

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

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

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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 in 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

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 identi

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 w 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 Coll

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 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. 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

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 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.

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

been made in recent years, gender equity issues remain. The Team was pleased to note that the 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 Club General

educule 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.

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 Tea

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

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

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 in 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

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- 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 thesethe

spending that would not be sustainable during a typical market downturn. Second, the growth in 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.

between the completion of the Self-Study, which is dated 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.

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

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

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.

The draft strategic plan does identify a series of objectives that are consonant with the planning has reached a stage where substantive and frequent engagement of the entire College

- (4) The Faculty, through the existing committee structure, should involve itself in

STUDENT LIFE

Hamilton College has created a wide range of student services demonstrating its

-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

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 educational mission.

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

Certainly there is evidence that the richness and variety on campus activities has grown in the
vide 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 de
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.

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
re 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

