserved for an African American, but after three years this effort failed: recent hires include Japanese and Chinese professors. We suggest that the College continue to search for African American faculty;
- creating new goals for diversity.

Further, the administrative review resulted in the institution of regular administrative unit self study, a process that includes external reviewers. Several reviews have been satisfactorily concluded and more are scheduled.

### III Major Challenges and Opportunities

The Strategic Planning process began by working to create new strategic goals that build upon those originally developed in 2001.

The Planning Process. The 88-person task force numbered trustees, senior administrators (including the President), professors, and students. The task force used the Drucker Self-Assessment Tool to answer these questions: What is our mission? Who are

our customers and what do they value? What are the results? What is our plan? They also surveyed eight significant challenges and opportunities:

- progress in science and technology and concomitant ethical issues;
- transformation in communication through information technology;
- development of new and expanded entrepreneurial opportunities;
- limitation created by ecological concern for environmental impact;
- danger associated with global conflicts of increasing complexity;
- change in educational content and delivery linked to accountability and affordability;
- expansion in the number of interactions with peoples of diverse cultural backgrounds and perspectives;
- increase in access to career opportunities occasioned by 'baby boom' retirements.

Clearly, these challenges and opportunities have helped to shape the College's current priorities, but (arguably) one or two need a second look even now, so soon after their articulation. The sustainability of the current priorities in the present volatile economic environment will be determined by Juniata's capacity to detect, understand and respond rapidly to changes.

Three Strategic initiatives: 1) the teaching and learning environment; 2) the 21<sup>st</sup> century campus; 3) the economic advancement initiative

*Teaching and Learning Initiative:* The existing review of the Freshman Experience was expanded to include sophomores. The Task Force also emphasized the need for a required experiential learning activity, although the faculty had previously rejected the idea of requiring a capstone course. The College needs to move to solve this impasse for once and for all.

Nonetheless, the PRR reveals the many ways Juniata can be counted upon to move to adjust its academic program to meet the needs of students within the constraints of existing faculty and other resources. The change in college-wide requirements is one example--from two courses in cultural analysis to one course (since an insufficient number of faculty felt they had sufficient expertise in cultural differences) and another course, Interdisciplinary Colloquium (PRR, p. 11). This interdisciplinary course, taught by at least two faculty members (we assume) in different disciplines, fulfills the original purpose. If Juniata's diversity goals in the area of academics are thought of as helping students understand world diversity, it would seem that more intercultural courses should be taught and required. Such an emphasis seems important for fulfilling its mission statement (the part about "global community"), too.

In addition they proposed timelines by which to:

- develop a new plan for faculty development;
- create interpersonal and intercultural programs for students and faculty;

- expand international programs;
- increase the number of students preparing to teach science in the schools;
- implement a successful Age 55+ Active Retirement community connected to the College;
- consider adding summer graduate programs in science and management.

Note that the move to offer summer graduate programs would be a significant change for Juniata College, which has offered graduate opportunities for students from other university's graduates, but not it's own degree programs.

In tackling the need for increased support for excellent teaching, the strategic plan now calls for the creation of a center for teaching excellence "as part of an overall re-design of faculty development (P.R.R. p.13). A grant from the Teagle Foundation will help to promote the scholarship of -- and the assessment of -- teaching and learning on campus and aid in the development of the teaching excellence center.

A new capital campaign is planned. Its goals include the intention to raise \$30 million for the endowment and \$20 million to planned giving in addition to soliciting funds for scholarships and capital projects. By 2012, they plan to allocate 3% of its budget to facilities and creative ventures.

Following approval by the faculty, the new Juniata Strategic Plan was approved by the Board on April 19, 2008

#### IV Assessment Processes and Plans

We commend Juniata for beginning to implement a stringent and thoroughgoing review of assessment at all departmental and administrative levels of the College. The PRR divides its report into four sections:

##### 1. *Assessing Administrative Offices and Programs:*

The College conducts periodic administrative assessment including self study and external review and annual administrative assessment in rotating cycles;

##### 2. *Assessing Student Learning: College-wide Efforts.*

- Juniata compares its students to others nationally using NSSE and CLA. A faculty forum discussed the test findings and considered opportunities for change, but reached no consensus; results of a straw poll of faculty resulted in the formation of a subcommittee of APAC to develop proposals on writing and, once again, the Freshman Experience. The College's willingness to revisit the Freshman Experience is salutary and over time will work to support its student-centered curriculum. Nonetheless, we urge the College to come to an effective method of creating positive consensus when faculty committees report to the whole faculty.

- Partial list of other venues for comparison:
  - Commendation: student involvement in the Juniata Liberal Arts Symposium (JCLAS) a triennial opportunity for students to present research papers to the academic community;
  - ongoing success in the National Conference of Undergraduate Research (NCUR);
  - the new Juniata Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership (JCEL), recently funded by the Coleman Foundation to support curricular development in entrepreneurship across the curriculum and attendance at the College Entrepreneurs' Organization (CEO);
  - Departmental activities: for example, the department supports a business case competition; Chemistry supports summer research opportunities, some funded by the Von Liebig foundation; competition for national summer grant-funding, etc.

### *3. Assessing Academic Departments and Programs*

Under the aegis of the assessment team, the Juniata faculty embarked on a thorough exploration of the current scholarship on assessing teaching and learning and each department inquired into its own assessment process using a uniform reporting template. An updated template on assessment activities will be submitted by departments each year and be used for course planning and assessment.

### *4. The Current State of Academic Assessment*

This section of the penultimate chapter of the PRR was extensive and full of precise reporting. It responds in admirable detail to MSA/CHE's emphasis on the necessity for institutional assessment of teaching and learning and the use of the results in planning and budgeting.

Juniata's assessment team met with a range of responses to their call for yearly student learning assessment in courses, programs and departments. After much work and discussion, in 2007, the college instituted a new program of annual departmental assessment; the office of institutional is the repository of the findings. There is no uniform expectation that all courses be assessed in terms of explicit course objectives, however.

In an especially candid run-down of the status of assessment in six different departments, the PRR distinguishes between those with an ongoing assessment program; those that started using feedback to inform change; and those that are struggling to begin. These descriptions should go a long way to encouraging those

who lag behind since they stress, along with new processes and programs, the use of information already collected and used by trusted colleagues.

- Student Writing and Assessment

The College Writing Seminar (CWS): Juniata's faculty has worked hard and long in trying to improve students' writing. We appreciate the struggles Juniata is having over the first-year writing course in the face of the lack of improvement in student learning outcomes and admire its willingness to persevere.

As the PRR reports, the results of pre- and post-assessment in the CWS showed that the writing ability of the students had slightly declined after completing a semester of CWS. In response to this negative assessment, the College Writing Seminar (CWS) lab has been changed: now faculty choose their own student assistants to improve communication between reading and writing components; the lab must have a project involving a major research component; and the project is due earlier in the semester so as not to interfere with final exam preparation in other courses (P.R.R. p.7-8).

Although these changes attest to Juniata's determination to improve the outcomes of CWS, there are obstacles to the kind of curricular change suggested by the negative results of the assessment. A subcommittee devoted to the task has considered linking the first semester CWS course to a writing intensive (CW) course in the spring of the first year and discussed how to bind the CW courses with the CWS educational goals.

As they note and what we find most important, however, is the need to develop “. . . a common pedagogical understanding” among instructors who teach the CW course as to the “specific skills CWS strives to accomplish” and how CWS is designed to create the desired student learning outcomes. It may be that the CW instructors bear responsibility for lack this understanding, but it is also true that the College has not successfully established a way to test an agreed-upon set of measureable criteria for CWS outcomes that can be used consistently, published widely and used to support the placement of students into CW courses. The success of this placement probably requires more face-to-face interaction between CWS and CW instructors and a good deal of clarity about which outcomes of CWS are most fragile and most in need of strengthening. The CW courses have been criticized as being focused on disciplinary content rather than “continuing the writing process begun in CWS” (P.R.R. p.67). To make the changes necessary to strengthen the writing components of CW courses, it falls upon all faculty across the curriculum to develop the spring CW courses with the support of writing instructors and to create measureable writing objectives for the CW courses created.

We suggest that a good way to achieve the difficult interface of CWS and CW courses is to separate disciplinary course objectives from writing objectives in



CW course outlines. The weighting of these two sets of objectives should be reasonably balanced so that students (and faculty) understand that both are central to their success. We doubt whether discussing writing issues in faculty conference before fall classes start or discussion in faculty meetings is sufficient to create the specific and assessable objectives that will be required for every CW course (P.R.R. pp.5-6). In some disciplines it is relatively easy to shape writing assignments that exercise an undergraduate grasp of what needs to be learned; in other disciplines, professional writing is more difficult to translate into the college-level writing experience. Often the answer to this difficulty is to stop relying upon regular introductory disciplinary tests and assignments and begin to create new assignments and new kinds of student collaborations.

We commend Juniata's intention to continue to try to improve faculty's teaching of writing. Insufficient faculty training in "writing in the disciplines" may well be a relevant and remedial factor in the poor outcomes assessment of student writing at the end of the first year. Perhaps Juniata can use its newly developing Center for Teaching and Learning, funded by a Teagle Foundation grant, in part to devise new strategies for helping a broader section of the faculty become better at instructing students in writing.

## V Linking Institutional Planning and Budgeting

We commend Juniata for developing a highly inclusive budgeting process carefully linked to the strategic plan. Periodic review of academic and administrative programs is key to the development of new resources and redeployment of existing funds.