

HAMILTON COLLEGE REACCREDITATION REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Hamilton College is a highly selective undergraduate residential liberal arts college, chartered in 1812 and today enrolling 1700 students. From its beginning as an all-male institution drawing most of its students from rural upstate New York, Hamilton now ranks among the country's leading colleges, attracting a coeducational student body from 41 states and 33 foreign countries. Applications for admission to the Class of 2005 are a record 4500. The College has recently completed a \$100 million capital campaign, which has augmented an endowment that has averaged an annual rate of growth of 15.2% over the past ten years. A strong faculty and committed staff understand the special nature of the residential college and offer both a rigorous course of study and a rich array of services that provide a comprehensive and high-quality experience for Hamilton students. With ambitious plans for the future, the College is now in the advanced stages of strategic planning for a coming decade that holds great promise.

The Visiting Team thus arrives at a timely and auspicious moment for Hamilton. We begin by expressing our gratitude to our hosts, who have attended to our every request, large and small, and who have provided comfortable quarters for our work. We acknowledge the work of the Self-Study Steering Committee, and its numerous subcommittees, who worked diligently to produce an exemplary document that captured (and, in the Team's view, captured accurately) Hamilton as it is and Hamilton as it aspires to be. We have carefully considered the recommendations that appear at the end of every section of the Self-Study, and, without exception, we join the Self-Study Committee in placing these recommendations before the College community with our strong endorsement. We thank all the members of the Hamilton community who put themselves at our disposal during our campus visit. We have tried very hard to comprehend, and to put into words, the remarkable vitality that suffuses this place, and the equally remarkable opportunities it now finds itself positioned to exploit. Strong and confident, Hamilton College now stands poised to define the details of, and then energetically to pursue, a visionary future.

And so we begin this report by calling to mind those most substantial strengths:

1. A boldness of institutional vision that demonstrates a willingness to embrace change while remaining true to the essential character of the institution. The College has fearlessly engaged significant challenges in student social and residential life; has adopted an ambitious new set of curricular requirements and is recasting its system of advising; and has recognized that creating a more diverse student body, faculty, and staff is central to its educational mission and essential to the preparation of its graduates for life in a new century.
2. A willingness to frame these initiatives already launched with a broader institutional strategic plan, which will shape and direct the institution's course over the next decade.

3. A dedicated and loyal faculty and staff who are committed to making change effective and enduring.
4. A sound financial base characterized by a prudent management of resources that now makes bold choices, carefully made, affordable.
5. An alumni body that is repeatedly described as not merely supportive, but “passionate.”

These strengths are considerable and inspiring. Their presence permits an opportunity for uncommon candor in addressing the pressing issues change presents and provides a base of self-confidence in confronting even the most vexatious of concerns that now present themselves to the institution. The report that follows, therefore, must not be thought unduly critical. Though seeking to identify areas that, in the Visiting Team’s view, merit the careful attention of the College and its leadership, this report attempts, with the same candor that has greeted the Team at every turn during our visit, neither to praise nor to blame but rather instead to advise and occasionally even to warn. And it presumes to do so because it shares the deep conviction that permeates this community that it faces, willingly, a potentially transforming moment in the College’s history. Thus we join the discussions, now under way and in many cases some distance from closure, as colleagues and consultants, intending above all to be constructive in our comments, clear yet temperate in expressing our views, and, finally, hoping that our report will strengthen Hamilton College’s resolve to pursue the course it has chosen for itself.

Though our narrative follows the outline of the Self-Study, it is laced with several recurrent themes, which will be simply listed here and developed in greater detail in the appropriate places in our report. These themes represent, in the view of the Visiting Team, issues that will ultimately either hasten or impede the course of the institution toward the attainment of its goals in the coming decade. Successful engagement of them, and evidence of progress in their resolution, will constitute the standard of measurement in gauging Hamilton’s forward movement.

These themes include:

1. The need to adopt and begin to implement an institutional strategic plan. Indeed, this is by far the most pressing issue of all and subsumes the issues that follow under it. Adoption and implementation will require broad support, by Hamilton’s many stakeholders. And that support will in turn be further broadened, and strengthened, to the degree that the issues that follow are addressed.
2. The need to consider a more consultative and participatory process for making and communicating decisions. Members of the community with whom we have spoken too often professed surprise at being asked to respond to initiatives and decisions that appeared already to have been taken or made with consultation occurring after the fact.

3. The need to address issues of campus diversity swiftly and comprehensively.
4. The need to clarify the nature, extent, and process of assessment of advising before the new curriculum is implemented. Hamilton is poised to become a national exemplar of effective student advising, but there is at present far too much uncertainty over how the advising component of the new curriculum is to function and how its effectiveness is to be evaluated.

These themes, along with other issues, will be addressed in detail in the pages that follow. These specific themes are stated here because they are overarching in nature.

MISSION

Hamilton College has a clear statement of mission that is appropriate and that is clearly and consistently communicated. The Mission Statement is elaborated in a set of core values that inform both policy and practice across the institution. The Team has found ample evidence that these values are not only understood at Hamilton, they are lived.

ADMISSION AND FINANCIAL AID

The admissions program that is managed by the Director of Admission under the general direction of the Dean of Admission and Financial Aid has clearly stated policies and seems to support the overall academic goals of the College. The process is one of identifying prospects who nominally fit those goals and maintaining close communications with them through letters, publications and electronic means. The portrayal of the College in admission publications seems accurate and consistent with its mission. The admissions staff is dedicated to its work and seems eager to sell Hamilton College to prospective students. The engagement of the Faculty Admission Committee in the admission process is noteworthy and laudable.

One very positive aspect of admissions is that after several years of relatively stable numbers of applications, albeit with increasing selectivity, applications increased over 20% this year as compared to last year. The Dean, the Director and the Admission staff expressed the opinion that this may have resulted from a combination of the stability of the staff over the past couple of years and the announcement of the new Hamilton curriculum.

Though Hamilton is not totally need-blind in its admissions, it is able to meet most of the needs of its admitted students, and by prudent uses of need-based and merit-based aid to attract a high quality student body. When they were asked what tools were needed to improve admission, the Admission staff and Director of Financial Aid quickly answered, " More financial aid."

Of particular note are progress in recent years in attracting a more diverse student body and the new initiative with the Posse Foundation to carry that progress forward. The College and the Admission staff seem very committed to these efforts.

Though a few members of the community expressed concerns about the role of athletics in the admission process, the Office of Admission sees the coaches as a very important and positive force in helping to meet the College's goals. They believe the Athletics staff members understand those goals and the Admissions staff does not feel pressured by the coaches. Nevertheless the Admission Office is open to a review of how athletics impacts the academic profile, diversity and financial need of the incoming class.

The President's Internet Initiative, which is a broad based effort to enhance the presentation of the College via electronic means to external constituencies, has made admission one of its first priorities. This indicates the importance of admission to the overall goals of the institution.

In general the admission staff sees the Dean of Admission and Financial Aid as empowering them and they see the President and the Board of Trustees as taking a leadership role in helping them improve the academic profile of the first-year class.

The Admission Office does not appear to have a formal assessment program. The staff said that the numbers speak for themselves and, to a great extent, that is true. This year, for the first time in several years, the office is administering the Admitted Student Questionnaire. It does gather anecdotal information from students and parents, and the Team was told that this shows great appreciation for the close contact the staff maintains with admission prospects. We would suggest that Admission develop an assessment program that focuses on the effectiveness of elements of its program on the outcomes that relate to the goals of the institution.

ATHLETICS

Hamilton College has a strong tradition of intercollegiate athletics that engages a significant population of the students. There is evidence that in recent years the Athletics department has made a concerted effort to enhance the administration of its programs, to improve communications with faculty, and to address issues of gender equity and resource allocation. Recent creation of an elected committee on athletics has helped to improve communication between faculty and the coaching staff. Policies concerning scheduling of athletic competitions and missed classes are in the process of being clarified.

The Team was encouraged that the Athletics Department and the Athletics Committee are currently undertaking a study of SATs and grade performance of men's and women's athletic teams over the past several years. The Team encourages the College to update this study regularly to track academic performance of athletes and to guard against differentiation of athletes from other students.

The College has recently made a major decision to enter the New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC) as a full playing member. While this is an important opportunity to position the College within the most academically rigorous athletic conference, it also poses serious challenges for an athletic program. The Team suggests that the desires of the

coaching staff, faculty and the students be taken into account when deciding how best to implement the transition to full membership in NESCAC.

While considerable progress regarding equity between men's and women's sports has been made in recent years, gender equity issues remain. The Team was pleased to note that the numbers of men's and women's varsity teams are equal. However, women are more often asked to serve as head coaches to two sports than are men; Hamilton has fewer women coaches than is the norm among NESCAC schools. Hamilton also reports fewer head coaches overall and more part time coaches than peer institutions. Unlike many NESCAC schools, the athletic director continues to serve as a coach.

The College has identified the allocation of resources from its Booster Club General Fund to be an ongoing source of concern. New guidelines may not adequately address the issue of differential funding available to men's and women's sports. While Booster Club General Funds are allocated specifically to "under-represented gender" sports, the monies raised for the General Fund represent a fraction of those designated annually for men's sports. As a result, men's teams are able to purchase equipment and schedule trips that seem to be unavailable to women.

Athletics also needs to be incorporated into the Strategic Planning process of the College. Priorities for new positions, new facilities and risk management issues need to be revisited as part of the ongoing planning process. For the department to be effective in its strategic planning efforts, the coaching staff will need to participate fully in the planning process.

New leadership within the Athletics Department provides the opportunity to enhance internal communications within the department by instituting regular staff meetings and broader policy and operational discussions. The Team encourages Hamilton to develop a means to actively mentor the incoming director of athletics during his tenure as associate director.

The Athletics Committee should also continue to develop its oversight of broad policy issues and continue to advocate for improved communication between the department and other faculty. The Committee should continue to review policies that affect academic performance of student athletes, gender equity issues and admissions policies.

COMMUNICATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT

Communications

Hamilton College has an integrated communications strategy that is intended to provide a focussed and consistent picture of the College to both internal and external constituencies. The Vice President for Development and Communications has executive-level responsibility for communications and the Director of Communications, who reports to the Vice President, has operational responsibility for publications, electronic media and media relations.

The Office of Communications provides direct support to campus clients for publications, including design, writing and printing. The primary clients are the Office of Admission and Financial Aid and the Office of Communications and Development; the only major area that is not a client is Athletics. The office outsources some publications, the major ones being the Catalog and capital campaign publications. A perusal of the catalog, admission materials and other promotional materials indicates reasonable consistency of style and message; however, the visiting Team does support the recommendation in the self-study on developing a clear institutional graphic identity. In general the portrayal of the institution in these publications seems consistent with and supportive of the mission of the College.

As a result of the President's Internet Initiative the position of Director of Electronic Media, reporting to the Director of Communications, has been created to complement the Webmaster, who reports to the Director of Information Technology Services (ITS). The former is responsible for the content on the highest level of the College web presence and the latter is responsible for design and implementation. This seems a good organizational strategy to ensure the same level of consistency and focus on the web that is provided in printed materials.

The Director of Communications also has two staff members whose primary responsibility is media relations. To the extent it could be determined, the media relations staff do a good job of presenting the College and its faculty, staff and students to external constituencies.

The role of the Office of Communications in internal communications is not as clear. There is evidence that students, staff, faculty and administrators do not feel as well informed on accomplishments of those in the community and on institutional processes and decisions as they would like to be. The Visiting Team was not made aware of internal publications, other than the student newspaper and some electronic communications, that might address this. This leads to the suggestion that the Office of Communications consider some sort of community newsletter aimed at faculty, staff and administrators and containing information of potential interest to those groups.

Development

Annual and capital gifts play an important part in providing the College with the financial resources necessary to support its programs. As reported in the Self-Study, the capital campaign that is just wrapping up has exceeded its goals and the annual giving program remains the envy of most colleges. The fund-raising efforts have not only been successful, but efficient in terms of cost per dollar raised. The Team understands that the College intends to continue to provide the Development operations with resources at the current level beyond the end of the current campaign. This would appear to be an excellent investment for future campaigns.

The Team concurs with the several opportunities for continued improvement identified in the Self-Study. The Team would suggest that the important information flow between Development and the Business Office that was identified in the report should be expanded to include the Financial Aid Office and the Academic Division. It is not an uncommon problem to find that the flow of information between the fundraisers, the accountants, and those responsible

for making the specific spending decisions is inadequate. Typically each office involved reports to a different College Officer. Each area has its own information needs – but good stewardship (donor communications) requires a combination of the information. The Team suggests that the College review all of the systems involved in this complex process and redesign the entire process if necessary rather than tackle it piecemeal.

The Team also observed that the potential success of future capital campaigns will be greatly enhanced, if the “case” can be based on a well-thought-out and coherent strategic plan. Therefore, the Team encourages the College to consider our suggestions related to Planning in order to assure the best possible starting point for the College’s next capital campaign success story.

ACADEMIC PROGRAM

Hamilton College states its mission in the following terms: “to educate a talented and diverse student body for future leadership roles in a changing, information-based society and economy, and to foster a learning environment characterized by frequent, intensive and personal interactions between and among our students and exceptionally dedicated teaching scholars.”

Hamilton’s academic program is consistent with these goals. The College offers concentrations in a wide spectrum of both departmental and interdisciplinary programs. It has recently established a new curriculum for the first two years. Since this curriculum has been a major focus of campus attention for several years and is a centerpiece of the Self-Study, it will be the focus of our discussion of the academic program.

The new curriculum is a radical departure, since it abandons the traditional system of divisional requirements in favor of: a quantitative literacy requirement, writing intensive proseminars, and an inter- or multidisciplinary sophomore seminar. In our discussions with faculty at all levels we found widespread acceptance and a good deal of enthusiasm for the new program. Some faculty claimed that it had finally been passed by a large majority of a relatively small quorum. The frequent characterization of the revision by faculty members as administratively initiated was borne out by the Self-Study, which explains that it was carried out under the direction of a dean directly charged with the task. One faculty member commented, “It is hard to get excited about something that was not your idea.” It is important to note, however, that over 60 faculty members serving on more than a half dozen subcommittees participated in the development of the new curriculum, and that the final version of the legislation was brought to the faculty by the faculty’s elected Committee on Academic Policy.

It is clear, however, that most faculty members do see merit in the new curriculum and are working hard with the administration to have it in place for the class of 2005. Implementing the curriculum involves several substantial logistical hurdles, of which everyone seems well aware. Planning for the proseminars seems well advanced: we heard from the committee in charge of vetting proposals that they were pleased with both the number and the suitability of courses. Everyone recognizes that designing and staffing the sophomore seminars will be more difficult - both because of their interdisciplinary nature and because mounting them (in spite of

the addition of 5 faculty FTE) is likely to force departments to cut the number of upper division courses in the major.

Assessment of the curriculum is an obvious necessity, and steps have already been taken to monitor its effectiveness. The college is applying to the Mellon Foundation for a grant to evaluate student progress in the proseminars and sophomore seminars. The Acting Dean of Faculty told us that it was the College's intention to make evaluation and assessment a regular part of administering the curriculum.

The success of the new curriculum depends on the ability to support it – not only financially and in terms of staffing, but also with related academic services: writing support, library services and resources, and especially advising. The College is stronger in some of these areas than others. Writing is valued at Hamilton; it is well supported by both individual faculty members and the Nesbitt-Johnston Writing Center. The Mellon Assessment Project Report (dated September 1, 2000) singles out writing as “a key strength” of the college. The library staff were not included in discussions of the curriculum, but the library is sufficient to support it, and library staff seem entirely willing to help in its implementation if and when they are called upon to do so.

The area of greatest concern is advising. Since the new curriculum is relatively unstructured and its requirements do not fall into the obvious patterns of the old divisional requirements, students will require attentive and knowledgeable guidance in designing their programs. Faculty and administration alike understand that superior advising must be a cornerstone of the curriculum. Unfortunately, however, advising at Hamilton is generally recognized as uneven in quality; the Mellon report labels it “a longtime weakness.” The College is taking steps to improve advising. It has made better advising one of the objectives in the Hamilton College Strategic Plan. The Acting Dean of Faculty, acknowledging that “the first year will be very difficult,” told us of plans to get things off to a good start by hand-picking advisors. An ad hoc Committee on Advising has been formed under the aegis of an Associate Dean of Faculty. This committee is already working on a handbook to help advisors, and it issued a series of recommendations in its report of September 29, 2000. These recommendations recognize several important issues. We single out the following:

1. The fact that advising has both an academic and a personal (or social) component.
2. The need to encourage and assist faculty to become good advisors.
3. The necessity of evaluating the quality of advising.
4. The need to find the best way of “counting” advising as part of the faculty work load.

Each of these issues is complicated. Each will necessitate creative adjustments to present structures and procedures.

The College must find a way to oversee and support academic advising by individual faculty members, but it must also coordinate this effort with the counseling and personal advising carried on by the office of the Associate Dean of Students. The present vacancy in the office of the Associate Dean of Students presents an opportunity to define the position of the person in charge of academic advising in line with the needs of the new curriculum.

The faculty members we talked to recognized the need for increased and improved advising, but worried about finding both the time and the information to be effective. They were also worried about how it would “count” (as service? as teaching?) and whether it would be appropriately recognized. Monitoring and assessment of advising are essential, but faculty members resist a system of student evaluation. Finding solutions to these problems will require negotiation and tact, but solutions must be found.

At the same time, we believe that advising presents not only a challenge but an opportunity to Hamilton. If the College arrives at a successful formula for integrating excellent advising into its innovative curriculum it will have created a model that will both attract creative and adventurous students and lead other institutions to follow its example.

We see both advantages and pitfalls in the new curriculum. *Among the advantages:* It is dynamic and flexible. It has great potential to attract students, and seems already to have done so. The admission office reports a 25% increase in applications this year – an improvement it attributes largely to the new curriculum. *The potential pitfalls:* The curriculum abandons the requirement that students pay attention to cultural and ethnic diversity, and it lacks any foreign language requirement. Furthermore, any curriculum of this kind risks giving its College a label of “not having any requirements.” While such a label may be attractive to students, these are not the students that the College is seeking. We believe that these potential pitfalls can be avoided, but only with careful presentation of the curriculum in College literature and by outstanding advising.

ASSESSMENT

The establishment of a new goals oriented curriculum challenges Hamilton College to establish a systematic college-wide assessment program to evaluate student progress toward achieving the prescribed goals. Hamilton has made bold and laudable efforts to embrace this challenge. Through the assistance of the Visiting Emerson Scholar and a planning grant from the Mellon Foundation, the College is moving forward to develop a comprehensive assessment program for student learning.

The first step in establishing an assessment program is to “begin or expand a dialogue on campus about outcomes assessment” (Framework for Outcomes Assessment, p1.) Through a series of workshops, seminars, visiting speakers, and individual conversations with faculty, the Visiting Emerson Scholar has engaged a significant and growing number of Hamilton faculty in discussions of various assessment techniques and how they may be applied to teaching/learning experiences. While those who are incorporating systematic assessment techniques in their courses remain small, there is a growing community of faculty, who are committed to the idea and are increasing their competence to implement assessment strategies.

In the spring of 1999, Hamilton College secured a planning grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation “to begin to develop strategies for and to secure faculty involvement in the assessment of student learning outcomes in a liberal arts setting” (Mellon Foundation Report,

September 1, 2000.) Through a series of alumni interviews, comparable alumni interviews from the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium for peer institutions, focus groups and senior surveys, the project identified Hamilton students' relative progress toward achieving the goals of a liberal arts education. These findings are consistent with the initiatives addressed in Hamilton's new curriculum. Hamilton has recently submitted a follow-up proposal to the Mellon Foundation to extend this study for the next five years. If funded, the project will seek to develop assessment techniques that will directly address learning outcomes in the Proseminars and Sophomore seminars.

Hamilton's efforts at outcomes assessment represent a good start and should continue. With a broader community embracing the notion of outcomes assessment, the College will be well positioned to move from formative to summative assessment. They will also be poised to close the loop whereby the assessment of learning outcomes influences teaching, the ultimate goal of any assessment system.

Department and program assessment at Hamilton takes the form of annual department chair evaluations and periodic external reviews. The external review process includes a departmental self-assessment followed by an external Team visit. The external Team reports are shared with the Dean of the Faculty and the Committee on Academic Policy. Departments are typically reviewed on a 10 year cycle, which may be too long given current curricular and pedagogical innovations.

Faculty assessment, outside of the benchmark reviews for tenure and promotion, is variable at best. Individual faculty are evaluated by their department chairs on an annual basis as part of the chair's annual departmental evaluation. The practice of sharing these evaluations with the individual faculty varies from department to department. Though criteria for merit raises was the topic of three department chair meetings last fall, there remain a significant number of faculty who claim not to know how these evaluations are incorporated into annual salary increases. These faculty are aware that salary increases include merit distinctions, but those distinctions are not evident nor are they explained. Faculty uncertainty persists over what the criteria are for receiving merit increases.

Given the central role that advising will play in the new curriculum, it is critical that an assessment system for advising be developed. Hamilton's goal is to move advising from the bureaucratic function of registering students to a more engaged role in academic planning and mentoring students.

Faculty are reluctant to embrace the new advising system without a clear indication of how it will be evaluated and recognized. The new advising program will require a significant increase in time for a faculty that is already stretched to provide concentration requirements and individualized learning experiences for students.

Institutional support for advising is also at issue. Currently, the advising function rests with the Associate Dean of Students – Academic. This individual is responsible for all academic aspects of student life. The recent vacancy of this position has proved difficult to fill.

The Team enthusiastically endorses Hamilton's efforts at outcomes assessment and makes the following suggestions:

- (1) Support for current programs to train faculty in assessment techniques should be continued.
- (2) Departmental program reviews should be scheduled on a 5-7 year cycle.
- (3) Annual faculty evaluations by department chairs should be separated from the review of the department and should include a discussion between the department chair and the faculty member.
- (4) Criteria for merit salary increases should be made clear to faculty.
- (5) Careful consideration should be given to developing assessment techniques to assess the quality of advising under the new system.
- (6) The College should give careful consideration to how advising will be considered in the evaluation and recognition of faculty.
- (7) The Dean of Faculty and the Dean of Students should be charged with developing a joint recommendation as to how the advising function can be integrated and supported so as to meet both academic and co-curricular needs.

FACULTY

The faculty is a group of accomplished and dedicated teacher/scholars, who give of themselves willingly in the education of Hamilton students. They are selected through national searches, they demonstrate excellence as both teachers and scholars as evidenced by a careful system of review, and they continue to grow in expertise and ability throughout their careers. In addition to teaching classes, the faculty meet with individual and small groups of students for many purposes and they provide informed guidance as students make educational decisions. The Hamilton faculty is at the heart of the educational mission of the College and the relationships between faculty and students constitute one of the most formative elements of a Hamilton education.

The Team notes many strengths in the faculty and its development and nurture by the institution. During the last decade sustained efforts to raise standards of faculty performance and to diversify the faculty have been successful. The result is a faculty of exceptional quality, which is also more representative of the population at large. There has also been an increase in the number of faculty in a proportion greater than the increase in the number of students, resulting in a student-faculty ratio of 9.5 to 1. The evaluation of faculty emphasizes teaching excellence above all else, while also giving significant importance to scholarship and collegiate service. Faculty are eligible for leave every 5 years and junior faculty can take a leave in their fourth year, allowing faculty both to augment their teaching and to continue to be productive

scholars. Close relationships with faculty are extremely important to Hamilton students, and most report wonderful examples of this happening to them.

In a time of considerable change, the faculty's perseverance and commitment have been commendable. It has adopted a new curriculum that creates many new challenges for the faculty. It continues to discuss standards and procedures for evaluation as expectations evolve. The faculty is interested in augmenting present resources available to them for teaching and scholarship, and is working with administrative officers on this matter. The faculty is deeply involved in its governance responsibilities, and is working to make the system work more reasonably and evenly. That these issues are under consideration strikes us as a sign of a healthy institution and we suggest that leaders of the faculty continue to work in earnest with appropriate administrators in these areas of faculty concern.

The Team also has some concerns. Attracting and retaining faculty of color is a significant challenge that has to be met with extraordinary initiatives. Increased advertising and taking advantage of opportunities will not alone increase the number of these faculty at a significant rate. More aggressive steps, which include non-traditional ways of identifying and attracting such faculty, might be taken. The Team notes Hamilton's decision to join the Grinnell Consortium as evidence of the institution's awareness of this need. Moreover, each department has been asked by the administration to file a plan for making special efforts to recruit faculty of color. Once on campus, these faculty members and their needs must be understood in detail and structures put into place to support their development as teachers and scholars. The difficulty of success in this endeavor must not be allowed to become an excuse. It is suggested that efforts to attract and retain faculty of color be expanded to include new strategies possible only with an increased commitment.

Though Hamilton has been more successful in attracting and retaining women faculty, and the issue of maintaining this record is less pressing or problematic, the Team expresses its hope that the College will continue aggressive efforts in this area as well.

Policies in regard to the use of adjunct faculty are under review and we suggest that the review be conducted diligently and forthrightly. Using adjunct faculty to cover for instances where faculty reduce their teaching for a limited amount of time (e.g. administrative duties or grant buy-outs) is very appropriate. But adjunct faculty should not be used routinely to partially replace faculty on leave or to allow a single area of study to be offered. In consultation with the Dean of the Faculty, departments should be encouraged to plan in ways that visiting faculty and perhaps an increase in permanent faculty permit a full curriculum to be offered by regular faculty.

GOVERNANCE

The organization of the different constituencies of the institution is effective in making a high quality education available to every student. The Board of Trustees acts according to a well formulated set of bylaws, and carries out its responsibilities with a sense of commitment and a level of scrutiny unusually high for academic institutions. With the help of his staff, the

President provides direction for major initiatives and ensures proper communication among the various constituencies. The faculty, through its system of committees, carries out its responsibilities in academic areas and is aided by various offices within the administration. Acting through a faculty committee or within the departmental structure, the faculty is free to exercise its responsibility in determining what courses are taught, what subject matter is contained in courses, and what methods are utilized to teach the courses.

There are many sources and areas of strength. The commitment of the Board of Trustees, the administration, and the faculty to engage in responsible decision-making with a deep loyalty toward the institution allows the College to successfully undertake significant challenges. Two examples of large initiatives that required full engagement at all levels are the residential life changes and the new curriculum. The College is to be commended not only for its ability to put these new programs in place, but also for the speed at which they were accomplished. In several ways Hamilton is poised to be a leader in these two areas, and this would not be the case without a working governance system and dedicated personnel.

There seems to be a fairly recent effort to ensure that appropriate input from various sectors of the College is available when making decisions. The most outward sign of this effort is the use of faculty committees advising administrators. Our view is that these changes strengthen further the College's ability to make difficult decisions, and that continued review of the situation should be monitored. A good example of a complex project requiring input from many sectors is the ongoing planning for expansion and renovation of the science facilities. This process seems to be going extremely well, with faculty, administrators, and trustees all playing effective and appropriate roles in a timely fashion.

The Team also, however, notes some concerns. We are struck by how many initiatives originate at the Board of Trustees and President level, and are subsequently worked out by the administration and faculty. While there is nothing wrong with a process starting at this level, the danger whenever such a "top-down" approach is used stems from the difficulty in keeping people properly informed during the process and promoting commitment on the part of the people who will be charged with making changes work. We heard too many times a statement that a decision might have been the correct one, but that the process used in making it and the way communication took place left people less than fully informed and therefore unable to fully understand the rationale behind the decision. We suggest that consideration be given to how the present governance structure might be used both to encourage proposals from all constituencies of the College and to involve as many constituencies as early as possible when new programs *are* being considered. One element of this consideration might involve the question of whether the present structure acts to reduce the possibility for developing strong leadership within the faculty.

While students are included in the governance system in various ways and are actively involved in many areas, their participation seems to be ineffective to some extent. Students on trustee and faculty committees spoke of being quite quiet and to some extent intimidated when it came to voicing their opinions. Whether this is due to the way meetings are run or the fact that they are only observers or some other reason is impossible to ascertain, but the fact remains that an important opportunity for significant input is being lost. In addition, we got the sense that the

students involved with these committees don't always do a good job of informing the rest of the student body about what is going on, and that in many cases the same students are involved with multiple committees. Our suggestion is that the issue of student participation in governance at all levels be investigated with the eye to implementing changes that will allow this sector of the College to participate meaningfully in the governance of the institution.

Midlevel administrators responsible for carrying out policy also appear to lack an appropriate vehicle for offering advice, suggestions, and opinions. Some means for providing a forum for the expression of these views should be considered. The dissatisfaction of the staff as evidenced by the recent survey is both deep and widespread. While the focus of this dissatisfaction is compensation, the real issue is whether the staff is seen as an important element in accomplishing the mission of the College. Conversations with members of the support staff indicated that their concerns were not without substance. While they enjoy working at the College and are dedicated to doing the best job possible, the level of compensation, the lack of a meaningful involvement in governance, and the perceived lack of appreciation for the role they play create an atmosphere of low morale. The fact that the faculty has strong participation in decision-making and that some staff are represented by a union make the perception of disenfranchisement widespread. The College has recognized some of these problems and last year made several adjustments to the compensation package. We recognize the College for these efforts, but we suggest a more aggressive commitment to staff issues be made. In such an examination of the issues, we would hope questions such as the following would be addressed: what goals in staff compensation relative to the chosen comparison group are consistent with the operating principles of the institution.

FINANCIAL

Hamilton has had the financial resources necessary to provide quality programs and services for its students. The Self-Study asserts that the College's financial condition is very strong. The Team concurs with this assertion and agrees that the College is well positioned financially to face the challenges and opportunities ahead. Three factors have all contributed to these positive outcomes. First, the College has provided its students an excellent educational program and in turn families have in the past and continue to be willing to pay a level of tuition commensurate with the quality of the program. Second, donors, especially the alumni, have provided and continue to provide generous support to the College both for operations and capital. Hamilton ranks with the best in the percentage of alumni who contribute. Third, the College has managed its physical and financial resources well. Deferred maintenance is not an issue and new facilities are planned to replace or renew those at the end of their useful life. The endowment per student places the College among the top liberal arts institutions. Expenditures for faculty compensation allow the College to compete for the best faculty available.

The College has been a very careful steward of its financial resources. The Board of Trustees and the Administration have aggressively invested the endowment assets. This has resulted in above average returns during a market cycle of historically high returns. The Board has also insisted on a spending policy that constrains the increase in endowment spending during up markets and provides a minimal growth during downturns. This policy has had at least two important outcomes. First, the College has not become dependent on a level of endowment

spending that would not be sustainable during a typical market downturn. Second, the growth in the College's wealth will enable it to undertake the renewal of the most expensive physical asset on any campus, its science facilities, through a combination of debt and capital gifts. Modernization of the science facilities is critical to enable the College to continue to meet the needs of its educational program. But as the College becomes increasingly leveraged with debt to fund its immediate capital construction projects it will need to rely increasingly on capital gifts to fund subsequent major capital projects.

The Self-Study identified two opportunities for improvement: developing three-five year budget plans and sharing more information with particular constituencies. The Team concurs with the importance of these recommendations.

The College's current vitality is indicated by the positive developments that occurred between the completion of the Self-Study, which is dated October 2000, and the Team's visit in February 2001. Of particular importance in the area of finance has been the establishment of a new faculty committee for budgeting. This Committee, which was elected by the faculty, first met in the fall. It received relevant information from the administration regarding the budget projections and made recommendations to the Officers of the College regarding operating and capital expenditures. During this time period, the College also completed upgrades to the financial administrative information systems that will enable the College to eventually make budget and current account information available to managers in a convenient on-line fashion.

The Team understands and shares the College's satisfaction with the progress it has made and suggests that the Officers of the College continue to work with the faculty to provide the faculty a meaningful role in the development of the three-five year operating and capital budget plans. The Team also suggests that the College continue the process of upgrading its administrative information systems so important data becomes readily available to end-users.

The Team is impressed with the efforts the College has made to improve faculty compensation. These efforts have been recognized externally, as well as on campus, and appear to be appreciated by the faculty. The College has also received feedback from administrative staff members that they are concerned about the level of their wages. While wages are often an important issue, wages are seldom the only issue affecting morale. It appears that the supervisors of staff members may not be communicating, interpreting, and administering the policies of the College in a consistent manner across the entire campus. The Team would suggest that the College set and communicate its goal regarding staff wages and look at ways to provide consistent supervision and treatment for staff across the campus.

LIBRARY AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

The Self-Study identifies the library as a special focus for the comprehensive review and describes at length the value of collaboration between the library and the Information Technology Services. Such attention and emphasis seems appropriate given that both operations are well organized and have strong staffs and leadership in place.

Library

Library collections are strong and appropriate for supporting the curriculum and associated teaching and learning. Collections are built through the recommendations of faculty and librarians and include an appropriate mix of electronic and traditional resources. Nearly all of the materials are included in the online catalog or are accessible through the library web page. Access to these resources was recently improved on campus and beyond through the use of new networking and authentication technologies in conjunction with ITS. In continuing to weigh the proper balance between traditional and new resources, the library may want to consider creating a position to oversee collection development.

The library also provides access to materials not owned by the college in support of student projects and faculty research. The Interlibrary Loan service is heavily used and receives compliments from students and faculty, and has established the College as generous lender. A special partnership exists with Colgate University and provides 48-hour turn around. Investigation of additional arrangements with other New York colleges, perhaps including development of a shared online catalog, should be explored. The evaluation of a new automated system should include review of its capacity to connect to similar and dissimilar systems.

The librarians recognize information literacy as an important goal that they wish to support through their instruction program. Presently, instruction is offered by reference desk questions and consultations, individual research appointments (often for senior research projects), and course-related instruction. Although students and faculty characterize these services as important, useful, and effective, the number of course-related instruction sessions seems low for a college of this caliber. Indeed, students and faculty state that most students could be better prepared to take on the senior projects that they will pursue. Faculty anticipate that Proseminars and Sophomore Interdisciplinary Seminars will offer additional opportunities for the library to prepare students to do research. This is reassuring to the librarians since unfortunately they were not consulted or involved when the new curriculum was being developed. Given the recent emphasis on the curriculum and the desire of the library director that the library be more visible and engaged in support of the educational mission of the college, this may be a good time to create regular mechanisms for the librarians to contribute to discussions of curricular planning and implementation.

The library needs to be more involved in other ways in campus and strategic planning and assessment. The draft Strategic Plan states that “a college library serves as a center for the intellectual life of an academic community.” To properly fulfill that role, the libraries must be involved with faculty and other administrators in planning and implementation. Having said that, it must be noted that the library does little assessment of its services or programs. A good first step would be to produce departmental and an overall annual report and to then move into review of the effectiveness of its activities on an ongoing basis.

Library and ITS collaboration is clearly a common goal of the directors of those two units. The recommendations in the Self-Study to encourage such coordination – that the ITS report as the library does to the Vice President for Academic Affairs/Dean of Faculty, that the

directors of the Library and ITS be placed on major academic policy committees, and that a joint Library/ITS planning group be created – seem logical. Even lacking these steps, collaborative efforts show promise. The two units are about to publish a joint newsletter that highlights faculty uses of technology as a way to inform other potential faculty users. Hamilton College will join other selective colleges in working on collaborative ways of partnering a faculty member, a student, an instructional technologist, and a librarian to develop a course in the humanities. The library and ITS will use the liaison program developed by the former to jointly approach faculty about instructional support that is available. Both units are also involved in a wireless pilot project in Burke Library, in a technology incubator project, and utilization of course management software. One matter the directors should determine in the near future is the future of the audiovisual support group. Organizationally this group is part of the library. As conventional audiovisual presentations migrate to network-provided multimedia presentations, it seems to make sense to move the audiovisual support group to ITS.

Space for library and ITS operations is severely constrained and impacts the ability of both units to accomplish their missions. Library collections will become increasingly crowded, which will require either the use of compact shelving in Burke Library or utilization of off-site storage space. The former option seems much the preferred route and seems feasible given a change in circumstances since the 1999 consultant's report on the topic. A fine rare books collection and college archives are underutilized, under staffed, and to a large extent little known due to major overcrowding. A related space issue is the future location of science collections, which are to be incorporated into Burke Library. The proximity of the science building to Burke, the benefits of centralized collections as interdisciplinary studies are being emphasized, provision of comparably strong services for all users, and staffing and budgeting efficiencies suggest that this decision is sound. ITS staff are located on two separate floors of Burke which is less than ideal. Finally, the library and ITS need but lack a hands-on instruction lab that they schedule for increasing information and technology literacy through workshops for students, faculty, and staff.

Information Technology Services

The information technology infrastructure at Hamilton College is pervasive and robust and provides a sound basis for the utilization of computing and other emerging technologies in teaching, learning and scholarship. This infrastructure includes the campus network, technology-capable classrooms, the Remote Collaboration Facility and video and multimedia production facilities as well as the fully funded faculty computer, network server and data projector upgrade and replacement programs. Most of the basic tools necessary to support the academic mission of the institution are in place.

The 1995 strategic plan for information technologies seems sound and it is notable that many of its goals have been accomplished. Those that have not are primarily due to circumstances not easily controlled. For example, the creation of an effective instructional support group to work closely with faculty has been hampered by the difficulty of attracting and retaining the necessary staff. However, recently the positions have been filled and a group that includes members of the library staff has been formed to move this effort forward. It is suggested

that this group work very aggressively to engage the faculty in employing technologies in teaching and learning.

Another example is the slow move to web-based tools for administrative computing. Though the administrative information systems seem quite functional and sufficient to support the needs of the College, the unavailability until quite recently of web-based interfaces from the vendor have hampered the development of many online tools that will eventually enhance the effectiveness and utility of administrative systems (e.g. registrarial, financial, etc.) for the whole community. This matter is rapidly being resolved.

Nevertheless, ITS has been able to move forward on some fronts. The introduction of CourseInfo as a web-based course management system, has been very well received by faculty and students alike. Also the Presidential Web Initiative, which is a collaboration of ITS and the Office of Communications, has already produced results (e.g. a redesigned College home page) and is rapidly developing a set of tools for presenting the College to external audiences electronically.

PLANNING

Since its last Middle States accreditation, Hamilton College has undertaken several significant planning efforts to reshape academic life at the College, beginning with the Residential Life decision in 1995, the establishment of a new curriculum in 2000, and the current development of a new strategic plan. In all cases the planning effort has been consistent with the institution's mission and goals.

Hamilton has in place several planning bodies; their respective roles in the overall planning process, however, need to be clarified. The Trustee Planning Committee is charged with long-range planning as it pertains to the future of the College and its educational purposes (Hamilton Self-Study, October 2000.) Concurrently, the President and the Senior Administration and the On-Campus Planning Committee have been charged with planning responsibilities. The On-Campus Planning Committee includes the President, as chair, most of the senior staff, three elected faculty, and one elected student. Its composition immediately calls into question its role relative to the senior administration in planning efforts. The issues discussed by the On-Campus Planning Committee in recent years appear to overlap with the charges of several Faculty committees. Further, the On-Campus Planning Committee is a sub-committee of the Trustee Planning Committee and reports directly to them. While a sub-committee of the Trustee Planning Committee, the interaction between the two has not been consistent in recent years.

Faculty feel that planning at Hamilton is primarily "top-down" with most initiatives being undertaken at the Trustee or Senior Administration level. Most recently, the Trustees charged the President and Senior Administration with drafting a new Strategic Plan for the institution. Hamilton faculty and students feel disenfranchised by this planning process. Both groups have limited input into planning decisions and, at best, become reactive bodies when preliminary plans are shared with them. The propensity for "top down" planning, however, may be the result of a Faculty historically not exercising strong leadership in this area.

The draft strategic plan does identify a series of objectives that are consonant with the College's mission and reinforce the goals put in place with the new curriculum. Strategic planning has reached a stage where substantive and frequent engagement of the entire College community to establish priorities and to explore resource implications of its enactment is especially critical. The College might expand and accelerate the positive steps it has heretofore taken in this area.

The Committee structure of the Board parallels that of the Faculty creating what the Team perceived as confusion over their respective charges. In response to the decision to move ahead with planning for the new science center, the Board created a Science Committee. The Board has created an Information Technology Committee, which also parallels the Faculty Committee on Information Technology. Without clarity of charge and frequent interaction, a system of parallel Board and Faculty committees risks confusion and redundancy. Views on the degree of concern over this parallel system clearly differ. The Team simply notes the potential for frustration in such an arrangement and urges that every effort be made to clarify the roles of each entity.

Hamilton has taken several significant steps in improving the annual planning and budgeting process, a process that has also been described as very centralized. The Team applauds the move to provide the Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty with greater budgetary authority and the creation of a new Faculty Committee on Budget and Finance to advise the President and report to the Faculty. Both initiatives will enhance the faculty voice in critical planning decisions.

Hamilton College should be congratulated on its foresight in Information Technology planning. Through the initiative of the Faculty Committee on Information Technology, the College recognized that an investment in technology requires continual renewal and replacement. Hamilton incorporated this recognition into its annual operating budget to provide the necessary funding.

Hamilton has many resources to support both long-term strategic planning and more targeted short-term initiatives. The Team makes the following suggestions to improve the College's planning efforts:

- (1) Clarify the roles and membership of the various planning bodies to avoid redundancy and to improve the engagement of the various College constituencies.
- (2) Faculty and student representatives on Trustee committees can provide valuable insight and should be more involved in planning discussions with the Trustees.
- (3) The Budget and Finance Committee, to be effective, should continue to be provided full information and to be engaged in budgetary discussions at an early stage of budget building.

- (4) The Faculty, through the existing committee structure, should involve itself in those areas of planning that fall within the Faculty's purview.

STUDENT LIFE

Hamilton College has created a wide range of student services demonstrating its commitment to "promoting and enhancing opportunities for education and personal growth beyond the formal classroom setting." As indicated in the self-study report, Hamilton has made a significant investment in student life, particularly focusing on following: Campus Safety, the Career Center, the Chaplaincy, Residential Life, Student Activities, Student Health Services, and the Adventure program.

The Team finds much to commend in the administration of student life of the College, particularly the talent, commitment and dedication of an active and engaged Student Life staff. The Student Life staff is generally perceived by students, faculty and administrative colleagues to be responsive to student concerns and open to student input and new ideas. Members of the community are particularly enthused about the new leadership of the Dean of Students.

Despite the positive regard in which the members of the staff are held, the Team is concerned that the Student Life staff has been occasionally left out of the loop in the decision making processes of the institution. The staff's lack of involvement with either the Diversity Task Force or the Advising Task Force suggests a lack of engagement with key issues affecting the institution. These specific examples may or may not be unique, but at a minimum they should alert the College that such a lack of involvement, even if inadvertent, can suggest a view of the importance of the educational and developmental role of the Student Affairs staff in the lives of Hamilton students.

A significant portion of the Self Study focused on the extent to which the goals of the Residential Life Decision of 1999 have been achieved. That report had at its core three primary objectives:

- to provide equality of social and residential opportunity for all students;
- to offer all students a rich variety of on-campus activities that encourages student involvement in campus life, and;
- to ensure greater integration of academic and residential life to promote the College's educational mission.

The Team commends Hamilton's vigor in implementing the Residential Life Study. The first goal of providing equity of social and residential opportunity for all students seem to have been enhanced since 1995 as a result of the elimination of private housing for fraternities. Students now comment that they have access to an impressive array of housing opportunities.

Acknowledging that many campus parties are still hosted by the private societies, the Team supports the College's desire to find ways to encourage other groups to sponsor social events.

Certainly there is evidence that the richness and variety on campus activities has grown in the past five years. Students readily acknowledge the College's efforts to provide a variety of social options that do not include alcohol.

The Team commends the trustees and administration for their commitment to building suitable spaces for socializing and late night activities; however, these spaces do not seem to satisfy the desire for informal "hangout" space to gather, meet friends and socialize. As the College moves forward with feasibility planning for such a space, they need to insure that future planning of social space draws heavily on student input. Student programming offices might be more effective were they to be located in Beinecke Student Activities Village, rather than Bristol Campus Center. Intramural sports and campus recreation are important social outlets for students and would benefit from additional support. The Team was encouraged that conversations between Student Life and Athletics to strengthen this program are underway.

The Team commends the College's approach to alcohol and the development of the "social norms" approach to alcohol and other behavioral issues. The Dean of Students' staff has recently implemented policy changes to create a safer social environment and to enhance student responsibility for social events. However, the Team noted the need for greater consistency in approach to alcohol among residence life staff.

With regard to the final Residential Life goal of ensuring greater integration of academic and residential life, there is less evidence of the College's success. Some faculty report that they are "less troubled" by student culture now than they were five years ago; students readily acknowledge the many opportunities they have for interaction with faculty (and administrators) outside the classroom. Nonetheless, with the exception of the Rogers Estate Distinguished Guest Series, many of the methods proposed by the Study to enhance residential/academic integration appear to have fallen short of their potential. While the report acknowledges that faculty/student interaction cannot be legislated, the Team suggests that the College continue to search out best practices for encouraging such interaction.

Advising is viewed as a high institutional priority: faculty, students, and student life staff all expressed overwhelming support for the importance of strong advising. The faculty role in advising is currently under review. The Team suggests that the Dean of Students and the Dean of the Faculty define more clearly the appropriate structures and positions in their two offices to support and integrate advising. Included in this should be a joint recommendation concerning the nature and placement of the position of the Associate Dean of Students (Academic). Traditionally this rotating faculty position has provided the advantage of giving Hamilton faculty an insight and connection to the work of the Student Life staff. This advantage now needs to be weighed against the difficulty of recruiting for the position and the growing expertise needed to function effectively in the role.

Although not a focus of the self-study, the Team was concerned that learning disability issues may not be adequately addressed at Hamilton. Under the best models, learning disabled students are encouraged to take a self-advocacy approach and are often the best judges of what accommodation is most useful in their academic progress. Nonetheless, support from a trained professional can often make the difference between struggle and appropriate accommodation in

the lives of a significant number of students. The Team suggests that Hamilton faculty and Student Life staff study the most appropriate model for support of learning disabled students on campus.

The Team found evidence of Hamilton's commitment to diversity and an enviable record of diversity in student recruitment. The Team was encouraged by the work currently under way to develop a plan with specific objectives and accountability to guide diversity efforts in the future. The Team was surprised and dismayed to learn, however, that no members of the Dean of Students Office were serving as members of that task force. To be sure, such service is especially difficult when numbers of administrators and staff of color are so few, and it is possible that invitations to serve were extended to colleagues who were not themselves of color. The reasons for this vacancy may, themselves, be interesting. The Team offers no interpretation, but notes, as others on campus have noted, the absence. The Team urges Hamilton to continue to make special efforts to recruit people of color to its administrative, staff and faculty ranks. Students also noted the need for enhanced training of faculty, administrators and staff with regard to diversity.

Developing goals and outcome measures for co-curricular learning can strengthen the programs and services of Student Life. Pilot projects, such as the one proposed for an extended orientation, should be supported and evaluated for impact on student development. The development of a comprehensive systematic plan to assess these outcomes will enhance the College's ability to measure the effectiveness and impact of these programs on student learning. These Student Life goals should be incorporated into the College's strategic plan.

CONCLUSION

Without question Hamilton College possesses characteristics of excellence that place it among America's finest liberal arts colleges. Its many and conspicuous strengths properly inspire confidence in its ability to pursue a bold and ambitious vision for the future. The Visiting Team has found many reasons for the College community to embrace this vision, and many sources of hope that it can be achieved. With firmness of purpose and a determination to include in the adventure all those who love this College and wish it well, Hamilton needs only to chart the course to its gleaming destination and then begin to write an exciting new chapter in its long and distinguished history.