

Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Board of Managers, and Students of

SWARTHMORE COLLEGE
Swarthmore, Pennsylvania

by an Evaluation Team representing the

Commission on Higher Education of
the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools

Prepared after analysis of Swarthmore College's self-study report
and a visit to campus from

March 29, 2009 through April 1, 2009

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A visiting team representing the Middle States Commission on Higher Education conducted a site visit at Swarthmore College from March 29 to April 1, 2009, having reviewed and analyzed the college's self study and supporting materials. The team comprised eight members: Diana Chapman Walsh (Wellesley College, *emerita*), Howard C. Buxbaum (Drew University), Jeffrey J. Byrd (St. Mary's College of Maryland), Michele D. Dominy (Bard College), Elizabeth S. Boylan (Barnard College), Julie Ramsey (Gettysburg College), Celeste Schenck (American University of Paris), Barbara Jones (Wesleyan University).

The chair, Diana Chapman Walsh, hosted by the chair of the College's middle states steering committee, Ellen Magenheimer, made a preliminary visit to campus on Friday, November 14, 2008. She had read a draft of the self-study report which she discussed with the president, Alfred Bloom, the chair of the Board of managers, Barbara Mather, and two other board members (Fred Kyle and Bruce Gould), the president's senior staff, the staff advisory council, and with groups of students and faculty. She toured the facilities and discussed the arrangements for making materials available to the team prior to and during its visit.

The full team, as a whole and in subgroups, met with President Bloom and, individually, with members of his senior staff: Stephen Bayer, vice president of development and alumni relations, James Bock, dean of admissions and financial aid, Maurice Eldridge, vice president and executive assistant to the president, C. Stuart Hain, vice president for facilities and services, Constance Hungerford, provost, James Larimore, dean of students, Suzanne Welsh, vice president for finance and treasurer, and Melanie Young, vice president for human resources.

In addition, we met with the associate provost, the associate dean for academic affairs, the college librarian, the director of information technology services, the director of institutional research, the registrar, the director of career services, curators of two library special collections, eight members of the board of managers, the chairs of large departments, the coordinators of interdisciplinary programs, the middle states steering committee, the council on educational policy, the committee on faculty procedures, the advisory committee on promotion and tenure, the committee on admissions and financial aid policy, the *ad hoc* assessment planning committee with members of the curriculum committee, the staff advisory council, the administrative advisory council, the student life team, the career services team, the library management team, the multicultural and religious life team and the student health team, and with a group of 10 pre-tenure faculty.

We had working dinners with a dozen faculty, including members of the presidential search committee, and, separately, with a group of students. We toured the campus and had lunch at the Lang center for civic and social responsibility and an interchange there with involved faculty, staff and students. We met as a group with the recently commissioned *ad hoc* financial planning group, comprising board members, senior staff, faculty, and a staff representative. The team chair held office hours that were open to anyone. A single tenured faculty member took advantage of that offer.

The visiting team finds that Swarthmore is in full compliance with all of the Commission’s “standards of excellence” for reaccreditation.

The team was grateful for the warm hospitality extended to us during our visit, for the candor and full disclosure we met from all quarters, and for the quality and comprehensiveness of the resource materials to which we were given access. As discussed at several of our initial meetings, we did arrive on campus concerned about what we all perceived as a surprising shortage of data and analysis to buttress the assertions in the self-study report. This was more than compensated for in the weight of supporting evidence available to us on site.

From our brief but intense encounter with a sizeable cross-section of the Swarthmore community and from a careful assessment of the self-study and ancillary documents, we emerged with a strong impression that the college is, as it represents itself, “exceptional,” “distinctive,” even “extraordinary” in many respects. We found nothing to gainsay the college’s self-portrait as an ambitious and engaged community of learners dedicated to “independent, rigorous and creative thought,” and to the production and application of knowledge to advance the cause of justice, from the classroom, to the campus, to the community, to the world.

We found a college that is excellent in every respect: in the quality of its faculty and its students, in the dedication of its staff, the sophistication of its administration, the leadership of its president, the successes of its alumni/ae, and the wisdom of its Board. Evidence of these strengths was everywhere manifest. Less concrete, but equally practical as a resource that characterizes Swarthmore, helps explain the College’s success, and bodes well for its future were the unusually deep reservoirs of mutual trust we found at every turn.

In virtually every encounter, we heard spontaneous expressions of faith in the good intentions of others, and witnessed a willingness to be unguarded or vulnerable with one another, an appreciation of mutually-interdependent relations, a preference for cooperation over competition, and an interaction style that naturally and gently smoothed incipient conflict before it became awkward or tense. Like the financial wealth that buffers the College from economic perturbations, this relational trust buys Swarthmoreans the time they need to deliberate thoughtfully and conscientiously—not by applying abstract rules or forcing hasty compromises—but by knowing the rightness of their actions by the integrity of the discernment process from which they spring. Without this well of trust, such a slow decision process in a fast-moving world would be riskier than it may be here. With the trust, there is at least the possibility that a quick decision could be reached should members of the community become convinced that speed was imperative. Complicating the picture are the reciprocal loops: hasty decisions could erode the trust that buys time for thoughtful deliberation.

Standard 1: Mission and Goals

The institution's mission clearly defines its purpose within the context of higher education and indicates who the institution serves and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's stated goals, consistent with the aspirations and expectations of higher education, clearly specify how the institution will fulfill its mission. The mission and goals are developed and recognized by the institution with the participation of its members and its governing body and are used to develop and shape its programs and practices and to evaluate its effectiveness.

Swarthmore College meets this standard.

The “objectives and purposes” of Swarthmore College, clearly stated in its self-study and on the opening page of the Swarthmore College Bulletin, begin, characteristically, with an expression of the College’s expectations of its students: “to prepare themselves for full, balanced lives as individuals and as responsible citizens through exacting intellectual study supplemented by a varied program of sports and extracurricular activities.” The College holds itself to an equally demanding test, defining its task as making its students “more valuable human beings and more useful members of society.” The statement goes on to differentiate Swarthmore from other educational institutions in the emphasis it places on “help[ing] its students realize their fullest intellectual and personal potential combined with a deep sense of ethical and social concern.”

The twin “cornerstones” of this mission, Swarthmore’s honors program and its legacy of Quaker traditions, are deeply rooted in the history of the college and provide the logic and practice of the community’s shared intellectual life. Together they support and nourish a “microcosm” that enacts, inculcates and perpetuates values that are distinct, even to some extent now, countercultural. They begin with “the individual’s responsibility for seeking and applying truth and testing whatever truth one believes one has found,” and “emphasize hard work, simple living, and generous giving as well as personal integrity, social justice and the peaceful settlement of disputes.” (Swarthmore College Bulletin, 2008-2009).

This mission has been amplified over the past decade in systematic work the College has done to understand and express as vividly as it can aspects of its essence that, in the words of a long-time professor, are “enduring but ineffable.” At the outset of the recent two-year planning cycle, the mission of the College was affirmed by acclamation in response to an invitation to all constituencies from the president and the chair of the Board. Large numbers of respondents “resoundingly” and “consistently” rallied around the College’s mission and current direction.

Institutional objectives that flow from the mission and its reaffirmation are being distilled from extensive work in an ongoing planning process that did the foundational analysis and interpretation on which the self-study stands. Eight planning groups and a steering committee, all broadly representative, spent a year documenting progress,

identifying challenges, and hammering out priorities for the College's future. Although this process is on hold, awaiting the imminent arrival of a new president, the team finds ample evidence in Swarthmore's recent history that the College sets objectives that it works to meet. At every level and in multiple ways, Swarthmore College presents as a scholarly community constantly communicating its expectation that all its members will set and achieve their goals, then raise the bar and reach higher still.

Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation and Institutional Renewal

An institution 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. Implementation and subsequent evaluation of the success of the strategic plan and resource allocation support the development and change necessary to improve and maintain institutional quality.

Swarthmore College meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings

In spring of 2007 Swarthmore began preparing the college-wide planning process that it launched the following fall. A steering committee and eight planning groups were established and given specific charges that were tracked side-by-side with the 14 middle states "standards of excellence." The planning process was designed to study all aspects of the college and to make recommendations for the future, with an eye toward another comprehensive fund raising campaign in the not-too-distant future.

The president's announcement the following summer that he would step down at the close of the 2008-09 academic year, combined with the spreading global economic recession, took some of the immediacy out of the planning process. The planning groups issued interim written reports to the planning steering committee in December 2008 and these were reviewed and distilled; the recommendations were appended to the self-study report and the extensive reports of the planning groups were provided to and read by our visiting team.

The College undertakes an in-depth financial and budgeting process each year. The process starts with a review of the prior year's financial results and the update of the five-year financial and enrollment projections. The budget committee begins its work with the review of this information as well as budget requests for the following year. Later in the budget cycle the finance committee of the Board of managers and the full Board review the budget requests and provide input on financial plans. The Board of managers adopts the annual budget in February.

In 2002-03 faculty member at Swarthmore College led an in-depth collaborative study of expenditure patterns among six peer liberal arts colleges. The results showed that Swarthmore was expending relatively more of its annual budget on academic programs

than was true of the peers, validation, the college felt, that its budgetary allocations were balanced appropriately.

Significant Accomplishments or Exemplary/Innovative Practices

The college has succeeded in bringing together its constituent groups to make substantial progress in its planning. The draft reports are well reasoned, well substantiated and well written. They reflect the vision for the future of the broadly-representative participants in the planning process.

Swarthmore has developed a sophisticated financial planning model that provides revenue and expense projections, using clearly-specified assumptions, over a five-year period. The model, which aggregates underlying enrollment, financial aid, and endowment data, will be critical in assessing financial options and choices during the current recession.

Suggestion

- The team commends the College for its intention to resume its planning process upon the arrival of the new president. This will allow Swarthmore to identify the key issues facing the College, and to act on them expeditiously at a time of high uncertainty around the world. It will be important also to continue to track external trends and to understand Swarthmore's place among its competitors and in the wider universe of higher education institutions here and abroad.

Standard 3: Institutional Resources

The human, financial, technical, facilities, and other resources necessary to achieve an institution's mission and goals are available and accessible. In the context of the institution's mission, the effective and efficient uses of the institution's resources are analyzed as part of ongoing outcomes assessment.

Swarthmore College meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings

The precipitous drop in the stock market has significantly reduced the support available from the endowment for the operating budget. The College expects to meet its financial plan for fiscal year '09 and is currently developing the FY '10 budget. Following the December Board meeting, the president announced the College's intention to defer capital projects, reduce non-salary expenses to defer capital projects, reduce non-salary expenses, and probably/possibly freeze salaries to balance next year's budget. Beyond FY '10, the college is projecting a structural budget gap in the range of \$10-million to \$15-million. An *ad hoc* financial planning group chaired by the Board chair has been convened to develop, by December 2009, a financial strategy and timetable to

address the budget gap. A web site has been created to invite faculty and staff input on the process.

Swarthmore strives for economic sustainability that balances financial, human and physical capital. The College is committed to the following: balanced operating budgets, meeting compensation targets for faculty and staff, providing adequate capital budgets and maintaining a high credit rating. During the period prior to the economic crisis, the College finances were managed expertly and conservatively so that it was notably well positioned when the markets collapsed. The College's low spending rate, balanced budget, investment allocation and lack of exposure to variable rate bonds have mitigated the impact of the current financial downturn.

In recent years, the Board's investment committee has adopted a more diversified policy portfolio, increasing allocations to private equity, real assets and hedge funds. But because the College was less aggressive in investing in alternatives than were many other highly-endowed colleges and universities, Swarthmore has been able to maintain adequate liquidity and has not had to liquidate stock positions to support the endowment draw or to borrow for unfunded commitments subject to call from venture capital, private equity, and other non-marketable investments.

Enrollment at the College has grown from 1,325 full-time equivalent students to 1,385 over the past 10 years. This growth appears to have been motivated chiefly by an expansion of the curriculum. Charges (tuition and fees) in the last 10 years have increased at an annual rate of 4.4 percent, although students receiving aid have been cushioned to a large extent. Institutional aid as a percentage of tuition revenue increased from 36.9 percent in 2000 to 39.4 percent in 2007. Swarthmore has adopted a no loan policy to further expand student access.

Swarthmore's endowment per student is more than adequate to meet its mission and is significantly higher than the median for a group of eight comparable colleges participating in the consortium on financing higher education. Compensation for faculty and staff, by policy, is highly competitive.

The facilities department has carried out a number of initiatives identified in the last college-wide planning effort a decade ago. Approximately 140,000 square feet were added for two new residence halls, an addition to the science building, and a new athletic building. A full 216,000 square feet were renovated to create a state-of-the-art integrated science center, and a new home for the center for civic and social responsibility, and to restore and upgrade the original college building.

The College completed a land use master plan in 2002, a flexible blueprint for growth over time. The plan identified potential sites for future development and green spaces, and envisioned improved connections from the campus to the Borough of Swarthmore. Work has begun on a new facilities master plan that will address strategic and tactical space needs for academic and support programs. The College is considering

entering a partnership with a developer to build an inn on a parcel of land adjacent to the business district.

Swarthmore is a client of Sightlines, a firm that collects and reports benchmark data on campus facilities. This allows for access to comparative data from many direct competitors and similar institutions. The College tracks its performance on operational measures, which compare well with peers. As a point of reference, 65 percent was the highest investment level of any of the peer schools. The average rate among the group was 45 percent and Sightlines cited Swarthmore as a “best practice” school in this category. However, investment in capital has declined over the last five years and has dropped from 95 percent to 65 percent of the suggested investment level recommended by Sightlines.

Swarthmore has created an *ad hoc* committee on sustainability, comprising faculty, staff and students, to generate ideas and make recommendations on strategies to improve environmental sustainability on campus. Some of the actions taken so far include publicizing the benefits of powering down computers and turning off lights and of reducing student printing.

The College has extended advanced audiovisual equipment and systems into every classroom and teaching space that has requested such equipment. Over half of the faculty and almost all students now use Blackboard and the College offers a broad array of software for academic use, but the College is somewhat limited in its ability to work with individual faculty to implement technology solutions for their courses, a situation that bears monitoring. The computer network (wired and wireless) is robust and a virtual private network has been implanted for off-campus use. Redundant servers in dual locations provide for back up in the event that the technology facility cannot be used.

The College has implemented the Banner system for its development, finance, human resources, and student services and has extended the functionality of the system through self-service modules for students and staff and self-developed applications. An examination of paper-based processes is under way for future automation.

Significant Accomplishments or Exemplary/Innovative Practices

Swarthmore’s exceptionally thoughtful and prudent conduct of its financial affairs—from endowment management, to endowment spending, to budgeting and financial reporting--have so far enabled the College to avoid major disruptions to its academic and support programs at a time of economic duress.

The *Meaning of Swarthmore Campaign* was brought to a successful conclusion in 2006, exceeding its \$230-million goal and mobilizing the College’s graduates to an unprecedented degree. The campaign raised funds to meet identified academic needs including financial aid, new faculty positions, full-time head coaches for all varsity sports, and enhancements to the honors program as well as funds to upgrade three academic and residential facilities. The campaign was transformative. It dramatically

improved facilities for the sciences, provided new living spaces and allowed for a significant increase in financial aid.

The College endowment grew from \$748-million to \$1.441-billion over the 10 years from 1997 to 2007. The annual return was 9.3 percent, 0.8 percent above the target rate of return of 8.5 percent. The endowment has subsequently declined to about \$1-billion in the recent downturn.

Swarthmore has adopted a written debt policy that includes guidelines for the amount and type of debt and for the use of derivatives. This will help guide future decisions about whether, when, and how to issue more debt. In 2006 Moody's upgraded the College's rating to AAA; in 2008, Standard & Poor's upgraded their rating to the highest level.

Suggestions

- The visiting team suggests that the College continue its examination of base budget allocations in every way possible to identify operating savings that would be necessary in the event of an unexpectedly sluggish rebound in endowment earnings. This might include re-negotiation and re-bidding of contracts, expanded collaboration with other institutions, prioritization of expenses, contraction in some areas, and design of a multi-year budget reduction process.
- We suggest that Swarthmore monitor the condition of its facilities while capital spending is being deferred owing to severe economic conditions. At the same time, we suggest that the College complete its facilities plan to prepare for an eventual recovery.

Standard 4: Leadership and Governance

The institution's system of governance clearly defines the roles of institutional constituencies in policy development and decision-making. The governance structure includes an active governing body with sufficient autonomy to assure institutional integrity and to fulfill its responsibilities of policy and resource development, consistent with the mission of the institution.

Swarthmore College meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings

Swarthmore's distinctive form of institutional governance rests upon its Quaker heritage and its tradition of deliberative process leading to consensus. While the formal governance apparatus is notably unobtrusive, its culture and effects are everywhere seen, accepted, and respected. Every constituency—faculty, administration, staff, students and governing board—plays a vital role in the resolutely slow and measured process of decision making. Faculty and staff appeared to respect the limits of their advisory power

on committees, and to experience their voices being heard in these extended consultative processes. The Board respects the boundary between governance and management, trusting the president and the senior management team to handle all operations within the context of policy it sets and fiduciary responsibility it exercises. In this and other respects Swarthmore's resolutely nonhierarchical governance system exhibits an unusual degree of equipoise. It is, in the view of the visiting team, a model of "ethical intelligence" at work, a cross-constituency living out of mission.

The Board of managers is a powerful stabilizing force for the College, dominated as it has traditionally been by "insiders." At present only one of 35 members is a non-alumna, and she is a former dean. The stability of the Board is further ensured by the very long terms of some of its members. The Board imposes no term limits other than the stipulation that members rotate off for a one-year hiatus at the end of three four-year terms. Exceptions can be and are made. We were told that the Board has been considering the related questions of term lengths and Board composition, but is wary of damaging a culture that is both unusual and manifestly effective. Members describe the Board atmosphere as collegial, warm, and conducive to the eventual achievement of a robust consensus. The subtle practices and norms that produce these results take time for newcomers to absorb and appreciate.

Board members participate energetically in the life of the College, supporting faculty and students, as well as a president with whom they have maintained a strong and effective partnership for 18 years. Board members contribute financially (they played a major role in the successful campaign) and they invest extraordinary amounts of time in their work for the college. For example, 28 members of the Board were assigned to one of the eight planning groups that met all last year. Many made repeated trips to the campus for meetings and the eight Board members we met were extremely knowledgeable about issues and challenges the campus was facing, all the while voicing respect for the capacity of the faculty and administration to wisely manage their affairs.

The Board's protectiveness of its effective functioning—its sense of responsibility for transmitting a precious heritage of social trust and civility—radiates through the president's senior staff, through the many faculty and staff governance bodies, and through the student government. Described by many different constituencies as "the Swarthmore way," this sturdy fabric of relational trust supports all governance processes in the College.

Notable too is the cross-constituency makeup of nearly every important committee, as well as the patience expressed by community members at the many hours many of them devote to committee work. Students are involved in virtually every aspect of governance, not only in deliberations that affect them. The faculty sends two observers to attend Board meetings, reporting back to the faculty as a whole as appropriate. In the place of a faculty senate, Swarthmore has faculty committees that contribute importantly to the work of the College, allocating tenure lines, developing promotion and tenure recommendations, conducting educational planning, reviewing budgets, policy and procedures. Typically the provost and the president convene and chair such committees,

yet faculty describe the work accomplished by committees as efficiently consultative and deliberative.

The Board has well-developed governance documents: a conflict of interest policy, a charter, a set of by-laws, a manual, and an orientation program for new members. Its mechanisms for self-assessment and for performance appraisal of the president, however, appear to be largely informal. Appropriate written policies, charges, assignments of responsibility and handbooks exist for Board, faculty, administrative, and student governance bodies of the institution.

Significant Accomplishments or Exemplary/Innovative Practices

Swarthmore's Board of managers has displayed, over many years, foresight and sophistication in its management of the institution's resources, ensuring that the College, today, is one of the best-positioned American liberal arts colleges in the current financial crisis.

The recent presidential search was conducted so effectively and engendered such trust—and the ultimate choice is viewed as so right for Swarthmore--that the new president elect is being greeted with widespread enthusiasm and excitement among all constituencies.

Students are included at all levels of governance, including on committees that attend to matters only indirectly concerning them. Such participation offers powerful leadership experience and exposure to the College's signature consultative process.

Suggestions and Questions

- The College may want to ask itself, once again, whether it is possible to reduce the time required to accomplish goals. We noted, as one example, that the 1999 self-study discussed issues related to interdisciplinary studies that remain largely unaddressed a full decade later. In a different context, one senior administrator said to this visiting committee: "It would be good if we could retain our thoughtfulness, while achieving greater crispness of execution."
- We had questions, too, about the balance of costs and benefits related to Swarthmore's "insider" culture. The Board expressed a desire to cultivate potential donors from beyond the ranks of alumni/ae, people who nonetheless share the College's values. It may soon become salutary, as well, to bring non-alumni/ae to the Board for the new perspectives they could provide in a changing landscape of private higher education at a time of unprecedented change. Swarthmore prizes diversity as a resource for student learning and faculty vitality, and yet is notably homogeneous in this one respect.
- The arrival of a new president may be an opportune moment for the Board to discuss, both internally and with the new president, how it plans to assess her performance in a way that will support her development and solidify the Board's all-important

partnership with her. And, in the spirit of holding itself to standards it would apply to others, the Board might consider strengthening its procedures for evaluating its own performance, drawing on evolving best practices in non-profit governance.

Standard 5: Administration

The institution's administrative structure and services facilitate learning and research/scholarship, foster quality improvement, and support the institution's organization and governance.

Swarthmore College meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings

Swarthmore has, by any standard, an impressively staffed, highly competent, and dedicated administrative team—from the president's staff to the dining facilities and grounds staff. Everyone who works at Swarthmore seems deeply implicated in the educational mission of the college. Sufficiency and quality of staffing is a non-issue at this institution.

The visiting team noted that many suggestions from the 1999 review have been implemented. A new vice president for human resources has worked collaboratively to institute many notable changes in staff compensation and benefits, and a new dean of students has brought important expertise, including experience with tools for assessing and continuously improving programs and services. The College has entirely rethought its approach to admissions with impressive results in admissions materials, composition of the class, and enrollment. Since the last self-study, two new positions have been created in institutional research. Career services has received attention as well, resulting in enhanced staffing and capacity and higher rates of reported student satisfaction.

A concern raised in the last self-study about technical and clerical staff compensation and reward was taken seriously, and the College has successfully completed a full review of compensation classifications and salary structures measured against peer institutions for comparison. A broad participatory process—surveys, *ad hoc* committees, standing committees, focus groups—has restored both transparency and trust even as it has produced new staff classifications and job weightings in alignment with Swarthmore's culture. Employee opinion is assessed using focus groups.

Although the self-study clearly documents various administrative teams and their apparent lines of organization and authority, the same trust-based, community-privileging system of decision-making that characterizes governance across the entire institution prevails as well within the administration. Staff members have their own broadly-representative staff advisory council, and mid-level managers and directors have the

administrative advisory council. These cross-division committees appear to provide for a regular flow of information, a space for resolving staff concerns, and a conduit to the president's staff as well as a sense of participation and validation. Staff members at multiple levels of the institution expressed appreciation considerably beyond satisfaction with working conditions at the College, benefits, the community culture, communication, and compensation. A staff engagement survey conducted in 2008, while not touching on issues of compensation and benefits, corroborated these observations and seemed to be a reliable measure of staff engagement, which we heard reaffirmed in our interviews and encounters.

The visiting team confirmed as well, in conversations with staff at all levels, an unusual degree of engagement in the academic mission of the College. As one salient example, while leading us on a tour of the campus, the vice president for facilities and services impressed the entire visiting team not only with his obvious mastery of his own domain but also, and movingly, with his story of accommodating a severely-handicapped student who had recently graduated and whose name, major, and subsequent career path this vice president was able to cite. Later, a member of the grounds crew spoke of the same student by name and with palpable affection and pride that Swarthmore was able to meet his needs. Staff members know students individually, are deeply invested in their success, and go out of their way to contribute to and support their experience at Swarthmore.

The College is currently articulating its grateful valedictory to a strong president who has served with distinction for nearly two decades, maintaining relationships of trust throughout, and is welcoming a new president with whom the characteristic Swarthmore "fit" is felt to be assured. The process for selecting President Bloom's successor, while confidential and closed, was carried out in a way consistent with Swarthmore's inclusive governance culture. The presidential search, in a best-outcomes manner, appears to have strengthened staff commitments to the values of the College

Significant Accomplishments or Exemplary/Innovative Practices

The innovative "learning for life program," sponsored by the educational studies department, supports bi-directional student-staff partnerships working to learn things from, and/or with, each other. A student might teach a staff member a new computer skill, and learn piano or fitness techniques from a member of the staff (or vice versa). Groups of students and staff members can elect to learn new skills together. This struck the visiting team as a wonderful vehicle for integrating the lives of students and staff and enhancing learning opportunities for all.

Staff members appreciate the favorable working conditions, possibilities for career development, and, especially, the lived experience of ethical intelligence governing human relations in the workplace. This is confirmed by the relative longevity of staff careers and the scores on staff engagement yielded in a survey using measures from the Gallup organization.

Involvement of staff of all levels on virtually every important committee aligns fully with the values of the community. The recent decision to create a website soliciting cost-saving suggestions and comments by all employees was greeted with great enthusiasm in our interviews with staff, as was the recent decision to add an additional, non-exempt, staff member to the new *ad hoc* financial planning group.

The entire president's staff, save one position, has been renewed by strategic appointments over the past decade and is composed of professionals with impressive credentials and rich experience. It was described by several of its members as one of the "least political, most collaborative" senior teams of which he or she had ever been a member.

Suggestions

- Continuing staff development at all levels was noted by the staff planning group (SPG) as critical to Swarthmore's capacity to achieve its mission. The visiting team supports this suggestion from the SPG, noting that investment in professional development may be especially wise in the current financial climate, both to cross-train staff and deepen their skills at a time of institutional stress and to express the College's appreciation for its staff at a moment when difficult choices could send other signals.
- The Team commends Swarthmore for its recognition that "the abilities and dedication of the staff must match those of the faculty and students." As the College faces increasingly the inevitable tradeoffs that straitened financial conditions will require--protecting as everyone expects the College will its exceptional academic program--the visiting team encourages its leaders to work closely with staff to maintain the experience and perception of fair and equitable treatment, participatory governance, and commitment to every community member's welfare. Swarthmore's deliberative traditions and consultative habits will be steady in hard times so long as they continue to involve all employees of the college.

Standard 6: Integrity

In the conduct of its programs and activities involving the public and the constituencies it serves, the institution demonstrates adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies, providing support for academic and intellectual freedom.

Swarthmore College meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings

The term "ethical intelligence," often used by President Bloom and the wider Swarthmore community, appears in the opening pages of the self-study and underscores the signal importance of institutional integrity to this college. The team found campus-wide modeling of this value. For example, the Board of managers meetings model

exceptional listening skills; the College judiciary committee includes students who learn to use due process to discipline fellow students if it is necessary to uphold the community's values of academic integrity.

The College's respect for academic and intellectual freedom was evidenced throughout the team's visit and examination of College documents. Students confidently espoused a variety of points of view among their peers during meetings with the visiting team. Their ideas can be further tested and honed on a campus rich with opportunities for research and discourse with faculty. Another example of intellectual freedom is the library's mission statement supporting collections that "ensure the representation of a multiplicity of ideas and perspectives."

The College has thorough policies and statements in place for legal and ethical employment practices, including the tenure process. We found the expected policies for such issues as conflict of interest and the ethical handling of research animals. The campus has also addressed the increasingly contentious arenas of intellectual property and electronic privacy with published policies.

Swarthmore takes an activist stance toward external community relations through annual financial contributions to the Borough of Swarthmore and frequent meetings between the College and local government and police officials. And student civic engagement through the Lang center, internships, and study abroad, adds to Swarthmore's demonstrated service to the larger world.

Standard 7: Institutional Assessment

The institution has developed and implemented an assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals and its compliance with accreditation standards.

Swarthmore College meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings

Swarthmore continues to build upon its strong program of institutional assessment practices, praised in the reviewers' report in response to its 2004 periodic review report, and documented extensively in the materials supplied for review by this visiting team.

Significant Accomplishments or Exemplary/Innovative Practices

The team commends the institution for the thoroughness of its many institutional assessment studies—of the library, of information technology services, and of the various parameters of institutional operations reflected in comparative data provided by their contract with Sightlines. Swarthmore invests in, and makes excellent use of, surveys and comparative data provided by the consortium on financing higher education (COFHE)

and other sources. We further commend the new dean of students for bringing a renewed focus on the regular assessment of student services under his purview.

The hiring of a director of institutional research (IR) in 1999, with the addition recently of a full time research analyst, has enabled the college to expand the reach and dissemination of data on institutional effectiveness. Regular meetings of the president and his senior staff with the IR director (as the institutional research advisory committee) ensure that the utilization of such data is maximized and that potential IR projects are prioritized.

The institutional research office annually produces an “indicators” report, documenting progress toward objectives in admissions, financial aid, academics, development, finances, and student affairs. A key feature of the report is a series of comparisons with peer schools that participate in collaborative data sharing consortia (notably COFHE). The indicators are shared with the chair of the Board of managers each fall, and highlighted in the president’s report to the Board. The president’s senior staff identify trends that they feel warrant further study and/or action.

The planning projects for new buildings and renovations are based on extensive surveys of the needs of prospective occupants. The visiting team was impressed that the facilities staff were well-attuned to user needs. Their close interaction with engineering and visual arts students who undertake special projects is noteworthy. Facilities staff recognized that their strong record of surveying prospective building occupants could be extended by gathering information more systematically from residents several months to a year after building occupancy, as was done in the case of the new residence hall.

Standard 8: Student Admissions and Retention

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.

Swarthmore College meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings

Swarthmore’s admissions and financial aid office has developed a set of programs, policies and communications vehicles that well express the institutional mission and serve to recruit a cohort of high-achieving, richly-talented, and exceptionally-motivated students who seek a demanding intellectual and academic experience in a small liberal arts setting. Swarthmore’s commitment to the recruitment of an exceptionally diverse and gifted class is demonstrated by its long-standing commitment to need-blind admissions, its recent decision to eliminate loans in financial-aid packages. The college, with board approval has committed to extending need-blind admissions to international students and is making progress on that effort. Swarthmore’s commitment to need-blind admissions is commendable and the team saw every indication that

Swarthmore will strive to maintain this commitment in the current economic climate and the probable reduction in expenditures over the next decade.

Recent investments in publications, the web site and the outsourcing of the search function have paid dividends, reflected in the significant increase in the number of applications. Students report that the admissions materials and messages accurately portray the Swarthmore experience. Faculty also report that they are exceedingly pleased with the characteristics and quality of the student body. A faculty advisory committee provides for the involvement of faculty in the consideration of admissions policies and programs. Although faculty typically serve for only one-to-two years, the advisory committee helps them understand the intricacies of the admissions process.

The admissions office works closely with the dean of students' office to provide sensitive and confidential insights about students who might be at risk of experiencing academic or personal difficulties in adjusting to the academic rigors and demanding lifestyle of Swarthmore. Likewise, admissions staff participate in discussions that provide them data on the performance of first-year students, thereby providing a feedback loop for their future admissions decisions.

The admissions office carefully monitors national demographic trends likely to impact small liberal arts colleges in the next decade and views this year's modest decline in the context of these larger demographic trends. The visiting team picked up conflicting signals about where the College stands on the question of future enrollment growth.

The Swarthmore community is justifiably proud of its recent gains in the socio-economic and racial diversity of its student body. The greater disparity in academic backgrounds and preparation gives rise to a concern heard by members of the team. Among some faculty, we heard a concern about students who are admitted to Swarthmore with intentions to major in particular disciplines for which they may be under prepared. While their overall academic background qualifies them for admission to Swarthmore, particular weaknesses may prevent them from achieving their personal academic goals (for example, a career in medicine). Some science faculty were especially troubled by this dilemma.

Suggestions

- Swarthmore is grappling appropriately with the ethical question many peer institutions face of whether every student admitted to Swarthmore should be capable of succeeding in the most rigorous majors. The team encourages the College to continue to explore ways to resolve this very difficult issue.
- The team encourages continued broad and transparent discussion of the question of future student body size and a careful look at the corresponding changes that would be required in faculty size and supporting infrastructure.

Standard 9: Student Support Services

The institution provides student support services reasonably necessary to enable each student to achieve the institution's goals for students.

Swarthmore College meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings

The dean of students manages a team of qualified staff organized into coordinated and collaborative teams. The dean's office maintains and works to strengthen the level of communication and collaboration with colleagues in academic administration, facilities management, and other key areas, and with members of the faculty.

The office provides high-quality and thoughtfully-conceived services for students. The visiting team was impressed with the clear commitment evidenced by all members of the dean's staff to support students' academic, intellectual, ethical, and personal development. Students appreciate their easy access to the administration and the faculty and believe their voices are considered in institutional policy decisions. They view the dean's office as accessible to them individually, as well as responsive to their ideas and initiatives.

The professionals in the dean's office are deeply committed to their roles as supporters of and advocates for students. They show appreciation and admiration for their students' diverse talents and passions. They sponsor activities and services designed to promote the college's mission, with an emphasis on students' academic success and their development as ethically intelligent and engaged leaders. Given the College's particular emphasis on socially-responsible behavior, the visiting team felt some concern about whether the level of the support provided to students, individually and collectively, might rise to the level of enabling. Our question is whether support is balanced appropriately with the importance of ensuring that students learn through consequences. The team encourages the College to consider the tensions between support and accountability in the student culture at Swarthmore.

Recently the dean's office has developed a new organizational model of class deans, each with general responsibility for advising students and coordinating key services and support systems for students. An early-alert system for "students at risk" has also been implemented to ensure student success and improve student retention. The class-deans model both relies upon and encourages close coordination with other entities, including admissions and faculty. Also recently, the College has also increased its use of peer mentors in a variety of contexts to enhance students' academic success and their adjustment to a rigorous, stressful, and diverse collegiate experience.

The team noted that Swarthmore, like many colleges, is experiencing an increasing demand for counseling and health services. This trend is likely to continue and possibly to accelerate in the foreseeable future and to call for new and innovative approaches in staffing and programming. The dean's staff has developed proposals to

increase the space available for counseling staff, to implement a peer-mentoring program and perhaps to institute a comprehensive wellness program. The team encourages the College to pursue these and other such initiatives.

Several discussions, including the self study, revealed concern about inadequate spaces for student performances and practice, as well as for social gathering. Consensus was lacking on whether a new campus center would be desirable, or would possibly undermine the culture of the campus. We encourage the College to continue this discussion about a new campus center or alternative solutions to space limitations many agree are real.

The team noted that assessment activities within the dean of students' office are increasing. The staff routinely solicits feedback from students and uses it to continuously improve its programming. Across the board, student utilization and satisfaction patterns are monitored, using both longitudinal trends and peer comparison data where available. However, assessment activities were often described as "indirect" and "informal;" the dean expressed a desire to develop a more comprehensive approach to assessment of the office's overarching goals.

Significant Accomplishments or Exemplary/Innovative Practices

In our visit to the Lang center, the team was delighted and inspired by the extraordinary learning opportunities provided to students and the passion and vigor with which they have embraced those opportunities. It is through the Lang center that the team felt Swarthmore most profoundly lives out its commitment to helping students create a better world. The center's approach to supporting students' passion for social justice is a model for other institutions.

Suggestions

- Swarthmore has made creative and effective use of student peer mentors. The College may want to think more broadly about how to capture the learning experienced by student mentors in various contexts.
- The dean of students should encourage regular conversations among his staff of the importance of assessment, broadly conceived. As the College explores possible structures for its assessment of student learning, and what it means to produce a "comprehensive assessment plan," the team encourages an expansive view of student learning commensurate with Swarthmore's ambitious mission. The dean of students' office has a critical role to play here, in collaboration with faculty, and should consider strengthening the department's own assessment processes, perhaps including periodic departmental self studies followed by external reviews, akin to those in academic departments.

Standard 10: Faculty

The institution's instructional, research, and service programs are devised, developed, monitored, and supported by qualified professionals.

Swarthmore College meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings

The faculty at Swarthmore is highly qualified, with 100 percent of the tenured and tenure-track academic faculty holding terminal degrees in their field. The faculty is very active in scholarly and artistic pursuits. Many have received prestigious grants to fund their work. The College supports this scholarship with annual stipends for research (\$1,000) and for travel to professional meetings (\$1,300). The College works hard to attract and retain this highly-qualified faculty. Salaries are annually targeted to reach 102.5 percent of comparable institutions, retirement benefits have been increased from 7.5 percent to 10 percent, and the College supports attractive leave arrangements, family benefits, and housing subsidies to offset the cost of living in the Philadelphia area.

With 165 tenure and tenure-track teaching faculty (40 percent female and 16 percent minority), along with other full-time leave replacements and part-time instructional positions, the College is able to offer an 8:1 student faculty ratio. This low ratio allows the faculty to provide a wide range of course offerings, given the size of the institution. Faculty growth over the past 10 years has been strategic and based on identified curricular growth areas and enrollment pressures.

Swarthmore's faculty is dedicated and committed to providing an academically rigorous education. Students expressed great appreciation of this dedication and commitment by the faculty and viewed the faculty as partners/mentors along their scholarly journey. The College has begun teaching and learning lunches for new and continuing faculty. The team sees this as an appropriate way to provide faculty with new methods of instruction and to bring in outside experts specializing in educational practices.

Approximately 80 percent of the faculty is tenured and most of the rest are in tenure-track positions. Information on faculty hiring, promotion and tenure, and retention is available in the handbook for instructional staff. The details of the tenure and promotion process are relayed to the pre-tenure faculty members by the department chairs and through an initial meeting with the provost when they join the college community. Mentorship for the pre-tenure faculty occurs both within departments and through college-selected faculty mentors. Many faculty members participate in interdisciplinary programs in addition to their departments. Concern was expressed by faculty whose work crosses disciplinary lines that their teaching and scholarly activities in interdisciplinary programs are not viewed as equivalent to their participation within their departments in tenure and promotion deliberations. Overall, though, the team found a refreshing sense of trust that the tenure and promotion process will provide the proper results for the Swarthmore community.

The institution's instruction, research, and service are overseen by the faculty. Changes to existing academic programs are funneled to the appropriate faculty committee for discussion and comment. Proposals of new majors or programs are made to the provost, vetted at faculty meetings, and ratified by the faculty. Faculty serve on many committees and are very active in this shared governance. Standing committees of the faculty include the president and/or the provost as members. The College has begun to grapple with the idea of moving to a four course load, from a five course load (to "redefine the fifth" as one committee has reframed the question). The purpose would be to recognize the many contact hours the faculty spend with their students outside of the traditional classroom setting. To achieve this goal the College would have to make some difficult decisions as to how to maintain the breadth of course offerings, continue course reductions for specific service, and not drastically increase faculty. Each of these options could change the current culture in ways that specific college constituencies find unpalatable.

Suggestions

- Faculty service appears to be very high and we encourage the College to examine ways in which the burden of faculty service can be reduced.
- The College should continue to examine ways to promote transparency and equity within the tenure and promotion process, especially in terms of interdisciplinary participation.
- We encourage the College to continue to monitor recruitment and retention of underrepresented faculty.
- The discussion of whether, and if so, how to convert to a four-course load is well under way and we encourage the College to proceed with caution, as it shows every inclination to do.

Standard 11: Educational Offerings

The institution's educational offerings display academic content, rigor, and coherence that are appropriate to its higher education mission. The institution identifies student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings.

Swarthmore College meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings

Swarthmore's mission "to help its students realize their fullest intellectual and personal potential combined with a sense of ethical and social concern" is shared, understood and collectively developed by faculty and students in collective partnership and pervades all aspects of the curriculum. The departmentally-based curriculum,

evolving interdisciplinary minors, the new structure of majors and minors, the cornerstone honors system, the advising system, and increased opportunities for faculty-student research collaboration work are central to the curricular mission.

Also central is the imperative to effectively bridge academic excellence with the social concerns of students and their desire to make a difference through leadership. Students spoke explicitly of their commitment to theory-based learning with practical application in the world and in particular its realization through programs of the Lang center. The June 2008 recommendations from the leadership in scholarship, higher education and society planning group (for example, the discussion of connections between environmental studies and campus-wide engagement in sustainability) are substantive and worthy of attention.

Advising is integral to the curricular coherence of a student's academic plan, and the advising system at the departmental level is critical in shaping and tracking the individual student's progress in the major. The registrar, who sends a degree program audit to each student and departmental chair every term, tracks general education requirements. Departmental chairs track fulfillment of major and minor (honors and course) requirements, and in larger departments chairs may reallocate advisees to departmental faculty. This system depends upon the effectiveness and attentiveness of individual faculty advisors, and underscores the value of systems of support for junior faculty development as teachers and advisors. The system also depends upon juniors and seniors being responsible for the coherence of their own education, making good choices in their course selections and in the articulation of their course of study between majors and minors. As the faculty continue to consider ways in which student learning outcomes can be measured, it will want to analyze how well advising works under the current curricular and departmental structure and whether students' choices are indeed serving them optimally.

Swarthmore faculty, administrators and students recognize the challenges posed by interdisciplinary programs—staffing issues and issues of curricular coherence that are by no means unique to Swarthmore. The allocation of faculty lines to strong and autonomous departments and not to interdisciplinary programs disrupts their curricular planning and creates a frustrating dependency on choices others make. The possible transition to a four-credit teaching load puts interdisciplinary programs at special risk. Meanwhile, a new generation of faculty will likely seek more interdisciplinarity in their teaching opportunities, in curricular design and in more collaborative models of working with students in shared research projects. The college recognizes the value of such collaboration, for example, by profiling co-authored publications between faculty and students and supporting student/faculty research. Current structures, however, stand in the way.

In response to the current economic downturn, faculty are beginning to discuss what is essential to preserve. This will take time within a community where “thoughtful trust” and slow deliberation through faculty structures such as the council on educational policy (CEP) will consider how advising, small class size (especially in first-year and

writing courses), and the generation of intellectual excitement and exchange can be preserved and enhanced. While the faculty are not likely to agree, “they are committed to figure this out” in a context where “consultation is our way” and “consensus permits disagreement.” The visiting team does note that this faculty may be facing hard choices more difficult than any they have had to face in anyone’s memory.

Despite the imperfections of consortial arrangements, this might be the moment for more tri-college cooperation with three new presidents leading these institutions. The tri-college community offers possibilities for shared lines, coordinated academic programs, enhanced departmental offerings, and events and lectures that provide both students and faculty with a larger intellectual community. Faculty and students noted that it might be helpful to invest in increasing the shuttle service to twice hourly. Environmental studies faculty noted the contribution to their curriculum of geology offerings at Bryn Mawr College.

Suggestions

- The CEP and faculty departments may want to continue to explore the degree to which faculty and academic departments explicitly lead students through the curriculum to the opportunities provided by the Lang center and parallel leadership initiatives, and to explore barriers to this kind of integration of student learning.
- Interdisciplinarity provides a challenge to a strong departmental system of curricular planning and governance. Faculty lines may need to be shared. Departmental chairs and junior and senior faculty expressed confidence that the tenure review process is flexible enough to make this possible.
- Junior faculty would welcome more formalized structures for supporting collaborative work and team teaching with full teaching credit. Stronger mechanisms could be developed to promote opportunities for collaborative teaching across departments and within interdisciplinary programs. Faculty we interviewed expressed the expectation that this will eventually happen through the work of the CEP but we note that it seems to be reasonably widely viewed as a desideratum.
- The team sought to understand the effects of departmental autonomy on curricular innovation, on advising, and on the coordination of course scheduling across departments and interdisciplinary areas of study. Divisional structures might be used to bring department chairs together to build curricular bridges and coordinate offerings, both departmental and interdisciplinary.
- The annual faculty assessment reports prepared by department chairs for the provost might be used to think about curricular planning within departments.

Standard 12: General Education

The institution's curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, and technological complexity.

Swarthmore College meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings

The self-study report addresses the ways in which Swarthmore's curricular planning and allocation of resources has enhanced breadth in general education in the first two years of study, and in rethinking distribution credits in the three divisions—humanities, natural sciences and engineering, and social sciences. Primary distribution designations have been eliminated, and students are required to take, as one of their distribution requirements in the division of natural sciences and engineering, a course with a laboratory or a practicum component. Furthermore, the college has implemented minors in cognitive science, film and media studies and Islamic studies—new areas that enhance the variety of essential skills emphasized in the standard, as do the experiential learning initiatives of the Lang center.

Swarthmore's curriculum also clearly addresses and meets the expectations of this standard in its newly-introduced first-year seminars, writing intensive courses, and revised distributional requirements designed to encourage breadth across the three divisions, while strengthening mastery of the scientific method.

Student members of the CEP said they found their voices and learned how to write and think in their first-year seminars. The seminars provide faculty with valuable opportunities for curricular exploration and interdisciplinarity in course content. One senior faculty member in an empirically-based discipline voiced her pleasure in being able to “teach a topic that doesn't go anywhere,” and to engage in a meaningful exploration of questions and ideas with her students. Faculty do not seek or expect compensatory incentives to teach in these courses. Departments value the first-year seminar as an alternative way into the courses they offer, and note the innovation these courses bring to their curricula. Other institutions have emulated Swarthmore's model of student writing associates, and the director of college writing is actively supporting faculty in the development of writing pedagogy.

Innovation in the sciences includes the development of peer-facilitated study groups, characterized by formal (e-SAMs and SAs) and additional affectionate nomenclature that underscores pride in students' commitment to serious scholarship and demonstrates the benefit of grant support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. Student collaboration with faculty in their summer research projects is pedagogically intensive and underscores Swarthmore's commitment to the centrality of the sciences to the study of the liberal arts.

Significant Accomplishments or Exemplary/Innovative Practices

We commend the institution on the significant curricular innovation that has occurred with the development of first-year seminars and writing courses, and pedagogical innovation in the sciences and engineering as well as the strategic curricular expansions planned a decade ago and implemented with support from *The Meaning of Swarthmore Campaign*.

Suggestions

- A joint faculty student committee reviewed the writing courses and first-year seminars and made an excellent set of recommendations for continued development (on pages 5-7). We note that these recommendations offer the potential for Swarthmore to track the value-added in this curricular initiative from the first-year to the senior year, perhaps within the departmental context.

Standard 13: Related Educational Activities

The institution's programs or activities that are characterized by particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorship meet appropriate standards.

Swarthmore College meets this standard.

The Library: Summary of Evidence and Findings

During our visit to campus, we were asked for guidance on how best to think about a college library in the context of the contemporary information revolution. Although the library is integral to the College's educational offerings and could be taken up in the context of standard 11, we discuss it here as a stand-alone section. We examined all of the facilities and services of the library (comprising three main facilities and several collections).

Significant Accomplishments or Exemplary/Innovative Practices

The *Swarthmore College Library Self-Study* (July 18, 2008) is a model of its kind in defining the twenty-first century liberal arts college library, assessing how Swarthmore's library is doing in comparison with its peers, and recommending future action. Conversations with the college librarian and her staff demonstrated their clear understanding of the library's role in teaching, learning, research, and information literacy. The Swarthmore library's highly professional staff provide national leadership for library transformation; and they apply this expertise to Swarthmore's rigorous teaching, research, and learning needs. They seem particularly dedicated to the library user and have the data to show their success with information literacy initiatives.

In the self-study the library astutely defines its twenty-first century campus role and conducts a 10-year review of major areas and challenges. The library is using this

document for its planning and assessment process and the team applauds this strategy. Below we use the framework within which the library organizes its own self-study.

The Future of the Library: During the team's visit several Swarthmore leaders asked us for an easy-to-digest summary of how to understand and plan for future library resource allocation. The first chapter of the July 18 self-study (after editing out "library jargon") answers that question; it could be used to communicate effectively and concisely with all constituencies at Swarthmore.

Budget and Staffing: The self-study includes a thorough presentation and analysis of the library budget. The team believes that the key concern is for the college librarian to *be at the table* for campus budget and staffing discussions, particularly during this time of fiscal challenge. The library's budget is one of the campus' largest and, along with IT, is sometimes perceived as a "bottomless pit." Planning and spending is increasingly complex as librarians negotiate licenses for bundled serials subscriptions; weigh the pros and cons of an e-book versus a hard copy versus a copy borrowed through Interlibrary Loan; and incorporate various formats, from medieval manuscripts to i-Pod content. Campus innovation in almost every area—but particularly in curriculum, facilities, and student engagement—affect the library budget and staffing.

Collections (Content) and Technology: The library has effectively assessed the past 10 years' acquisitions as it moves into such formats as e-books and locally created digitized content. While the report and staff mention successful collaboration with library consortia (TriCo and others), Swarthmore has done even more in this area, we believe, than the reports indicate. The tri-college consortium (TriCo) has been an innovative national model for collaboration on sharing of library collections and technology. Its successes have prompted the Mellon Foundation to support the formation of similar groups nationwide.

Information Literacy: On the development of information literacy in all campus academic endeavors the Swarthmore library, again, has in place an excellent program that can stand as a model for other liberal arts colleges. For example, twenty-first century librarians are trained to assist students in evaluating everything from Internet resources and the meaning of peer-reviewed content, to new discipline-specific databases. They are trained also in pedagogically-effective library research sessions.

The librarians are eager to offer the library as a "laboratory for the humanities." They would like to teach students how to use primary resources, especially rare books and archives, for research projects. There are many models for this work in liberal arts colleges, and Swarthmore is well positioned to offer this program because of its internationally distinguished special collections and expert curators.

Library as Place: The 1999 report flags important trends in library facilities growth that must be addressed in the future. The future is here, 10 years later. The July 18 self-study describes the types of spaces needed in the twenty-first century library: more collaborative student work spaces; a "classroom" for information literacy purposes;

and others. The campus facilities managers are well aware of the library facilities priority and are waiting to act after the current financial crisis.

Suggestions and Questions

- The July 18 self-study raises the important questions about the future of Swarthmore's library and should be distilled for a college-wide discussion.
- While the visiting team heard that TriCo has been less successful for other campus functions (in part because of distance from Bryn Mawr and Haverford), the library's collaborative programs (Tri-Co and others) are essential for professional and economic reasons and should remain a high priority.
- TriCo, however, has caused some inevitable tensions between Swarthmore IT initiatives that could stay "local," and those that could be joint TriCo projects. People of good will in the library and IT have begun to iron out these problems together, and we suggest these fruitful discussions continue and be communicated to the provost. Also, some knotty issues (not insurmountable) have arisen among TriCo libraries, and we encourage the provost to assist the college librarian in solving these problems, which she seems highly motivated to do.
- The team would like to see the library staff focus next on the tradeoffs between purchasing and borrowing library content. This would be a service to the entire national library community, but especially to Swarthmore as the collections budget is financially challenged. Swarthmore is well positioned to do this research, given its assessment expertise and TriCo affiliation.
- Swarthmore's librarians are understandably frustrated that faculty have yet to utilize fully the many information-seeking skills and resources the librarians could offer to classes. We suggest that the college librarian and the information literacy librarian meet with the provost to find ways to promote this invaluable service.
- The faculty and library should not limit information literacy or student research projects to supporting a faculty member's own research. In addition, faculty members, collaborating with a librarian, can work with students to develop projects of their own. These kinds of collaborations at peer institution libraries have aided undergraduates in graduate school acceptance and transition.
- In addition, to capitalize on the idea of using the library as a laboratory for the humanities, we suggest that the provost meet with the college librarian and the curators of special collections--in particular, the peace collection and Friends' historical library--to approach the idea of "teaching using primary resources." Such a meeting is likely to surface the question of whether the special collections should become the purview of the college librarian, a conversation that needs to take place. We saw evidence of common ground among the curators and the librarians that could be the basis for a successful collaboration.

- Further, we suggest that the college archives (currently overseen by the curator of the Friends' collection) become more prominent in campus priorities. Historical, legal, and public relations questions, for example, can arise for which evidence from a college archive can be invaluable. The role of the archives could be articulated more sharply and supporting policies developed more fully.
- The team reaffirms that an examination of library space should remain at or near the top of priorities for campus facilities when funds become available. At some point it would be useful to hire an architectural consultant—not to design a new building, but to consult with the campus and librarians to envision the type of library space needed. This conversation should be coordinated with the question of whether or not to build a campus center, which would in some ways overlap with the library's current status as in part a social gathering place. Many library architects now specialize in this kind of consulting.

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment of student learning demonstrates that, at graduation, or at other points, the institution's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals.

Swarthmore College meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings

Substantial progress has been made since the 2004 periodic review report in the mechanisms by which Swarthmore faculty gather and utilize data on student learning. Key to the successes achieved have been the serious efforts of the CEP and the *ad hoc* committee on assessment planning, along with the creative work of faculty members within their individual departments and programs.

Since the last self-study, Swarthmore has invested additional staff resources in institutional research and the assessment of student learning outcomes. A director of institutional research (IR) was appointed in 1999, and a new research analyst position was created. This latter change will permit Swarthmore to deploy some of the time and expertise of the director to provide additional support in academic planning and assessment to the provost's office and various faculty committees and academic departments as they move ahead with their plans to expand the means by which student learning is documented and evaluated.

Significant Accomplishments or Exemplary/Innovative Practices

A regular cycle of external reviews of academic departments has been re-established and implemented. Interdisciplinary programs continue on their five-year cycle of internal review for their continuance, and there is evidence that this review

process can lead to decisions about a program's continued viability. The associate provost and the director of institutional research support the work of departments and programs in this regard.

The council on educational policy (CEP), chaired by the Provost and composed of faculty and student representatives, plays a central role in academic planning (line allocation) and in major academic quality initiatives. Issues addressed in the past several years include assessment of the first-year seminar courses, senior comprehensives, re-defining the fifth teaching credit (faculty workload discussions), breadth of and support for interdisciplinary programs, faculty support for the "teacher-scholar," and writing-intensive courses. The visiting team was very impressed with the dialogue among the faculty and students with whom we met, especially on the complicated topic of faculty workload. All seemed knowledgeable about, and respectful of, the pressures felt by faculty; the needs to staff interdisciplinary programs, writing courses and first-year seminars; and the potential impact that any change in faculty workload might have on the student experience (especially in light of financial constraints that are likely to preclude significant expansion in the size of the faculty to offset the loss of teaching time associated with a lower course load). Reference was made to comparably rich and productive discussions on other major academic policy matters, including the specific topics noted above.

The *ad hoc* assessment planning committee has, since its establishment in 2006, worked diligently to devise an integrated plan for academic assessment that builds on Swarthmore's distinctive academic character and its core values. It has notable achievements, and has benefited from its membership structure and divisional representation. It has ably served as a conduit to, from and between departments and programs, and has developed annual practices of assessment that have been broadly adopted, for example, the incorporation of institutionally-oriented questions on student course evaluation surveys. The committee was credited with shaping and standardizing how departments think about assessment of student work, and with facilitating the sharing of approaches to the assessment of student learning between departments that have already been shown to be well-adapted to the Swarthmore academic environment and expectations.

Suggestions

- Members of the assessment planning committee (APC) expressed the hope that the visiting team would provide it and the college with some guidance on its continued existence, since it was established as an *ad hoc* committee whose charge was, in part, to recommend a structure for assessment planning for the future. The team believes that there is more than sufficient evidence that the committee has made a positive impact on the college's efforts in assessment planning, and we encourage serious consideration of its conversion to a standing committee on academic assessment.
- We also discussed with the APC the advisability of appointing a second associate provost who would, among other responsibilities, focus on leading and coordinating

academic assessment efforts. In the current fiscal climate, the addition of staff, even for such an important function, is of course unlikely. The college might, however, consider freeing up the time of a faculty member with a course reduction to co-chair an academic assessment planning committee with the director of institutional research. Partnering the expertise of the faculty on an assessment planning committee and the institutional research director would, we believe, build upon the efforts of the past two-three years and position the college well for future investment in the assessment of student learning.

- We believe it will be important to differentiate the complementary and mutually reinforcing roles of a new “AAC” (academic assessment committee) and the CEP. We see the role of the CEP as primarily one of policy definition, and we believe that its membership (spanning the senior administration, faculty and students) suits its many purposes well. We see the role of the “AAC” as one where divisional faculty representatives, a faculty chair (perhaps eventually an associate provost), and the director of institutional research would serve as the research and planning arm, providing advice and support both for departments and programs and for the CEP.
- Swarthmore faculty with whom we met spoke passionately about the role of the honors program as a cornerstone of their evaluation system – both for the performance of individual students and for the preparation and achievement of specific, high-order learning goals by the student body at large. We were persuaded that the discipline of bringing in external evaluators to examine individual students does, indeed, provide powerful evidence (direct measures of student learning) for the faculty leading the honors seminars. Furthermore, our discussions convinced us that the honors program has a wider impact on faculty who teach honors students (fully one third of Swarthmore students), knowing that the depth of these students’ learning will be evaluated by respected peers. We encourage the Swarthmore faculty to reflect more fully on the direct and indirect effects of the honors program in an effort not only to articulate more fully the ramifications of the honors program upon the assessment of teaching and learning across the college but also to imagine how those effects might be studied with a sophistication and subtlety worthy of the honors program.
- A recent tri-college submission to the Teagle Foundation, seeking grant support of a next phase of collaborative assessment work, struck the visiting team as an especially strong proposal that laid out a promising approach. We encourage the continued pursuit of this kind of thoughtful collaborative work, whether or not the specific proposal is funded.

Recommendation

- Despite the considerable gains made since the last self study and periodic five-year review, the team recommends that Swarthmore institutionalize a comprehensive assessment plan of student learning outcomes in a manner that is consistent with its values and pedagogic goals. We further recommend that such assessment plans be

coordinated and integrated with assessment processes to be developed by the dean of students and the Lang center.