

ADVANCEMENT SECTION

REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION VISIT

TO

University of Detroit Mercy
Detroit, Michigan

January 29 –31, 2007

FOR

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

EVALUATION TEAM

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I. OVERALL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

University of Detroit Mercy has a rich history stemming from two distinct and important Catholic traditions: The Society of Jesus and the Religious Sisters of Mercy. The team found significant commitment to mission at the institution. In fact, one of UDM's successes is how well it has inculcated the mission upon its students, faculty, administrators, and board.

The fact that UDM has remained in the City of Detroit is impressive. The benefit of having so many students and employees on campus helps with the local economy, of course. More so is the benefit to individuals who are able to use the services of McNichols Campus and the Law and Dental Schools. When a city is in decline, there is often a flood of institutions to the outlying area. UDM has not only stayed but is continuing to be an anchor in the rebuilding of the metropolitan area. Great cities have great universities and this is the case with Detroit and the University of Detroit Mercy.

Deciding to stay in the area and to fulfill its mission has not been easy. Indeed, it has been difficult on the school to move ahead in the face of major financial pressures. The team found, however, that the stewardship over those resources has been diligent and faithful making it possible to say that UDM has turned a corner. Naturally, all tuition-dependent schools need to balance opportunity with reality, but UDM seems to be headed in the right direction with an administrative team that can succeed, a partnership with the faculty, and the commitment of the board. When the enrollment picture is stable and growing, the rest of the goals will be met.

The history of conversations about the life of the university took a new turn when the shared governance model was implemented. The team found cooperation and commitment to be a consistent thread in the life of the institution. Although it is noteworthy that UDM faculty are represented by a union, the trust evident in the shared governance model transcends most management/employee issues.

II. CONSULTATIONS OF THE TEAM

A. Tenure and promotion

In interviews with faculty, the team found that tenure and promotion guidelines seem unclear. There is a perception among faculty that written guidelines, particularly regarding scholarship, are not always in alignment with cultural expectations (the "real" guidelines). Further, the expectations apparently differ across schools, which means that faculty members could meet or exceed the expectations of their school and then potentially be held to higher

standards by the university tenure and promotion committee.

If these perceptions are, indeed, widely held, UDM might want to try to clarify the requirements for tenure and promotion. Such clarification would lower stress levels and ensure not just an equitable process, but an *understanding* that the process is equitable, as well.

Attempts to quantify scholarship expectations could be difficult, but perhaps publishing aggregate statistics from successful candidates (such as average number of publications from faculty members granted tenure over a three year period) would promote transparency.

Newly-appointed faculty members expressed a desire for mentoring that would guide them toward successfully completing the promotion and tenure process. They felt a lack of guidance and were unclear as to whether their performance as faculty members would merit a recommendation for promotion and tenure from their peers. The institution's Agreement with the University of Detroit Mercy Professors' Union requires a yearly review by the dean for faculty members who are in the probationary period. It is a good start. The university might consider adding a mentoring/review process in which faculty members familiar with rank and tenure expectations that would help junior faculty members develop a dossier of teaching, scholarship, and service to document their merit for promotion and tenure. In the long run, such mentoring is likely to make the university stronger by helping junior faculty members better understand and meet the university's expectations.

B. Faculty Replacement

It appears that, for financial reasons, approval for replacing a departing faculty member might occur too late in the hiring season to conduct a search that ensures the best candidate pool. One solution to this problem is to fill the position with a one-year appointment, thus giving the department time during the following year to do a search with a larger and, hopefully, higher-quality candidate pool. Such an idea is not without its detractors on campus, however. Some faculty members fear – based on experience – that if an approved faculty position is not filled immediately with a tenure-track person, it will disappear in the next budget. As finances stabilize, UDM could make clear its commitment to faculty line items in the budget, once they are approved. If that is possible, then departments will confidently feel that they can search for the right candidate instead of the “right now” candidate. UDM will draw from better candidate pools and ultimately have a higher quality tenure-track faculty.

C. Support for Faculty Scholarship

Faculty members perceived increasing expectations of scholarship, but some frustration that material support for scholarship was not increasing commensurately. These faculty members were reluctant to take a sabbatical or research leaves, because their absences would place a burden on their already-burdened colleagues. Yet, these same faculty members were eager to engage in scholarly activities and felt pulled by the competing concerns.

As the finances improve, enhancing the pool of resources to support faculty scholarship and provide assistance to those departments who have faculty members using release or leave time would help to remedy the situation. Some actions that would provide greater support for scholarship include full time sabbatical replacements, expansion of the research fund, and the addition of grant-writing support staff.

D. Shared Governance

The new shared-governance structure seems to enjoy widespread, and in many cases enthusiastic, support based on conversations the team had with the faculty, administration, and Board of Trustees. To ensure the success of sharing responsibility for governing, it is important that these parties establish new habits of communicating and responding to one another. Old perceptions may persist unless the new model ushers in new ways of communicating.

To that end, the team recommends that all members of the campus community seek to respond promptly to proposals and to work with relevant teams and committees to improve communication. Such attention to the timeliness and processes whereby each group works with the others will generate both good will and mutual trust. By establishing that kind of relationship in routine matters, the trust and goodwill will be available when a crisis comes up.

E. Enhanced Financial Reporting

Enhanced financial reporting will assist the University of Detroit Mercy (UDM) in communicating and measuring its performance progress both fiscally and programmatically.

The team recommends that UDM secure the services of an audit firm with greater experience in private higher education financial accounting and reporting. This will support improved compliance with FASB reporting standards. The team observed these standards are not being uniformly followed in the annual financial reports provided. For example, FASB does not

consider operation and maintenance of plant as a separate function, but rather allocates these expenses to the other functions such as instruction, research, public service, and academic support in the Statement of Activities or footnote.

In addition to complying with accounting standards, FASB-consistent financial reporting will allow UDM to benchmark its fiscal performance against that of its peers. To supplement this, it is recommended that the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and Board Finance Committee identify financial accounting and operating ratios and data points that will assist the institution in pinpointing problems and judging success. These should include both parameters that are meaningful to external constituents as well as ones that are useful for internal decision-makers (examples can be found in the January 2007 *Business Officer*). Well-selected financial statistics will also facilitate alignment of the institution's strategic plan and its financial performance. The National Association of College and University Business Officers' (NACUBO) website houses financial statements for numerous comparative institutions, and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) website contains a wealth of data about the operations of peer universities.

As UDM moves into an aggressive capital campaign and triples its long-term debt obligations, documented demonstration of financial integrity will be critical for donors and financing institutions. Attention to the recommendations on the "Checklist for Higher Education" developed by NACUBO and the Accounting Principles Council will support this initiative. These should include, in the annual audit report, certifications by the university's president and CFO as to the completeness and accuracy of the statements and assurance that effective internal controls are in place. The university's auditor also needs to examine and report on the internal control assessment made by management in the annual report.

F. Enrollment Management

A student experiences his or her college life as one whole experience and does not break it into parts: "Oh, this is my academic life and that is my extracurricular life." It is more a matter of, "I am going to college." Students see the experience in more holistic terms. UDM may, therefore, want to use a holistic approach to managing its enrollment. The team found there is a foundation for such an approach with the inclusion of student affairs under academic affairs.

With the recent realignment of the top executive staff, it might be prudent to think about how to prevent a dropped baton as students are relayed from recruitment, to financial aid, to student affairs, and to residential living. It is not enough that the chief administrators are clear on the goals and the progress toward them; the ones who must carry out the actions

must also be in agreement with one another.

On every campus there is natural friction between offices as each attempts to solve a problem “in the best interest of the student.” It might, therefore, be helpful to convene a standing enrollment management council made up of those administrators and directors who enact and discharge policies related to enrollment. This is the group that can decide on matters of financial aid policy, process improvement in handling registrations, billing, and payments, and improvements to residences and student life. Specific offices will carry out specific tasks, of course, but such a council will help each group to understand its effect on others.

Enrollment management is a complex task. The more that every member of the various offices understands those complexities, the better able they will be to make good decisions. Instead of solving their immediate problems, staff members will consider the effects on other areas of the campus and develop solutions to solve the whole problem. Shared reports will help to educate all the members of the enrollment management council and prevent the kind of data jealousy that some campuses experience.

G. Distance Education

The team applauds the university in taking the initial steps to analyze the use of technologically mediated instruction to create new opportunities for servicing existing student populations, as well as providing opportunities for new student clientele. While these new delivery methods may test conventional educational thinking, the essential nature and content of educational experiences can certainly be blended with these innovative delivery methods.

However, the university does not currently have a comprehensive plan to integrate additional technology-aided instruction in the classroom or to offer additional courses or programs in technologically mediated instruction. The team feels that the university could extend its services to underserved student populations, pursuant to its mission, by considering the development of such a comprehensive plan.

In doing so, the team would offer the following comments in connection with the development of a comprehensive online program/course strategic plan:

- Integration of technology-aided instruction or online courses should include, *inter alia*, outline best practices in distance education, including well-established essentials of instructional quality, learning that is dynamic and interactive, integrity of instruction through substantive and adapted curricula, and assessment.
- Recognition that quality assurance is imperative to maintaining sound educational

programs that are diverse in structure to meet the needs of not only full-time, on-campus students, but also to address the needs of other students who wish to obtain educational services on a part-time basis.

- Professional development program for faculty in connection with the integration of technology in the classroom and online instruction.
- Innovative collaboration with faculty and staff to integrate conventional principles of pedagogy with technology for both synchronous and asynchronous delivery methods.
- Assessment of institutional effectiveness in providing distance education as part of the ongoing institutional assessment program.
- Orientation for students in the online environment.

III. RECOGNITION OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS, PROGRESS, AND/OR PRACTICES

A. Innovative Programs

UDM faculty has developed some intriguing and unique niche graduate programs. The programs take advantage of UDM's location in a large metropolitan center and the problems that such centers encounter. The skills learned in these programs are transferable to other locales making them very valuable and a potential avenue for on-line learning. Examples of these programs include master's degrees in community development, intelligence analysis, and information assurance.

Faculty in the Law School and Dental School are, likewise, demonstrating creative ways of teaching and learning. The simulated law firm gives students practical experience in handling many of the situations encountered in daily practice, including mergers and acquisitions. The Law School also offers courses in Talmudic Law and Canon Law, both of which are not standard fare for urban law schools.

The Dental School serves many poor and uninsured residents in the community who present a very wide range of oral health problems. Students, therefore, are able to see a variety of patients they might not see with a more homogenous population. In order to prepare both oral hygienists and dentists to work together as a team, the Dental School combines some classes, so the students interact with one another as professional colleagues.

B. Service and Community Involvement

UDM is a model for how its faculty and staff live out the institution's mission in an urban context. In both graduate and undergraduate settings, students are given opportunities to serve others as a part of their education. These opportunities are found in the curriculum and in the out-of-class activities as well. The process of inculcating members of the campus communities begins with orientation programs for both students and employees.

C. Catholic Identity While Being Open and Diverse to Other Communities

The team found that UDM promotes a tolerant and accepting environment for students of all faiths and orientations. The two Catholic traditions that comprise the UDM mission work together promote the health and well-being of every person who comes into contact with the institution. In addition to its accepting nature, UDM promotes an active religious life in keeping with its traditions.

D. Shared Governance

The faculty, administration, and board are to be commended for the high level of commitment and effort exhibited during the development of, and now-implemented, shared governance system.