

January 12, 2008

Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
209 Burlington Road, Suite 201
Bedford, MA 01730-1433

Dear Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the *Report to the Faculty, Administration, Trustees, and Students of Smith College by the Evaluation team representing the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of NEASC*. We were particularly grateful for the excellent team of visitors selected for our decennial review. The visitors read our self-study with care, came to campus prepared with thoughtful questions, and left us with new insights and renewed appreciation of the opportunities open to the College.

In what follows we summarize the concrete actions the College has already taken, or intends to take in the coming months and years, that respond to the challenges identified in our self-study or in the report of the external visiting team:

In the areas of Governance, the team noted a need to enhance the links and communication between our budget committees – the committee on mission and priorities (CMP) and the advisory committee on resource allocation (ACRA) – and to bring financial and academic planning into closer alignment. Building on the success of our efforts to link the committees on mission and academic priorities (CMP and CAP) during the first phases of the strategic planning process, we have planned joint meetings of the CMP and ACRA—during the implementation process. Similarly, we are currently engaged in efforts to improve coordination and align the timing between academic and financial planning processes.

With respect to the role of chairs and directors of academic departments, we have initiated an expanded program of meetings for chairs and directors with the President and Provost to encourage their leadership in the implementation of the strategic plan. In addition, the Faculty Council held a series of meetings in the fall of 2007 with current chairs and directors to identify the ways in which their roles might be strengthened and their leadership enhanced. We anticipate a report and recommendations from the faculty council in the spring of 2008.

We agree with the team's observation that there is a need to move expeditiously to identify the remaining reductions of faculty positions and we are currently in discussions with CAP to determine the appropriate process to accomplish this goal. With respect to the visitors' concerns that we identify the additional resources that will be needed to accomplish the ambitious goals of the strategic plan, the President, Provost, CMP, and CAP have begun to clarify the appropriate level of funding and related resources—including faculty resources—that will be needed to implement *The Smith Design for Learning*. We expect to have refined budget estimates for the Smith Board of Trustees by May of 2008.

The visitors also underscored the need to coordinate the proposed new centers (in international studies, the environment and community engagement) with our existing curricular support services—such as the libraries, art museum, botanic gardens, Jacobson Center, and Quantitative Learning Center, as well as with existing academic departments and interdisciplinary programs. We find this to be one of the most important challenges before us and we intend to devote considerable time and effort to this concern over the course of the next five years.

The faculty is engaged in an ongoing re-examination of the needs and limits of Smith's open curriculum, particularly in light of the wide variation found in the preparation of today's undergraduates. Strengthening the acquisition of essential intellectual capacities in the structure of the major is now a part of the department and program level curricular reviews. As early as the winter and spring of 2008 departments and programs have scheduled retreats to re-examine the structure of their majors and identify where the intellectual capacities are addressed in their curricula.

In addition, the College is in the process of introducing new courses and their associated pedagogy to enhance the acquisition of essential intellectual capacities. First-year seminars (FYS) and Presidential interdisciplinary seminars for juniors and seniors are examples of such courses. The FYS are currently available for approximately half the entering class, and our plans call for expanding these offerings to make them available to all members of the first year class over the course of the next four years. At least six additional FYS have been approved for 2008-09. The Presidential seminars are intended to enhance the opportunity for juniors and seniors to do interdisciplinary work at an advanced level. They are also intended to address our concerns regarding the need for greater coherence among the courses students elect outside the major. We will launch the first of these seminars in the fall of 2008 and plan to offer approximately four each year.

Related to our efforts to re-examine the open curriculum is the ongoing effort to assess and restructure our program of pre-major advising. Appointed in the fall of 2007, the Advising Task Force issued a preliminary report with a set of recommendations in January of 2008. The efforts of the Task Force have been enhanced by our ongoing research with the Teagle/NEASC consortium. The Advising Task Force used the preliminary findings from that research to recommend major changes in our goals and structure of the advising system. Recommendations from the Advising Task Force will

include a program of sophomore orientation and reflection as well as an expansion of our portfolio assessment projects.

Supporting both of these projects is the expansion of our office of Institutional Research and Educational Assessment. We have already provided the additional staffing that will allow this office to expand its support for college and department level curricular planning.

The College has also undertaken steps to strengthen the ties of emeritus faculty through the appointment of Emeriti Advisory Committee that will recommend to the President and Provost suggestions for increased support for emeriti and utilization of their experience and skills in the ongoing life of the College.

Planning for the second science building has begun and a committee to address the scope and timing of this project has been appointed by the President.

We hope this response will give the Commission a sense of the usefulness of this accreditation process for the College. We wish to conclude with praise for the external visitors and the care and thoughtfulness that they gave to their roles. We found their comments and insights very useful as is reflected in our efforts to implement many of their suggestions with alacrity.

We will look forward to meeting with the Commissioners in April. Please let us know if you require any further information from us.

Carol T. Christ
President

Susan C. Bourque
Provost and Dean of the Faculty
Chair of the Standards Committee

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