

MISSION REVIEW

GETTING STARTED

MESSAGE FROM THE PROVOST

The mission of our University, which was reaffirmed by the Board of Trustees in *Rethinking SUNY*, is to provide the people of New York with "...educational services of the highest quality, with the broadest possible access, fully representative of all segments of the population in a complete range of academic, professional, and vocational post-secondary programs...."

Over its fifty-year history, the University has achieved this goal with considerable – and growing – distinction. Our University has provided unparalleled educational opportunities to the citizens of New York, many of whom would not otherwise have been able to attend college. In addition to instruction, our faculty create important new knowledge, provide service to a broad range of public and private interests, drive economic development across New York, and spark intellectual activity that grows and touches virtually every resident of the State.

As we honor our history, we must also recognize the demands of the future. *Rethinking SUNY* made far-reaching recommendations for the State University System. Prominent among these is a commitment to continue to re-examine the University and its work, with the intention of raising academic standards, utilizing State resources efficiently, and ensuring accountability to the public.

To realize the full potential of our diverse campuses and comprehensive System, we must make certain that campus missions are closely related to what each campus does best and that campuses build upon and enhance academic programs and institutional characteristics that attract students and resources. The University is now poised to focus individual campus missions on segments of the State University's overall academic mission.

The first step in a System-wide dialogue on mission differentiation was the recently-issued report of the Mission Review Task Force, *A Template for Rethinking the State University of New York*. This report articulates a vision for the State University over the next decade as "...the single most dominant higher education institution in New York, recognized as one of the pre-eminent educational institutions in the nation and the world...." I enthusiastically support this aspirational vision for the State University. Mission Review can and should be a unique opportunity to prepare the University for its role in the 21st century and assure it a place in the front rank of higher education.

I offer here for your consideration some thoughts about the importance of Mission Review and how I envision us carrying out this endeavor.

PURPOSE AND
PRINCIPLES OF
MISSION REVIEW

Mission Review is intended to encourage campus responsibility for higher levels of performance, distinctiveness, efficiency, and System-wide collaboration. It is premised on the following principles:

- The State University as a whole should fulfill its comprehensive mission, meeting the needs of all the State's post-secondary students. A commitment to access is fundamental to the University. This must not change even as we adapt to demographic and cultural trends resulting in more non-traditional students entering the University.
- Building on current levels of success and achievement, all campuses should aspire to perform at even higher levels and to enhance the quality of all programs within their unique mission envelopes.
- Consistent with a required degree of comprehensiveness, each campus should identify, develop and hone a distinctive mission. Campuses should not all seek to be equally comprehensive, to serve the same mix of students, or to provide the same range of programs. Rather, they should be geared to complement each other and cooperate in sharing the resources of the State University System.
- Campuses should fulfill their missions efficiently and cost-effectively.
- Although campuses should have reasonably differentiated missions, they all share three key objectives: to advance student learning by offering an academically rigorous program of instruction; to support an outstanding faculty in instruction and scholarship; and to provide public service to the citizens of New York.

These principles also require that Mission Review be a periodic effort, not a one-time occurrence.

The sheer scope and comprehensiveness of the University place a particular responsibility on System Administration to assist each campus in focusing and differentiating its mission. To maintain the quality of education, scholarship and service provided by the University, regular and thoughtful attention must be given to avoiding institutional drift and mission creep. It is also important that each campus understand and be comfortable with its role and place in the System, and that institutional sectors play a meaningful role in the planning of System objectives.

The Mission Review process will encourage campuses to focus on their strengths, and to sharpen and build on institutional differentiation. At the same time, Mission Review will provide a mechanism to monitor and prevent unwarranted duplication of programs and efforts. Each cycle of Mission Review should seek to identify and resolve the most pressing disputes over academic turf and the need for particular programs.

**CONTEXT OF
MISSION REVIEW**

The people of the State of New York expect the University to manage its resources wisely. In order to fulfill this public trust, the State University is committed to as great a level of effectiveness and efficiency as possible.

- Future plans must operate within the bounds of prevailing fiscal constraints.
- Re-examining the mission of each campus allows the University to encourage greater efficiencies across the System and to reward campus innovation.

Resource allocation must be closely linked to and supportive of campus mission, with appropriate performance measures defined and applied. System-wide Task Forces have been formed to develop a new model for the allocation of resources and to identify a set of measures to assess how well campuses are performing their missions and fulfilling their responsibilities. Mission Review must proceed in conjunction with these efforts. The results of the Mission Review process should drive the mission-dependent elements of the Resource Allocation Methodology, as well as the final selection of performance measures. The Resource Allocation Methodology should also provide funds to assist campuses in implementing changes in mission that are not initially self-supporting.

We must look to the challenges of the future and shape our University accordingly. Mission Review will take us beyond our current profile.

- Mission Review is an agent for forward-looking change. It provides a way to help identify where the System needs to develop new programs and invest additional resources.
- Mission Review will ask each campus to measure progress against its own established goals.
- Mission Review acknowledges the University's responsibility to function as a major economic engine for New York State, to generate knowledge and ideas that improve economic performance and create jobs, and to produce well-educated citizens capable of using democratic processes to improve New York's quality of life in the 21st century.

**REPORT OF THE
TASK FORCE ON
MISSION REVIEW
AND PERFORMANCE
REPORTING**

The Task Force report, A Template for Rethinking the State University of New York, initiated the Mission Review dialogue. The *Template's* laudable aspirations for the State University and recommendations are part of the context in which Mission Review will be conducted. There is much that the report can contribute to the dialogue. For instance, it proposed reconfiguring campus categories and assigning broad mission objectives to each category. With some further refinement, institutional categories recommended by the Task Force may prove very helpful in thinking about the State University System. There is value in considering how groups of campuses sharing important characteristics and objectives can work together to achieve common purposes, and in understanding how those groups are distinctive. Appendix A includes the Task Force's proposed classification and some observations on how it can be improved.

**PROCESS FOR
IMPLEMENTING
MISSION REVIEW**

The *Template* also gave much thought to admissions standards and associated admissions *minima* for campus sectors. In my opinion, the proposed *minima* suffer from being attached to sectors. Sector *minima* are misplaced – admissions decisions, starting with a student's decision to apply, moving through the institution's decision to offer admission, and ultimately to a student's decision to enroll, take place at individual campuses, not sectors. Nevertheless, much of what the Task Force has written regarding admissions and enrollment management is valuable and will be useful in our discussions with campuses. However, in accord with my view that Mission Review should focus on campus-specific characteristics and aspirations, I recommend that the sector-driven admissions minima proposed by the report not be implemented, and that in their place individual campuses articulate their own admissions minima as part of Mission Review.

Again, these reservations being stated, I find much of merit in the Task Force report and intend that we incorporate its thinking into the Mission Review process to the greatest extent possible.

In order to ensure that Mission Review promotes the distinctiveness and the successful achievement of campus and sector missions, we have sought to craft a review process that emphasizes campus-based knowledge and goals, as well as candid dialogues within each campus, among campuses, and with representatives of System Administration.

The Mission Review process described below is also included in outline form in Appendix B.

First, the Chancellor will notify campus Presidents that the Provost will conduct a formal review of individual campus missions within the context of the overall University mission. I will, in turn, advise Presidents that Mission Review is underway and ask for their cooperation in this important collaborative effort.

The substantive part of Mission Review will begin with a formal request that campus Presidents respond to a series of questions about their campus' history, future plans and projections, and mission.¹ These questions, compiled in a document prepared by the Provost's Office and called "Mission Review Guidance," are intended to help campuses identify institutional strengths and areas slated for development or improvement, as well as to articulate unique aspects of their missions.

To be fully successful, Mission Review should be a periodic effort that recognizes the dynamic nature of the academic enterprise. Each cycle of Mission Review should thus have its own emphases. Typically though, the Mission Review Guidance document will address topics such as:

¹ At the beginning of the process, campuses will also be asked to send the Provost's Office copies of any extant mission statements, strategic plans, facilities master plans, and a list of current articulation agreements and collaborative arrangements with other State University campuses. Institutions currently engaged in strategic planning efforts may also choose to submit works-in-progress.

- Academic standards
- Campus demography
- Campus role within the System
- Distinctive institutional characteristics
- Graduate and professional education
- Intercampus collaboration
- Plans for facilities
- Programmatic mix
- Regional focus
- Research and other specialized mission components
- Technology initiatives
- Undergraduate admission selectivity
- Undergraduate education

A Mission Review Guidance document tailored for your campus is enclosed as Appendix C.

As noted above, each campus will be asked to respond in writing to the questions raised in the Guidance document. This campus response, called a "Mission Summary," should be in narrative form, approximately 20 pages in length, and should be completed by September 30, 1998.

The Mission Review process is structured to encourage thoughtful analysis of each campus' mission on a timetable that is integrated with the Middle States Association's reaccreditation process. Accordingly, rather than making Mission Review an entirely separate exercise, we plan to conduct it in the same order as the reaccreditation cycle, starting with the institutions due for reaccreditation in 1999-2000, so that the completed Mission Review documents can form a foundation for the required reaccreditation Self-Study. The Provost's Office is actively seeking to minimize any overlap or redundancy between the Mission Review process and the requirements imposed by Middle States.²

Presidents should consult widely with faculty, administrative leaders, students and other constituencies in framing their response to the Mission Review Guidance document. Considerable intra-campus discussion must occur prior to the commencement of a thoughtful and productive dialogue with System Administration about a campus' mission. However, we leave to each campus the decisions about how best to gauge campus views on mission-related questions. We ask, though, that each campus keep the Provost's Office informed of the process it uses in developing the Mission Summary, and that the Mission Summary be reviewed with faculty governance bodies, Boards of Trustees (in the case of Community Colleges), and College Councils (in the case of State-operated institutions) before submission to the Provost's Office. In turn, the Provost's

² In pursuit of this objective, we met with the leadership of Middle States to request that campuses scheduled for reaccreditation in 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 be given the option of using their Mission Review materials as their Self-Study document. We have also raised with Middle States the possibility of adding additional questions or making other modifications in the Mission Review process that would dovetail our System-wide effort with the Middle States process.

Office will ensure that the Chancellor and the University's Board of Trustees are kept fully informed as the Mission Review process unfolds.

While the campus is developing its Mission Summary document, representatives of the Provost's Office will review extant materials on that institution (e.g., 5-year plans, enrollment projections), explore how that campus fits with other campuses in the same geographic region of the state and the same State University sector, and begin preparing a list of questions (tailored specifically to that campus) that will launch a dialogue with campus representatives about its mission. This list of questions – expanded to include new topics raised by the completed Mission Summary document – will be shared with campus leadership well in advance of any formal mission discussions.

Each campus will be asked to designate no more than six interlocutors (including its President, Chief Academic Officer, and a representative of the elected faculty leadership) to participate in a direct and substantive dialogue with the Provost's Office about the current and future scope of the institution's mission. In addition to the Provost, no more than three interlocutors from the Provost's Office who are familiar with the campus will complete the formal discussion group.³

The group of interlocutors will then meet on the campus to begin the task of agreeing upon (and describing with some specificity) the mission of that institution. An important part of this face-to-face dialogue will be testing – and developing further – the answers given by the campus to the questions (1) raised in the Guidance document and (2) developed in response to the Mission Summary document. Consistent with the emphasis in *Rethinking SUNY* on campus autonomy, we want and expect campuses to identify for themselves the intellectual directions and programmatic goals they intend to pursue.

This process of self-definition needs to include as key components the identification of opportunities to raise academic aspirations and possibilities for leveraging academic strengths and resources across the System. The ramifications of individual campus decisions for other State University institutions and the System as a whole must also be weighed.

On-campus meetings (each of which is anticipated to last for at least a full day) will be scheduled to begin in Fall 1998, and will be sufficiently staggered in time to permit campuses to complete their Mission Summary documents – and for the campus and the System Administration to prepare for the ensuing dialogue – before the interlocutors actually sit down with each other.

Following the initial on-campus meeting of the interlocutors, the Provost's Office will prepare a working draft of a Mission Memorandum of Understanding for

³ The number and mix of interlocutors, the September 30 date for completing the Mission Summary, and the length of the Summary outlined here will serve the vast majority of campuses. If there are unusual and compelling reasons for adjusting these, campus leadership should contact the Provost's Office to discuss possible accommodations.

the campus (using language drawn from the campus' Mission Summary whenever possible), which will be shared with the President and the other interlocutors. This is intended as the first of a series of opportunities the campus, acting through its interlocutors, will have to comment upon, respond to, edit, or otherwise sharpen and improve this document.⁴

Once initial campus meetings have been held at most of the institutions in a geographic coordinating area,⁵ we shall hold an area-wide meeting of interlocutors at a central regional location to discuss area-wide concerns and questions (e.g., regional competition for students, complementarity – or lack thereof – of programs) and to identify and promote opportunities for inter-campus collaboration. Following this session, the Provost's Office will prepare a revised Mission Memorandum of Understanding (version #2) for each campus in the coordinating area. Campus comments on this draft will be solicited, with campuses given one month to respond.

To address issues of mission complementarity that are primarily limited to particular sectors of the State University System, sector-wide meetings will be scheduled as needed after initial campus meetings have been held at most of the institutions in a sector.⁶ Following the sector meetings, the Provost's Office will prepare a revised Mission Memorandum of Understanding (version #3) for each campus in the given sector, reflecting changes or new ideas that have been developed. Again, campus comments on the draft will be solicited, with campuses given one month to respond.

At any point necessary in this process, the interlocutors for a campus can reassemble for further dialogue about the institution's mission. The Provost's Office will continue to revise the Mission Memorandum of Understanding until all issues are resolved. When that document is completed, it will be signed by the campus President and the Chancellor. The completed Mission Memorandum of Understanding will then serve as a touchstone for the planning and evaluation of campus academic programs and for setting a future course for that institution.

⁴ The campus-based interlocutors, are of course, free at any stage in this process to solicit further input from other members of the college or university community. The draft Mission Memorandum of Understanding is not intended as a private or confidential document.

⁵ We intend to use the extant State University coordinating areas for this purpose.

⁶ Community Colleges share a common broad mission to serve their local sponsorship area and are, therefore, largely differentiated by geography. Nevertheless, sector-wide meetings can provide a useful context for sharing common concerns and enhancing cooperative arrangements.