



# Middle States Commission on Higher Education

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March 10, 2010

Dr. Robert Altenkirch  
President  
New Jersey Institute of Technology  
University Heights  
Newark, New Jersey 07102-1982

Dear Dr. Altenkirch: *Bob,*

I write with a double purpose: first, to thank you for the very warm welcome that I received during my March 9 Self-Study preparation visit to the New Jersey Institute of Technology, and, second, to provide you with some feedback that I hope will be useful to you and the institution as you continue your work of self-study. I especially want to thank Drs. Norbert Elliot, Perry Deess, and Stephen Tricamo, the Self-Study co-chairs, for their efforts in arranging the schedule and tending to the many details of organization that resulted in a successful day of meetings. I also want to extend thanks to the many students, faculty, and administrators, in addition to the Self-Study Steering Committee, who made time available to participate in the day's discussions. Please extend my sincere appreciation to everyone who was involved, including Board Chair Kathleen Wielkopolski and students Matthew Deek, Fatima Elgammal, Adadese Olwaseun, and Jamil Wilkins, who literally went the extra mile to participate in my visit by accompanying me from and to Penn Station. I particularly enjoyed hearing from these students what their experience has been at NJIT, how much they appreciate the institution, and what they are planning for the future thanks to their NJIT education. They are very fine ambassadors for NJIT.

As you know, the purpose of my visit was two-fold, both to give and to receive information regarding your self-study and to learn more about NJIT. I found the visit very useful with regard to the latter and in learning what students, faculty, and staff see as some of the specific challenges and opportunities the institution currently faces. While what I heard was clearly the opinion of a limited number of individuals, I suggest that it may be useful to consider these issues as they may be relevant to your analysis during the self-study process, as well as to your planning efforts. As promised and discussed during the day, I am sharing below what I heard from students, faculty, and staff regarding both what they are excited and positive about and what they see as challenges.

On the positive side, people talked about:

- Increased numbers of graduated Ph.Ds
- Increasing demands on the part of students (yes, this was seen as positive)
- Quality of faculty colleagues
- Wide variety of research interests among faculty

Opportunities for students to have practical experiences with industry  
Commitment to research  
Infrastructure planning and improvement  
Improved living/working environment, safety: Gateway project  
Interest in smoothing faculty/administration relationships  
Involvement of advisory boards  
Increased demand for engineering  
Community  
Learning beyond the classroom  
Lots of research opportunities on campus for undergraduates  
Flexible possibilities for study  
Diversified curriculum  
Green minor for different programs  
Size of institution and size of classes  
Good access to labs and equipment  
Student accessibility to faculty  
Faculty who want to prepare students for careers  
Research methodologies taught in class relate to real world and life beyond schooling  
Technology is kept up to date and relevant  
Information systems structure and placement within institution (outside business)  
Improved statewide visibility and national reputation, reputation with industry  
Greater focus on integration of science/technology and liberal arts  
Development from commuter campus to one of senior research institutions in NJ  
Adaptability; willingness to evolve  
Highly ethical senior management  
Assessment systems  
Unique combination of science/technology and urban/diversity mission  
Affordability  
Employable graduates  
Student portfolios  
Diversity: people from all over the world  
Small, fleet-footed  
Move to Division I

What people spoke of regarding challenges included:

Early retirement for what could be a significant number of faculty  
Establishment of a medical school  
Growth  
Need for planning and facilities

Need for academic master plan  
Increasing number of faculty on non-tenure track  
Slowdown in sabbaticals  
Assessment burdens  
Class sizes increasing  
Need for more outreach to industry  
Need for true self-study, including attention to how NJIT is governed  
Filling faculty positions  
Quality of life on campus  
Incorporating technology usage into GUR  
Budget cuts, resource allocations, finances in general  
Role of liberal arts in a science and technology university  
Communications with Rutgers in federated programs  
Difficulty of being able to get into Rutgers classes  
Scarcity of courses on NJIT campus for federated programs  
Advising  
Career fairs don't serve humanities students  
Lack of teaching and research assistantships  
Some tenured faculty do not do research  
Commuter school; difficult to get people involved in activities  
Keeping pace with technology  
Erosion of concept that science education is a public good  
Need to act more like a private institution with regard to finances  
Retaining focus and remaining true to roots in the midst of change  
Move to Division I  
Financial aid/costs/growing concern with affordability  
Changing student population  
Engaging students in their learning  
Fewer employers in region  
Keeping budget balanced may necessitate even more diverse programming: will this result in loss of identity as a science/technology university?

As you can surmise from these lists, the day's discussions were rich and varied. Again I note that these comments came from individuals, and while some (e.g., regarding resources, finance, diversity, growth and improvement) were made by a number of people, some comments were made by a single individual. I offer these comments solely for your consideration and evaluation as to their significance for your work of self-study.

I have enclosed some promised comments and suggestions regarding the specifics of the self-study design with this letter, primarily for the benefit of Drs. Elliot and Deess and the

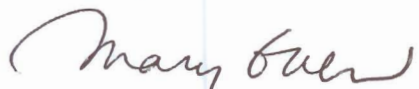
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Steering Committee. I have also included the relatively new MSCHE policy on the selection of peer evaluators and a new brochure on governance for your information. A number of other design suggestions made during the meeting with the Steering Committee are not repeated here, but I know that Drs. Elliot and Deess made note of them during our meeting.

The Steering Committee indicated that it would like to review and revise the self-study design, in particular the research questions, based on the March 9<sup>th</sup> meetings as well as this written feedback. We agreed that having the revised design to me within the next 3-4 weeks, or by April 6<sup>th</sup> at the latest, would be acceptable. The intention of this revision is to ensure that the design be as useful as possible in guiding a genuine and thorough self-study that will be of the maximum value to NJIT. While the research questions may and in all likelihood will evolve and change during self-study, so that the final self-study report is not a perfect reflection of the initial design, I believe that having the best and most relevant design questions at the outset will aid NJIT in creating the most useful report for both the institution and the evaluation team.

Once again, I thank you and everyone with whom I met for a most productive and enjoyable visit. . Please let me know if and when I can be of assistance to you during the process of self-study. I look forward to continued collaboration with you and with the New Jersey Institute of Technology.

Sincerely,



Mary Ellen Petrisko  
Vice President

cc: Dr. Deess  
Dr. Elliot  
Dr. Tricamo

Self-Study Prep Visit NJIT  
March 9, 2010  
Additional notes regarding Self-Study Design

Working groups:

Group 1: Standard 1: Mission and Goals—“target mission differentiation, global initiatives, processes surrounding strategic planning.”

Research Questions:

1.1: Alignment with Strategic Plan 2004-2010; 1.10: Relationship between SS and 2010-2015 strategic plan: Do you have greater clarity on this?

1.2.2. Not clear to me: does everyone in the workgroup have shared understanding? Will this be clear to team chair?

1.1., 1.2.1., 1.6: If answer is yes, or no, what then?

1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.7: Could be answered purely descriptively. Are there questions behind these questions? How is “how” understood—to be descriptive of current practice or trying to figure out what practice should be? (This is a question to be considered throughout the design.)

Group 2: Standards 2 and 3: Planning, Resource Allocation, Institutional Renewal—“Here, we focus on the NJIT resource allocation process” What about strategic planning and the overlap between groups 1 and 2? Narrative here seems to emphasize Standard 3. Also, discussion of figure 7 talks about relationship across 1,2, 3 but does not specifically talk about mission/goals/planning. Need greater clarity on new strategic plan and how this process aligns with it.

Research Questions:

2.0, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, etc. might be answerable descriptively. Are there questions behind these questions?

Group 3: Standards 4, 5, 6: Leadership and Governance, Administration, Integrity

Research Questions:

3.1.3, If answer is yes, or no, what then?

3.0, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, etc. might be answered descriptively. Are there questions behind these questions?

3.1, 3.10, 3.15 Not sure I understand: does everyone in the workgroup have shared understanding? Will this be clear to team chair?

Group 4: Standards 7 and 14: Institutional Assessment and Student Learning Assessment—“there remains a need to formulate a cohesive, university-wide assessment plan” How will this be tied into development of strategic plan? Note

that title of group on p 19 is "Educational Outcomes: The Measurement of Learning Ability"—be sure there is also emphasis on institutional effectiveness.

Research Questions:

4.1, 4.6, 4.8, 4.9, 4.10, 4.12, 4.13: If the answer is yes, or no, what then?

4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 4.7, 4.14 might be answered descriptively. Are there questions behind these questions?

Group 5: Standards 8 and 9: Student Admissions and Retention and Student Support Services—"graduation rates remain a challenge to NJIT" No students on this working group?

Research Questions:

5.2: Not sure what this means: does everyone in the workgroup have shared understanding? Will this be clear to team chair?

5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 5.10, 5.12, 5.13, etc. might be answered descriptively. Are there questions behind these questions?

5.11: If the answer is yes, or no, what then?

5.24: Are you sure that improving curriculum delivery is a factor in retention?

Group 6: Standard 10: Faculty—"tensions between research and instruction"

Research Questions:

6.0, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.5, 6.6, 6.7, etc. might be answered descriptively. Are there questions behind these questions?

Group 7: Standards 11, 12, 13: Educational Offerings, General Education, Related Educational Activities

Research Questions:

7.2, 7.4, 7.6, 7.11, 7.12, 7.15, 7.16, etc. might be answered descriptively. Are there questions behind these questions?

7.7 : If the answer is yes, or no, what then?

Timeline: According to design, you will be studying the university "to the fall of 2011". What will cut-off date be for data that will be included? The team chair is to review the draft during the fall and visits at least four months prior to the visit, so draft needs to be done in time for a community review and review by the team chair during this semester. Be sure to allow yourself sufficient time. (See also milestones on p. 48: looks like much is happening at the same time; may be good to be more specific with dates.)

Organization of the SS: proposed outline: Be sure to allow for discoveries in your research