This progress letter is submitted to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in response to its action dated June 26, 2008 which stated:

*To reaffirm accreditation and to request a progress letter, due by October 1, 2009, documenting progress in the implementation of a comprehensive and sustained process for the assessment of student learning outcomes, including evidence that assessment results are used to improve teaching and learning and linked to the planning and budgeting processes (Standards 2 and 14). The Periodic Review Report is due June 1, 2013.*

In addition to the progress letter the University is submitting a copy of its most recent Institutional Profile (Attachment A: *Institutional Profile 2008-2009*) as required.

This progress letter documents the actions which Duquesne University has taken since July 2008 in order to meet the Commission’s standards. The University:

1) conducted a gap analysis to identify areas which were lacking in order to have a comprehensive and sustained process;
2) revised policies and procedures to effectively document assessment results and to link this information in a meaningful way to the planning and budget processes; and
3) invested additional resources to support assessment, including development opportunities for faculty and financial support for academic program reviews.

The University’s response has focused on engaging faculty to lead in addressing these issues and to ensure that degree, program, and school results are aligned with the strategic and operational planning of the University.

At the degree level, the Academic Learning Outcomes Assessment (ALOA) committee reviewed a master list of all degree programs currently offered by the University. Although the committee determined that virtually all degree programs had completed assessment plans, it identified gaps in key areas: core curriculum, Honors College, and academic advising. The committee found that, although many departments had assessment plans, there was a need for further faculty development in terms of updating plans and effectively using the results. Its review also concluded that the reporting process did not adequately document progress. As a result, assessment results of student learning outcomes did not explicitly reflect improvement in teaching and learning and linkages to the planning and budgeting processes.

The core curriculum assessment plan had been incomplete and assessment processes had not been consistently occurring. The core curriculum plan was revised and implementation began this academic year (Attachment B: *Core Curriculum Assessment Plan*). Academic advising completed its assessment plan and implementation began this academic year (Attachment C: *Academic Advising Assessment Plan*). The Honors College faculty advisory committee
conducted an extensive curriculum and program review during AY 2008-2009 and a new curriculum was adopted for AY 2010-2011. Student learning outcomes and an assessment plan for student learning are being developed by the honors faculty this year as they design the courses for the new program.

An assessment annual report form documenting student learning outcomes was developed to provide evidence that assessment results are used to improve teaching and learning and are linked to the planning and budgeting processes (Attachment D: Assessment Annual Report). The Office of the Provost developed and maintains a comprehensive listing of all degree programs and tracks submission of all annual reports. All reports are now submitted and stored electronically so that information may be shared efficiently, and the University can document improvement over time. A dedicated site has been set up on Blackboard so assessment records can be maintained and are conveniently accessible to the administration and the assessment committee.

At the program level, the Provost placed priority on establishing academic program reviews for those areas which did not engage in this important practice. Duquesne University has a large number of professional programs which are accredited by specialized accreditation bodies. These programs and the University benefit by participating in the peer review process which includes extensive self-studies and site visits by external experts. Although all graduate programs have participated in academic program reviews, a significant number of undergraduate academic programs at the University, located primarily in the McAnulty College & Graduate School of Liberal Arts and the Bayer School of Natural & Environmental Sciences, have not routinely participated in academic program reviews.

Based on consultation with the deans, the Office of the Provost developed a proposal for academic program reviews which was approved by the Academic Council and are now in effect for those programs which do not have specialized external accreditation (Attachment E: Academic Program Review Guidelines). The purpose of the academic program reviews is to maintain and strengthen the quality of Duquesne University’s undergraduate and graduate programs. The Academic Program Review Guidelines for both undergraduate programs and graduate programs explicitly require the faculty to address student learning outcomes and to document how those results link to changes in curriculum, teaching methods, and/or resource allocation (budgeting). A master calendar for conducting these reviews has been established and is maintained on the University’s internal Academic Affairs website so that the information is readily accessible for planning and budgeting.

At the School and University-wide level, the Provost initiated a change in the annual school and program report guidelines for the deans and all other academic administrators (Attachment F: school/program annual reports). The new guidelines enable the Office of the Provost to efficiently document the connection between student learning outcomes, resulting changes in the curriculum, instruction, or resource allocation, and the alignment of degrees, programs, and Schools with the University’s planning and budgeting. These guidelines are now in effect, and the Provost has received the first annual reports in this format.
The President has appointed a University-wide institutional effectiveness committee with representatives from all of the executive areas. The purpose of this committee is to provide a comprehensive approach to assessment which supports the University’s academic mission, to ensure that assessment results are used in University-wide planning processes, and to document the University’s progress throughout all of its divisions.

The Provost has provided significant additional resources to support a comprehensive assessment process:

1) a new Associate Provost/Associate Academic Vice President was hired in July 2008. The position description explicitly stated that responsibilities included expertise in working with assessment and accreditation and this was emphasized throughout the search process. This person provides consistent focus, communication and leadership on the issue of assessment directly on behalf of the Provost and reflects his commitment as the University’s chief academic officer to academic quality, accountability and stewardship of resources;

2) during AY 2008-2009 a permanent budget allocation of $25,000 annually was created to support the University-wide Academic Learning Outcomes Assessment (ALOA) committee in fostering the sustained implementation of assessment. These resources are in addition to the significant funding provided for assessment within each of the University’s ten schools and academic affairs areas;

3) the ALOA committee’s role was clarified so that it is now clear that it serves as a peer resource for developing, implementing, and refining assessment plans and for using results to enhance student learning (Attachment G: Assessment Process); and

4) the Provost committed to providing funding each year for external site visitors for the new academic program review process.

Duquesne University is pleased to submit this Progress Letter to the Commission. The University has developed a comprehensive and sustainable assessment process which documents how student learning outcomes are employed to improve teaching and learning and are linked to the University’s planning and budgeting processes.