

# **ADVANCEMENT SECTION**

## **REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION VISIT**

TO

**CASE WESTERN RESERVE**  
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FOR

**The Higher Learning Commission**  
A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

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## **I. OVERALL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION**

Case Western Reserve University (Case) at the time of the visit was in a particularly dynamic phase of operation and development. There is an expanded Vision statement that expresses high aspirations ("Case Western Reserve University strives to be the most powerful learning environment in the world. We seek to have transformational impact on all who teach, learn, discover and work here so that they are prepared and engaged to serve humanity.") There is a new president, the Board of Trustees has a reorganized structure and operations, and new leadership holds key positions across the campus. There are new structures, new emphases, and a new strategy (and more risk-taking) in the financing and planning for the changes envisioned. As an established and widely recognized private institution of higher education serving just under 10,000 students at bachelor's master's, and doctoral-degree levels, Case is engaged in moving its national and international standing and recognition to the next higher level in as many areas possible.

## **II. CONSULTATIONS OF THE TEAM**

In this Advancement Section, the HLC team of consultant-evaluators offers advice and suggestions to Case with the purpose of providing assistance to the institution in meeting challenges and building upon strengths, enhancing the institution's effectiveness and accomplishments, and advancing the institution toward its stated Vision and goals.

### **A. Learning Environments**

The central goal of becoming a powerful learning environment, indeed, the most powerful learning environment in the world, will require substantial commitments and efforts in several areas if the goal is to be realized and recognized as successful by audiences of concern beyond the Case community. Three areas that will need substantial work are assessment of student academic achievement, faculty development, and faculty recognition and reward for substantial contributions to student learning. While some units have made some progress on assessment of student learning, in general assessment is not well developed at Case, especially with regard to the ambitious goals for student learning that the University has set for itself. Hard evidence that can be useful to faculty in their teaching and to students in their academic and career planning is in short supply. Without good assessment data on learning, Case will not know how it is doing in the effort to reach its ambitious goal, and it will not be able to persuade others that it is succeeding.

To transform students as Case intends to do will require extraordinary efforts from faculty and staff. While Case faculty and staff seem eager for the challenge, they will need more than commitment and good intentions. They need to learn what is not often taught in graduate school, how to design and teach truly effective courses and how to structure learning environments that are transformative. Much will be needed beyond an ambitious mission statement, no matter what the level of initial buy in from faculty and staff. Buy in is considerable at this point and is certainly necessary, but it is not nearly sufficient for the outcomes desired.

In addition to the major initiatives in faculty and staff development noted above, Case will need to adjust the structure of rewards and the criteria for tenure and promotion for faculty. If strong, effective teaching and service are not properly recognized in annual raises and tenure and promotion reviews, critical strategic goals will not be met. Case faculty will be hard pressed in the future since they will need to have very good, if not exemplary, records in both scholarship and teaching. The University will need to recognize the stress that this will produce for many faculty and take measures to address the pressures that faculty will experience and the development opportunities that faculty will require.

#### Benchmarking

Case intends to gauge its success in the near future by benchmarking itself against certain aspirational peers. This strategy will no doubt allow the University to make significant progress in some areas but it will be difficult to match aspirational peers in a good many areas, given their resources and head start. Given the difficulty of making up ground in so many traditional areas, Case might consider developing comparative rivalries on new fronts. For example, Case might strive to become the best research university in the area of assessing student learning and development. This would fit well with the stated intention of becoming the most powerful learning environment in the world. Most rivals would be poorly prepared for competition on this front.

#### Communication Regarding Events

Several students commented about the fact that lots of interesting things are happening on the Case campus but many people don't know about them. Case might consider publicizing more widely its university-wide on-line calendar and monitor it for inclusion of events and activities throughout the campus.

#### Planning for a New Student Center

In the past two years, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and other higher education publications have highlighted a number of institutions that have undertaken major building projects to renovate old facilities or to build immense new student centers. Clearly, campuses are recognizing students' rising expectations for community space and recreational facilities as an integral part of the learning environment. As Case continues to focus on building its undergraduate community, having state-of-the-art spaces for students outside the classroom will become increasingly important. The team recommends that the institution's plan to build a new student center to replace Thwing Center remain a high institutional priority.

#### Study Abroad

The team's recommendation that Case explore ways to increase students' opportunities to study abroad is based on the president's early commitment to arts and sciences being the core of a quality undergraduate institution. In fact, many of the U.S.'s finest liberal arts institutions have embraced the study abroad experience as integral to students' undergraduate education. It is hard to imagine Case's successfully asserting itself as the most powerful learning environment in the world without very strong support for study abroad as a primary way for students to expand their perspectives, to engage in experiential learning, and to be prepared for global citizenship.

Undergraduate institutions which have placed study abroad at the center of the undergraduate experience have addressed related financial issues in a variety of creative ways, including strategically establishing a number of institutional programs abroad, channeling all tuition payments through the home institution, or guaranteeing that students can study abroad at no cost greater than that of a semester at their home institution. Much can be learned by examining best practices of institutions who are managing to send 50 percent or more of their undergraduates on a study abroad program. Financial support from the Vision Investment Plan may be warranted in order for Case to make substantial progress in this area.

To be an international university, Case must increase the number of its students, both undergraduate and graduate, who study abroad. For graduate students this could be an opportunity to pursue a special research opportunity in the student's area of dissertation, in a laboratory, for instance. For undergraduates, it could be the conventional study at a foreign university or it could be an internship abroad with a local, national, or international business/industrial/cultural organization. This is especially germane given Case's emphasis on experiential learning. Case must also bring to its campus more international students and scholars. Finally, Case might explore the possibility of a partnership with one (or more) foreign institutions of considerable repute in which respective strengths are married in a degree (or even a non-degree) program. (Note that Higher Learning Commission HLC approval is needed for most such arrangements).

## **B. Diversity**

Despite limited success in recruiting and retaining diverse faculty, staff, and students, the commitment of the institution toward diversity is reflected in several ways. Successes achieved in addressing gender equity need to be paralleled in other areas of underrepresented minorities. The commitment will certainly be enhanced if the Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity is allocated a budget for undertaking to start a new training and best practice program for the Case community and the region. Similarly, budget commitment to several other entities engaged in diversity initiatives on campus will help them increase their scope and impact. Several individuals acknowledged success from the outcomes of the NSF-ADVANCE grant and expressed a desire to have internal allocation of resources to replace the funding to ensure continuity of effort.

The institution needs to consider carefully the opportunities for scholarships for attracting qualified minority students to the Case campus. Several constituencies engaged in the effort felt strongly that adequate scholarship resources are required to successfully attract highly qualified minority and underrepresented students.

It may be in the best interests of the institution to have every new faculty member coming to Case participate in a diversity and sensitivity training program to be able to understand the Case position on diversity and to engage in responsible university citizenship.

## **C. Financial Management**

The institution should consider reducing the endowment spending rate, as it does not yet appear to have sufficient monitoring safeguards to determine in a timely way whether endowment spending is achieving or on the way to achievement of institutional goals including a return to balancing income and expenditures within the time period set for doing so. Improving the quarterly reporting package so as to be able to actively monitor and manage financial performance would be highly desirable in this situation. Also highly desirable from a fiscal management perspective would be a managed and timely evolution from the current decentralized ("each tub on its own bottom") financial management to management by a collaborative, one-university financial team that includes trustees, central administrators, and deans.

#### **D. Institutional Support for Assessment**

Throughout the team's visit, multiple constituents reported their understanding of the need for more comprehensive assessment. This was clear both in academic and administrative units and relates to the institution's assessment of the outcomes of many kinds of endeavor. The team's perception is that in order for assessment of institutional effectiveness to become more pervasive at Case, the administration will need to increase institutional support for assessment efforts. Case's new Institutional Research Office is an excellent first step. Administrative and academic units do not appear to have sufficient resources to assign staff time for regular assessment or have not assigned assessment a high priority. One piece of evidence that leads to this conclusion is the inability of the institution to sustain any ongoing assessment of reasons for student attrition. Attrition information is important for the institution to have and use, particularly as Case sets goals to increase the size of its undergraduate student body. The team recommends a strategic examination of institutional interests in regard to assessment across a broad area of activity.

Assessment of learning outcomes among schools is somewhat uneven. Health-related schools have the advantage of direct measurement through national and state Board exams. Other schools do not. Rather, the others must rely upon creatively designing direct measures that are both efficient and reasonably administered. Engineering and Arts & Sciences have a way to go in this process. Assessment of student academic achievement should be present for all degree programs, and results should influence program change.

Assessment of effectiveness and impact of interdivisional collaborations, external partnerships, and service in general is lacking. Recommendations in the appendices of the *Self-Study for Reaccreditation* should be implemented to remedy this situation.

Surveys of constituents are common, but information is less readily available regarding how the information obtained is used effectively. There appears to be room for considerable improvement here as direct and indirect assessment data must be evaluated and appropriate responses made or the effort is not useful.

The *Self-Study for Reaccreditation* contains a note to the effect that the university does not methodically calculate the value of faculty salary and other

institutional expenditures relating to research, scholarship, and creative endeavors. The institution might well improve its ability to reach ambitious goals if institutional resources and returns from this investment were more directly monitored and assessed consistent with returns from sponsored research, scholarship, and creative endeavors.

## **E. Other Topics**

### **Community Involvement**

Case is to be commended for its diligent effort and obvious success in partnering with a variety of community constituencies for the common betterment of the university, the metropolitan area in which it resides, and the global community. Essentially every school at Case has connected in beneficial ways to the needs of the community -- from broad concerns such as urban poverty (the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences) to specific issues such as the dental health of children (the School of Dental Medicine.)

While the number of activities is impressive there is room for more collaboration in services and partnerships among the various programs at Case. These are in need of a clearing house of sorts at the highest levels in the university. Regular monitoring and assessment of projects also could be of use in keeping the skills of Case faculty, staff and students devoted to the most important issues of the day.

### **Enrollment management**

Case intends to fund its new strategic objectives in part by increasing the number of students in its undergraduate student population. This will be difficult on a sustained basis, given the negative demographics in the region, unless Case is able to draw qualified students from a much wider geographic area than it has been able to do in the immediate past. The University will also need to perform a very difficult balancing act of reducing or maintaining its comparatively high discount rate while attracting both more highly qualified students in the traditional sense and more minority students to meet its diversity goals. Recent success with attracting new applicants for admission will need to be related to success in maintaining or increasing the typical yield rate as it relates to the discounts offered.

### **Libraries:**

The libraries at Case are one of the consistently positive features of the university. There is impressive collaboration and cohesion among the school libraries and the central Kelvin Smith Library. Particularly impressive were the strategic plan and six goals of the libraries and the focus on such elements as operational effectiveness, personalized services and libraries as place.

As with other major educational institutions, the library must constantly jostle for financial support. Recent Provost Opportunity Fund support and the development of the Freedman Center (digital library, language learning, and multimedia services) are examples of their success in these efforts. Nonetheless, faculty senate members on the library committee speak of a "crisis in (Case) libraries." By this is meant that the libraries need to be continuously and reliably supported to keep up with the research mission and reputation of the university. This issue, too, may be an appropriate source of

evidence-based evaluation for senior administrators and the Board of Trustees.

The SAGES program (Seminar Approach to General Education and Scholarship), interdisciplinary research and programming, and Centers such as those for Law and Medicine and Law, Technology, and the Arts are examples of both long-standing and new initiatives that cross disciplinary lines and structures. The libraries' individual collection development policies, administrative structures, and technology infrastructure and processing may need some modification to facilitate increasingly cross-disciplinary study and research effectively.

#### Research Compliance

The office of Research Compliance at Case has been receiving additional requests for training and currently has 51 percent of its resources committed to training and educational efforts. The office may use additional resources to launch effective campus-wide education and training programs. This effort will enhance efforts to minimize non-compliance incidents and should be supported by the institution.

#### Support for Implementation of SAGES (Seminar Approach to General Education and Scholarship)

A recurring theme during the team's site visit to Case was the importance of the new SAGES general education program in revitalizing its undergraduate arts and sciences presence. In addition to widespread excitement and enthusiasm about SAGES, the team heard from several quarters a deep-seated apprehension about whether the administration is committed to providing sufficient financial support for this very ambitious project. Case must find a way to deliver sufficient resources to insure SAGES' success since the program will be the foundation of both a robust arts and sciences program and enlightened and broad professional programs of all kinds.

It is also heartening to note that faculty as far removed as those in the School of Dental Medicine participate in SAGES. Team members encourage more such interdisciplinary faculty participation in the SAGES program inasmuch as it serves all undergraduate students.

#### Staff Development:

Several meetings were held with various segments of staff. These included elected and volunteer leadership, general staff, and staff administrators. There was consensus among these groups that the recent reorganizations of Human Resources have been purposeful and effective. Staff members seem pleased with their overall benefits and participation in the life of the university as reported by a very recent environmental survey of staff in which there was a 75 percent participation rate.

There also is a consensus among the staff that more work needs to be done on supervisory and management training for staff members. Attention needs to be given among all supervisors to an equitable access for staff to education and training opportunities, many of which are only available during customary work hours. This obviously requires that supervisors be flexible with staff hours. Attending to these staff development concerns should be a specific point of evaluation for senior staff administration.

#### Student Evaluations of Courses and Faculty

At Case, student evaluations of courses and teachers are still done in the traditional (and slow) way by pencil and paper. Many universities have moved to web-based course evaluations. These have nearly instantaneous turn-around time and allow all student comments to be read. Student anonymity is preserved better than with hand-written comments since faculty members can often recognize student hand-writing.

### **III. RECOGNITION OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS, PROGRESS, AND/OR PRACTICES**

Case Western Reserve University has made demonstrable progress since the last comprehensive visit while weathering some administrative change and upheaval. Particularly impressive, however, is the ambitious enhanced Vision achieved under the president's leadership and plans and changes underway to move the institution toward achievement of that vision. In recognition of significant accomplishments and progress, the following examples are cited.

The SAGES (Seminar Approach to General Education and Scholarship) approach to general education was approved as a pilot program for Arts and Sciences students and was soon expanded to include students in Engineering, Nursing, and Management. The new president of the institution urged implementation for the entire undergraduate student body upon conclusion of the pilot program; overwhelming faculty approval was given, and the program is scheduled for implementation in the fall of 2005. While the design reflects some modification of the pilot program, it will feature seminars taken in each of the first three years, a required Writing Portfolio, a breadth requirement of six courses, and a capstone experience in the senior year. The program grew out of the institution's intention to incorporate research and experiential learning into general education, among other purposes, and its design is bold and exciting.

Case interdisciplinary collaborations and community partnerships are a significant achievement in number and variety, involving as they do most of the schools and the college and a great variety of partners and recipients of services. Under the leadership of Case, as the only medical school in Cleveland, all the surrounding hospitals and clinics have been brought into partnerships so that health care outreach goes to 80 percent of the hospital population.

Also impressive are the growth in external funding (nearly doubling in the last five years) and the growth in technology transfer with emphasis on start-up and licensing to regional companies, benefiting the regional economy as well as the institution.