Report to Faculty, Administrators, Trustees, and Students of

Duquesne University

7/31/2013

Prepared following analysis of the institution’s Periodic Review Report

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(Second reviewer: Mary Clark, Professor and Associate Dean for Faculty and Academic Affairs, American University Washington College of Law)
I. Introduction

Duquesne University is a private institution in Pittsburgh, associated with the Spiritan order. It has enjoyed University status since 1911, and enrolls 5900 undergraduate and 4100 graduate students. First accredited by MSCHE in 1935, Duquesne’s accreditation was most recently reaffirmed in 2008.

The reviewers were impressed by the hard work of the team from Duquesne that prepared the report, and the diversity of the team’s membership.

II. Responses to Recommendations from the previous Decennial Evaluation

The site visit team in 2008 made seven suggestions and one recommendation; the recommendation required a progress letter which was provided and accepted in 2009. The focus of the Progress Letter for Duquesne, as for many other institutions, was outcomes assessment, and in the Progress Letter and in the PRR, the University demonstrated reasonable activity and investment to regularize and improve its assessment practices. The text of the recommendation follows:

**Recommendation:** Although there is evidence that many units of the University (a) have articulated expectations for student learning, (b) are regularly engaged in assessing that learning, and (c) are beginning to use assessment results to improve student learning and/or demonstrate that students are achieving key institutional and program learning outcomes, such practices are not universal. While getting all units engaged in the assessment of student learning is a formidable task, it is important and well understood. Indeed, in its 2003 PRR Report, the University committed to having “all programs carry out systematic assessment of student learning,” with a target date of summer 2005. The 2003 PRR also indicated that outcomes assessment would be successfully integrated into the strategic and operating plans of the Institution which would then be woven into budget priorities by the time of the 2007 Middle States review. There is no evidence that this is occurring. Although it is implied that student learning assessment informs institutional decision making, there is little to indicate that assessment is being used systematically in the planning and budgeting process. The Team strongly recommends that attention be given to this matter. Progress Letter due October 1, 2009.

Duquesne appears to have a system whereby academic units are required to deliver annual reports on new assessment activities and results. Several examples were provided in the appendices, some fairly systematic but also some that appear to rely on very subjective processes. These examples speak to the high awareness and commitment to assessment at Duquesne but do not make it straightforward to track progress toward the University’s targets for consistency and universality; building or
implementing means of tracking progress might profitably be a focus for next assessment steps (which may well be part of the University’s assessment plan already).

The PRR does not address the suggestions of the 2008 document in a systematic way but returns to recommendations made by its own Self-Study document, some of which overlap with the site team’s suggestions. The document demonstrates that these recommendations have been part of Duquesne’s institutional planning since the Self-Study and that there has been progress on these needs. The document makes clear that substantial effort and progress has been made on self-study team recommendations about advisement, career services, competitiveness of faculty salaries, transparency, and diversity, among others. While the PRR was not required to and did not address the 2008 site visit team suggestions about more effective communication by and within the administration, the selection of goals and priorities for Duquesne since 2008 evinces an appropriate balance between academic and the financial, external, compliance and support needs that demand an increasing share of administrative work.

III. **Major Challenges and/or Opportunities**

Section 3 of the PRR focuses on two opportunities (enrollment management and online education) and two challenges (dependence on tuition and national trends). This is a fairly typical roster of challenges and opportunities for Universities like Duquesne and the document demonstrates reasonable effort and planning toward these issues. The University has engaged a retention initiative, appointed a director of Graduate Admissions, enhanced its international efforts, and moved the department of Educational Technology into Academic Affairs among other actions to take advantage of these opportunities. However, we note that the compliance report did raise a concern about the online offerings at Duquesne.

The University appears to be in strong shape to address its identified Challenges, and the success of its 2008-2012 Advancement campaign was impressive.

IV. **Enrollment and Finance Trends and Projections**

The sections on enrollment and finances seem thorough and raise no concerns.

V. **Assessment Processes and Results**

The assessment section details a number of important initiatives, including the University assessment plan, the Institutional Effectiveness Committee, and the system for reviewing faculty. With the annual assessment reports, and the adoption of the WEAVE system for organizing the results, Duquesne has adopted some powerful tactics to keep on track. The assessment landscape conveyed by the examples provided is a fairly typical one, with strong results from programs with external accreditation and pockets of assessment activities in non-externally accredited disciplines. The tools
that Duquesne is putting into place should help the assessment team to continue progress toward more universal assessment activity.

VI. **Linked Institutional Planning and Budgeting Processes**

This section demonstrates appropriate activity to link institutional planning and budget processes. The incorporation of market review into new program approval is noted as a strong tactic.

**Compliance Report**

As per the new Middle States procedures on Compliance with Accreditation-Relevant Federal Regulations, Dr Mark Garrison prepared a compliance report for Duquesne’s PRR, also consulting what was available on Duquesne’s website. Duquesne is among a cohort of institutions that are experiencing the Compliance report process for the first time, and their efforts vis-à-vis this new PRR process will benefit not only the University but the process.

Dr Garrison concluded that Duquesne is visibly compliant with the Title IV Cohort Default Rate requirement, and the Assignment of Credit Hours requirement. He concluded that Duquesne has not documented its compliance with the identity-verification and privacy-protection requirements. He also concluded that Duquesne has not provided the required information about transfer policies, to wit, the final authority for a graduate grade equivalent, and the terms of the University’s active transfer agreements. These reviewers concur with these conclusions and recommend that Duquesne respond to these four compliance concerns.

**Overall Conclusion**

The reviewers find that Duquesne has made progress on the Assessment program that was the subject of a 2008 recommendation, and has addressed the required material of a PRR in an informative and straightforward way. We recommend that Duquesne respond to Middle States as to the concerns raised by the Compliance reviewer. Overall, we commend Duquesne for its informative and reflective PRR, and the University’s steady and planful progress toward its goals and in the support of its mission.
The recent financial performance of Duquesne has been positive. Operating revenues were up 2.1% in FY 2011 over FY 2010 and another 1.4% in FY 2012. Net assets rose 18.2% in FY 2011 and by 2.2% in FY 2012. Duquesne’s Federal Financial Responsibility Score for FY 2011, the most recent one released, was 3.0, the highest possible.

Full time enrollment was up 0.2% in FY 2011, down 1.9% in FY 2012 and essentially unchanged in FY 2013. In FY 2012, 70.9% of Duquesne’s operating revenues came from net tuition and fees and 85.9% came from tuition, fees, room and board. In the FY 2013 budget, tuition and fees are projected to grow to 73% of operating revenues, and 89% is expected to come from tuition, fees, room and board. Duquesne acknowledges that these percentages show a higher student revenue dependence than the median of other private universities with similar ratings from Moody’s.

Enrollment is therefore critical to Duquesne’s success. Duquesne projects only very modest increases in enrollment in the next three years, but is trying to grow certain programs as well as expand its recruitment of international students. One challenge Duquesne has identified is that the mix of schools with which it is primarily competing for students has shifted over the last five years from one of predominately private institutions to one including mostly lower-cost public institutions. Duquesne therefore expects it will have to increase its financial aid expenditures faster than other parts of its budget. Duquesne is working hard on its retention programs and is also expanding its online programming.

Duquesne is also trying to expand its fundraising, in order to diversify its revenues. It has not, however, budgeted significant improvement in fundraising.

In FY 2013, Duquesne revised its endowment spending policy down from 5.3% to 5%. This more conservative approach is consistent with changes made by most colleges. It is not expected to have a significant effect on Duquesne’s budget.

One question arises from the $11 million that Duquesne reported in FY 2012 in “Additional authorized amounts” in its endowment, separate and apart from Contributions. That item is not explained, nor is it clear where it’s reflected in the Statements of Activities. Such amount is greater than the total change in net assets for the year.

One note of caution is that 59.8% of Duquesne’s modest increase in net assets in FY 2012 came from a non-recurring item—the sale of its radio station.

Duquesne funds its post-retirement benefit obligations on a pay-as-you-go basis, but does reflect the liabilities in its balance sheet. Such liabilities amounted to 2.4% of net assets at the end of each of FY 2011 and FY 2012. Duquesne uses a 5.25% discount rate to calculate future benefits. Such rate may be too high.