Delaware State University

“Reflecting on our past while preparing for our future”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Delaware State University’s foundation dates to May 15, 1891, when the 58th General Assembly of the State of Delaware passed “An Act to Establish and Maintain a College for the Education of Colored Students in Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts” by virtue of the Second Morrill Act of Congress approved on August 30, 1890. As such, Delaware State University is a land-grant university and its mission is defined by the state and federal legislation associated with this designation. The University began enrolling students in early 1892 offering courses of study in agriculture, chemistry, the classics, engineering and sciences.

The University has since developed into a 460-acre complex and has undergone two name changes. The name was changed to Delaware State College in 1947 and Delaware State University (DSU) in 1993. In addition to its main campus in the state capital of Dover, DSU has additional locations in Wilmington and Georgetown, Delaware, and Hanoi, Vietnam, and has an annual operating budget of $98 million.

Now in its 121st year, the University is energetically moving forward to prepare students for the global market and to invigorate the economy and culture of Delaware and the Mid-Atlantic region. The 52 undergraduate and 31 graduate programs serve a diverse student population who are predominantly African-American, but with an increasing number of Caucasian, Hispanic, Asian, and international students.

This self-study process has enhanced Delaware State University’s effort to reflect on its past while preparing for the future, especially for the next five to 10 years. Despite the uncertain economic climate, the Board of Trustees expects DSU to raise retention and graduation rates, enroll better-prepared students, conduct innovative research, and stimulate the state’s economy. As part of the ongoing strategic planning process, six priority areas based on the current and future needs of the University have been identified: (1) excellence in teaching, research, and outreach; (2) student learning, retention, and graduation; (3) science, engineering, technology, and math (STEM); (4) health and wellness; (5) international partnerships; and (6) revenue generation.

Since DSU’s 2002 comprehensive self-study, the University has undergone extraordinary change. The student profile has been changing due to a period of unprecedented growth with a fall 2011 enrollment of 4,178, a 25% increase over the 3,343 students enrolled in 2001. Students come from 32 states and from 23 countries around the globe. In addition, the program offerings have expanded from 44 undergraduate and 15 master’s degrees with no doctoral programs in 2002 to the current 52 undergraduate, 26 masters, and five doctoral degree programs.
DSU has also experienced changes in senior-level leadership since the last Periodic Review Report and the development of the 2007 Strategic Plan. A new President was installed in January 2010 and a new Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs was appointed in July 2010. Facing the reaffirmation of accreditation in 2012, the Self-Study Steering Committee was formed in 2009 and decided that the University would be best served by utilizing a comprehensive design for its self-study.

Although the University adopted a new Vision in 2010 and Mission in 2011, reflective of the changing needs of higher education, its tripartite mission of instruction, research, and service in the land-grant university tradition remains unchanged. This self-study assesses the University’s effectiveness in relationship to that tripartite Mission and its Strategic Goals. In addition, the self-study process allowed campus leaders to identify strengths and areas for improvement in relation to the Commission’s 14 standards.

Several strengths are noteworthy. The University strategically grew its enrollment with an eye toward steadily improving the academic profile of its incoming students. It successfully implemented a formal five-year retention plan, significantly increasing the retention rate. Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) results demonstrate that student services such as financial aid, student accounts, advising, and student records have improved. Degree offerings have expanded in high demand areas including the promotion of STEM-oriented academic programs. The University has increased its sponsored research funding to $23 million while expanding the portfolio of programs and activities in outreach and engagement. A DSU Foundation was formed to build a solid infrastructure for private fundraising. Several new international partnerships have been forged, and educational opportunities have expanded for first-generation, low-income students.

This report, “Reflecting on our past while preparing for our future,” is a compendium of salient findings and action items from the University’s self-study process.

Chapters 1 – 3 contain, respectively, the institutional profile, the organization of the Steering Committee and research groups, and the nature and scope of the self-study.

Chapter 4, “Supporting Institutional Renewal,” presents the findings and documentation that demonstrate the University’s compliance with Standards 1, 2, and 3. Relative to Standard 1, Delaware State University (DSU) has a clearly defined, comprehensive, and published mission statement that defines its purpose and goals as an institution of higher education and is specific to the institution. The mission addresses instruction, scholarship, research, service, community involvement and identifies who the institution serves and what it intends to accomplish. The basic focus of the institution is defined by the Mission Statement and it explains the institution’s character and individuality. The Mission is in harmony with and supportive of the specific, mandated and unique role of a land-grant university as legislated in the Second Morrill Act of 1890.

In order to meet Standard 2, the University pursues its long-term, overarching strategic goals through a unifying methodology centered upon annual goal-setting and assessment activities and in the budget allocation process. Each functional area of the University develops goals and objectives specific to the division and in alignment with the Mission and Strategic Plan.

The University’s internal budget allocation process (Standard 3) is well-documented and designed to provide an inclusive and objective process by which to allocate the institution’s
resources in alignment with the Mission and Strategic Goals. The budget development process, however, is impacted by variables such as changes in tuition and fees, enrollment projections, levels of state appropriations, and the financial condition of the institution.

Chapter 5, “Organizational Leadership and Decision-Making,” presents the findings and documentation that demonstrate the University’s compliance with Standards 4, 5, and 6. DSU has a clear delineation of responsibilities with respect to institutional governance (Standard 4). The governance of the University is shared among its institutional constituencies to include, but is not limited to, policy development and decision-making. The Board of Trustees takes an active role in governing the University through a shared governance process and as an autonomous body, thereby assuring the integrity of the University. The shared governance principle requires open and frequent communication between the Board of Trustees, administration, faculty, students, and staff.

In order to meet Standard 5, the University is governed by a Board of Trustees that delegates management of the University to the President. Supporting the President are five vice presidents, six academic deans, and a number of associate/assistant vice presidents, program directors, and managers. University administrators are recruited and hired using national searches, published vacancy notices, and formal search committee interviews. In recent years, the University has implemented a number of administrative changes designed to address operational challenges and improve administrative efficiency.

The University adheres to high ethical standards to ensure the integrity of the institution (Standard 6). Integrity is one of the recently adopted Core Values of the University. This institutional core value is reflected in policies for academic and non-academic programs across all constituencies of the University. Institutional integrity is sustained in the academic and intellectual freedom of the University, which is further reflected in its policies and contractual agreements.

Chapter 6, “Discovery and Improvement through Assessment,” presents the findings and documentation that demonstrate the University’s compliance with Standard 7. A well-coordinated, systematic, institutional assessment process has been implemented since the 2007 Periodic Review Report. As a result, programs, initiatives, and activities of the University have been developed, and continue to be developed, through established and well-coordinated cycles measuring the extent to which the University is making effective and efficient use of its human, fiscal, and physical resources in support of the institution’s mission. The overarching framework for assessing institutional effectiveness is the University Mission Statement and the nine goals that have grown from that mission and are captured in the Strategic Plan.

Chapter 7, “College Access and Opportunities for Students,” presents the findings and documentation demonstrating the University’s compliance with Standards 8 and 9. DSU’s land-grant institution status and its promise to educate a diverse body of students at a cost consistent with the economic status of the student body have resulted in clearly stated criteria for admission of students (Standard 8). Admissions and retention policies are closely aligned with the student support services required by the students, and the efforts of diverse academic and administrative units are coordinated to pursue the shared goals of increased enrollment and retention. Expansive student support services not only serve these goals but also support the mission to educate students to become competent, productive, and contributing citizens.
Within the scope of its mission, the University provides a broad spectrum of collaborative programs and student support services in its divisions of Academic Affairs, Academic Enrichment, and Student Affairs to address the students’ varied academic, personal and professional needs (Standard 9). The University serves a highly diverse student population whether viewed in terms of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or geographic background. Many DSU students are the first in their families to attend college and many are underserved educationally and financially. The latter three aspects, in particular, shape the developmental support programs, services, and activities to promote student learning consistent with the University mission.

Chapter 8, “Promoting, Facilitating and Evaluating the Process of Learning,” presents the findings and documentation that demonstrate the University’s compliance with Standards 10, 11, 12 and 13. The Delaware State University faculty has primary responsibility for the quality of the educational program (Standard 10). This is accomplished not simply through the presence of a highly qualified faculty, but in their role as advisors in academic matters and their active participation and willing acceptance of the responsibilities of shared institutional governance. Faculty qualifications are assessed in terms of the expertise needed to address DSU’s diverse majors, minors, and concentration areas adequately. Highest-earned degree in the discipline is the first consideration in seeking qualified faculty, but the University also considers competence, capacity, related life/work experience and professional licensure/certification. Ninety-three percent of the faculty members have terminal degrees in the discipline for which they have been hired. DSU uses the PhD, EdD or other doctoral level degrees as the definition of a "terminal" degree in most disciplines. However, a Masters in Fine Arts (MFA) is the terminal degree in areas such as the Theater Arts, Creative Writing and Visual and Studio Art.

DSU offers degree programs at the baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral levels that are entirely consistent with the institutional mission and that are responsive to state, regional, national and international educational needs (Standard 11). Faculty is primarily responsible for assuring that “sufficient content, depth and rigor” are maintained in program curricula and the program review process is utilized to assess program effectiveness. Programs maintain their uniqueness by designing their own senior capstone experience and determining acceptable levels of competence or alignment with national standards for degree attainment.

A strong and effective general education program (Standard 12) is central to fulfilling DSU’s mission and vision. After several years of planning and input by all stakeholders, the University’s General Education Program was re-designed in 1998 and updated in 2009. The program emphasizes that graduates must be equipped with the core skills of effective verbal and written communication, critical thinking, and quantitative reasoning skills. They must know their own society and region and develop a global perspective with sensitivity to variations of cultural, social, racial, ethnic, moral, and physical diversity. The program recognizes that teaching and learning must embrace multiple bodies of knowledge, skills, and sensibilities to shape the whole student, including curiosity about the social and natural worlds, appreciation for the complexities of knowledge, tolerance for ambiguity, and the capacity for attaining perspective on one’s own life through self-examination and the study of others. The curriculum exposes students to the multicultural dimensions of the world and, as an HBCU, to the experiences of people of African descent in particular. DSU also emphasizes study in breadth to encourage students to explore disciplined inquiry within their major, shedding light on broader issues in their own lives and enabling them to use their knowledge to render service to humanity.
The University offers a number of related educational programs and activities which complement academic coursework, expand educational offerings, and enhance student learning. These structured academic offerings maintain the same academic rigor and expected student learning outcomes as their classroom-based counterparts (Standard 13).

Chapter 9, “Data-Informed Improvements for Student Learning,” presents the findings and documentation that demonstrate the University’s compliance with Standard 14. Student learning is fundamental to DSU’s mission. Clearly articulated expected student learning outcomes occur at all levels and at different points of the student experience. Student learning outcomes assessment is mission-driven and essential to the achievement of the University’s mission and goals.

Since 2007 DSU has implemented a comprehensive assessment system to evaluate whether the institution is meeting its mission and goals regarding student learning and in order to continuously improve the quality of programs. From the identification of learning goals and targeted outcomes to the implementation of WEAVEonline® and the Assessment Data Collection System, DSU is continuously enhancing its ability to assess the effectiveness of its educational programs and the institution. Both direct and indirect data from student learning assessment and documented outcomes achievement are highlighted. Examples from colleges and units, including program-specific accreditations, are reported and action items for strengthening the collection and use of student learning assessment data are provided.

Chapter 10, “Conclusions and Summary of Action Items,” contains concluding remarks and action items. Based on a critical analysis of the data presented in this self-study, action items have been listed in the preceding chapters. The most significant are reiterated in a typology in this chapter.

Finally, this self-study provides a candid assessment of DSU’s progress over the past 5 – 10 years, where the University stands today, and more importantly, helps the institution prepare for and create its preferred future. In compliance with the standards and requirements laid out in Characteristics of Excellence, as defined by the Middle States Commission of Higher Education, and the supporting data and documentation, it is clear that Delaware State University’s accreditation should be reaffirmed.