

**Report to Faculty, Administrators, Trustees, Students**

**Of**

**State University of New York College at Cortland**

**Prepared following analysis of the institution's**

**Periodic Review Report**

**First Reviewer:**

**Warren Sandmann  
Vice President for Academic Affairs  
William Paterson University  
August 1, 2017**

**Second Reviewer:**

**Brenda Sanders Dede  
Associate Vice President, Academic Affairs  
Clarion University of Pennsylvania  
August 1, 2017**

## **I. Introduction**

The State University of New York College at Cortland is a member of the State University of New York (SUNY) system. As with many state colleges and universities, the College has a history as a normal school, growing to state teachers' college and then to a comprehensive College within the SUNY system. The College has an enrollment of approximately 7,000 students, and operates primarily as a residential campus for traditionally aged students, though it does have viable graduate education programs. The College is generally stable in enrollment, but has experienced shifts internally, as education programs have seen declining enrollments, with shifts to social science and professional programs. Senior leadership has also been stable, though two senior administrators were new beginning in 2015. The College underwent decennial review in 2012, and as part of that review process, two recommendations were made to the College, both of which are addressed below. The periodic review report submitted by the College addresses recommendations from the 2012 decennial review, and addresses recommendations made by the College as part of that process. The readers thank the College for the quality and thoroughness of the report, as well as the clear documentation in the report of a broad, cross-College representation in the development of the report.

## **II. Responses to Recommendations from the Previous Decennial Evaluation**

### **Responses to 2012 Evaluation:**

**Recommendation 1:** The College should coordinate the various financial plans into a multi-year planning document that will align with its carefully crafted strategic direction.

SUNY Cortland as an institution has engaged in numerous activities to address this recommendation. As directed by the President, and under the management of the Institutional Planning and Assessment Committee (IPAC), the College has developed a coherent and unified planning document and process with clear outcomes and indicators that will allow for ongoing evaluation and assessment. There is also evidence that this planning document is tied to budgeting activities, with a related committee that is tasked with reviewing the budgeting process and ensuring that the budgeting process is aligned with the goals and is part of the planning process. The College has also implemented a process to tie divisional plans and goals to the College-wide planning document. The relationship between planning and budgeting is strongest in the review and allocation of new strategic funds. The relationship between planning and budgeting is not as apparent when it comes to ongoing and base budgeting. It is also not clear from this report that there has been assessment of this process to ensure that planning and budgeting truly are linked. It may be that the process is still in the beginning stages. This recommendation has been adequately addressed. The readers do recommend that the College document the assessment of this new process to make sure that it "closes the loop" on the planning, budgeting and assessment cycle, and that evidence of assessment tied to planning and budgeting, for both new and ongoing funding, be provided as part of the College's next review by Middle States.

**Recommendation 2: Measurable goals, objectives, and student learning outcomes should be developed and assessed in all academic programs—regardless of external accreditation—at the course, program and unit levels, with the goal of creating and maintaining a culture of continuous improvement with regard to all of Cortland’s strategic goals and priorities.**

The report from the College clearly documents that goals and a plan for ongoing assessment and evaluation that can lead to a culture of continuous improvement has taken place. The College redesigned an existing committee to develop the Student Learning Outcomes Committee, charged with overseeing the process. That committee has developed and implemented a process, however the report does not provide evidence of implementation of that process. Again, while this may still be in the beginning stages of implementation, it is important to do more than plan. Ongoing assessment that leads to a culture of continuous improvement requires the action of assessment, the review and evaluation of assessment results, and evidence that the assessment results are used as part of the planning and budgeting process. This recommendation has been adequately addressed in terms of development; however, the readers recommend that the College provide documented evidence of ongoing assessment, review and analysis of student learning outcomes, and evidence that assessment results are used in the budgeting and planning process as part of the College’s next review by Middle States.

#### Responses to 2012 Self-Study self-recommendations

As part of the PRR, the College identified numerous self-recommendations as part of the 2012 self-study, and provided updates and progress report on these self-recommendations. It is clear from this section of the PRR that the College and its community members took both the self-recommendation process and the review process seriously. The self-recommendations are clearly connected to the mission of the College and address significant areas at the College. This section of the PRR report also seems to indicate that the College may have been a bit over-ambitious in identifying so many self-recommendations, as the majority of these self-recommendations are in different stages of progress, and some identified as “in progress” are more likely better conceived as “ongoing” rather than “in progress.” Overall, this section of the PRR provides evidence that the College is continually engaged in thoughtful reflection and planning, and that the College would benefit from focused attention to specific goals in these self-recommendations. This review will highlight some areas of strength and some suggestions for focus and continued attention.

- The College has addressed the alignment of campus strategic planning with the SUNY system strategic plan.
- The revision of the annual report process to enhance student learning outcomes reporting is well underway but, as in other areas, is still a plan and will need documented evidence of student learning outcome assessment and evaluation.
- Data analysis, including comparative data on new first time students and transfer students, satisfaction measures and academic support measures, is also planned and will need continued attention.

- The SUNY Seamless Transfer initiative may mitigate the need to analyze transfer student readiness, but that information would still be important so that the College could identify potential needs for academic support of transfer students.
- COR 101 (New FT) and COR 201 (new Transfer) experience programs are good examples of support for all students, and the COR 201 for transfers is a very good idea.
- Activities such as institutionalizing high impact practices and increasing interdisciplinary collaborations are perhaps better conceived as ongoing rather than in progress.
- The goal to increase the number of full-time tenure track faculty, reported as in progress, provides evidence that does not appear to match the goal, as the data seems to report faculty replacement hires, not new hires—but perhaps the data is just not clear.

Overall, based on the number of these self-recommendations that are shown as in progress, the College may wish to review the number of these self-recommendations and focus on those that are most central to the new strategic planning document and the four goals of the College.

### III. Major Challenges and Opportunities

The College has clearly identified the major challenge facing it (and so many other similar institutions in geographic areas facing declining populations of traditional aged students). The College also faces challenges based on its history and heritage as a school for teacher preparation, as that field experiences declining demand and an ever-changing political and legal climate for teacher education and accountability. The College notes this, appropriately, as a challenge at both the undergraduate and graduate level. In response to this challenge, the College has identified potential areas for growth in health sciences, social sciences and professional programs. The College also is clearly aware that growth in some fields and disciplines is difficult based on lack of facilities and faculty expertise, as well as high costs for some new programs (engineering, for example). While aware of these challenges, and offering some evidence of new and revised curricular programs, this report does not clearly address sufficient actions that the College is undertaking; there is much analysis and reporting of plans (and discussion of the potential barriers to new activities), but insufficient evidence of a strategic College-wide plan to address these concerns. Stable enrollment is not necessarily a bad thing in an era of declining enrollment nationwide, but the demographic data for that region (and the northeast in general) does not provide much hope for growth in the absence of strategic and significance changes. The readers suggest that a more systemic approach to addressing enrollment (new students, new and redesigned programs, and retention of current students) would be advisable for the College.

The College has also identified faculty and student diversity as a challenge, and data provided in the report supports this as a challenge. There has been good improvement in gender diversity at the faculty level, but little in other areas of diversity. As with enrollment, the report accurately identifies the challenges, but is less specific in terms of potential solutions. Making the search process more sufficient and “growing your own” are good ideas, but there is once again a need for a clear and systemic approach to addressing the issue of a diverse faculty, staff and administrative team, as well as developing a more diverse student body. This need, diversity in students, is tied to the enrollment challenges as

well. Demographics once again show that any growth in student enrollment will come from enrolling students that are more diverse.

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

The College reports slight declines in overall student enrollment, with more significant declines at the graduate level. Graduate education is a much smaller proportion of total student enrollment, so shifts in that population have a smaller impact on overall enrollment. The College plans for and projects stable to slightly lower enrollments through the 2019-20 academic year, and the College does not have (nor desires to have) any plan for significant enrollment growth. The decision to not seek significant enrollment growth is based on a desire to not have a negative impact on student services, residence halls and classrooms. To meet projections of a stable to slightly lower enrollment, in light of demographic challenges described elsewhere in the report, the College has developed new graduate and undergraduate programs to attract new students, and has under development additional programs at both the undergraduate and graduate level. The College has also added to its recruitment staff. The very recent introduction of the Excelsior Scholarship program for New York residents is projected to assist the College in meeting its enrollment plans, though the College notes there will be increasing completion for a diminishing number of potential students, and the College desires to maintain its academic standards. The report presented by the College in this section is not clear about the financial impact of this enrollment plan. As the College moves forward with this enrollment plan, it will be vitally important to monitor enrollment trends. This includes looking at new enrollment, as well as addressing student retention efforts, which are discussed in another section of the report. The readers suggest that the College provide a more thorough analysis of the financial impacts of this enrollment plan as it prepares for its next visit from Middle States.

#### **V. Assessment Processes and Plans**

This area was recommended for attention in the 2012 visit, and the College has engaged in careful and deliberate discussions to make changes in the assessment process, the alignment of planning, budgeting and assessment, and the necessity of student learning outcomes and outcome assessment for all academic programs, including those not part of a disciplinary accreditation program. The College provides in this section of the report a chart that illustrates the alignment between planning, assessment and budgeting. At the College level, the SUNY Cortland Strategic Plan provides an overall structure to planning activities. The Strategic Plan provides guidance at the divisional and departmental level for operational plans and priorities. Assessment activities allow the College to evaluate the initiatives and activities guided by these plans, and budgeting decisions are then made in response to the assessment results. While some of this process is still just being implemented (for example, the annual reports for 2016-17 will ask for specific outcomes on student learning and program effectiveness), others have been

implemented and provide evidence that the College is engaged with this aligned planning, assessment and budgeting model. The College has created new offices and new academic and support programs, has redesigned existing positions to better serve the needs of the College based on analysis of assessment results, and has increased access to and use of data in decision making. Specifically concerning student learning outcomes, the College mandates that all academic departments have documented assessment plans, all course syllabi include student learning outcomes, and course and program proposal forms require student learning outcomes. The College is also developing a process for the College Catalog to include student learning outcomes. As noted above, the 2016-17 academic year was the first year that all departments were asked to address student learning as part of the annual reporting process.

Assessment of the general education program is more advanced than overall student learning outcome assessment, with data collected, analyzed and used to make and suggest changes to the general education program. The readers are pleased to see the attention to student learning outcomes, but as this is still in the beginning stages, the readers recommend that the College, as it prepares for its next visit from Middle States, document academic department reporting of student learning outcome assessment, and document how those assessment results are used in the budgeting and planning processes for the College.

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

The need for alignment between planning and budgeting (with assessment and evaluation) has been reported in various portions of the College report, and the readers have commented upon the specific areas that touch upon linked planning and budgeting. The College, in this section of the report, supplies numerous examples of new initiatives, funding changes and other activities that have taken place over the past few years. While these new initiatives are important and clearly described, what is not clear in this section of the report is connection between planning and budgeting. This may just be a matter of style in how this section of the report was crafted, but it is important to not just provide examples, but to provide examples that support the stated claim that there is improved alignment and linking between planning and budgeting. The College once again provides a clear and practical chart that describes the way planning and budgeting is linked (and will be linked in the future) but the College is less clear in how the decisions about all the new initiatives and activities were made. The linkage is not readily apparent. There is much more discussion and clarity when it comes to discussion of the budget model moving forward, so it is clear that the College has a plan for a more well-aligned budgeting and planning process. The discussion of the connection between state resources and College resources (which would have made Section IV of the report more effective) shows the need for aligned budgeting and planning, and offers evidence that the College understands the need for a linked budgeting and planning model.

## **VII. Conclusion**

SUNY Cortland has addressed the specific recommendations made as part of the 2012 decennial visit, and it is clear from the report that the College has taken seriously the need to better align planning, budgeting and assessment. The College has established thorough processes for both aligning planning and budgeting, and for making sure that assessment and evaluation, including student learning outcome assessment, is taking place, and that assessment results are used in the planning and budgeting process. The College also demonstrates that it is aware of the challenges it faces, especially in terms of enrollment and of the need to increase the diversity of the student body and the faculty, staff and administration of the College. The College will need to make sure that the processes put in place are fully implemented, and that ongoing assessment and evaluation take place so that data can be used to create a culture of continuous improvement for the College.

As readers of this report, we made the following recommendations:

1. That the College document the assessment of the process of tying college, divisional and departmental planning and budgeting together to make sure that it "closes the loop" on the planning, budgeting and assessment cycle, and that evidence of assessment tied to planning and budgeting, for both new and ongoing funding, be provided as part of the College's next review by Middle States. (Standard 7)
2. That the College provide documented evidence of ongoing assessment, review and analysis of student learning outcomes, and evidence that assessment results are used in the budgeting and planning process as part of the College's next review by Middle States. (Standard 14)
3. That the College, as it prepares for its next visit from Middle States, document academic department reporting of student learning outcome assessment, and document how those assessment results are used in the budgeting and planning processes for the College. (Standard 14)

We also make the following suggestions:

1. That a more systemic approach to addressing enrollment (new students, new and redesigned programs, and retention of current students) would be advisable for the College.
2. That the College provide a more thorough analysis of the financial impacts of its enrollment plan as it prepares for its next visit from Middle States.

## **Reviewer's Report**

The SUNY Cortland is a part of the State University of New York (SUNY). It is a comprehensive master's institution with a total enrollment of roughly 7,000 students with 64 undergraduate majors, 27 master's programs, and 5 advanced study certificates.

After carefully analyzing the available financial material for the college, I find that the overall condition appears relatively stable. It is somewhat challenging to review the financial data because Cortland is a part of the SUNY system and the system does not provide individual audited financial statements for its constituent institutions. Therefore, I reviewed various data in order to gain an understanding of Cortland's financial condition. So, while deep financial ratio analysis is not possible at the institution level, I am able to review high-level information.

A review of Cortland's data shows that their state support has been relatively flat but with a modest increase of 1.5% slated for FY 2019-20. Cortland is considering a tuition increase of approximately \$300 per year. This increase will help to offset potential increases since state support is subject to change without notice due to tax revenue shortfalls. Cortland uses an institutionalized budget planning process that helps to provide a stable framework for budget planning. The President of Cortland created an Institutional Planning and Assessment Committee that includes all stakeholders to link planning and the budget process to outcomes. This included, reviewing on-going operational funds, funds for divisional plans, fund for additional and distinct work to support progress on institutional priorities and funds for unanticipated and emergent needs as deemed necessary. In addition, Cortland is planning to implement a zero-based budget every four years, which will allow for adjustments if there are changes in the financial landscape.

Cortland also uses sustainability and green technology cost saving measures like solar energy and have become LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified. These and other cost-saving measures help to overcome slightly declining enrollment. However, there is the potential for receiving assistance from the Excelsior Scholarship which was recently approved by the State that could provide scholarships for families making under \$100,000. This assistance should bolster enrollment prospects and possibly help to correct the enrollment slides of the recent past.

Overall, Cortland maintains a reasonable financial structure that reliably depicts operating capabilities. They also make good use of instructional planning models within a well-defined budget process. Therefore, given the relatively modest changes each year, the enrollment targets and estimates appear realistic and fairly represent the basis for financial estimation and planning. As with the landscape of higher education, enrollment must be monitor as revenues can fluctuate year or year and hence cause a sudden deficit in operating operations.



August 23, 2017

Dr. Elizabeth Silboski, President  
Committee on Periodic Review Reports  
3624 Market Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor West  
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Dear President Silboski and Members of the Committee on Periodic Review Reports:

Thank you to the reviewers of SUNY Cortland's PRR Report, Dr. Warren Sandmann and Dr. Brenda Sanders Dede. In their report, the reviewers list three recommendations regarding the clarification of specific assessment evidence of linking strategic planning and budgeting and student learning outcomes that need to be provided during our next Middle States visit (Standards 7 and 14), as well as suggestions regarding enrollment, which will also be addressed at the next visit from Middle States.

I have discussed the reports with the President's Cabinet and key constituents of the campus. We concur with the reviewers' recommendations and suggestions.

Implementation of SUNY Cortland's revised strategic plan and linking to budgeting initiatives is underway, and the campus is in the process of collecting and analyzing our first set of data using the new format. In addition, meetings of the Institutional Planning and Assessment Committee (IPAC), Budgeting Committee and the SLO Committee are scheduled to resume in early September, once faculty return to campus. We are confident that we will be prepared to provide the full cycle of assessment evidence requested by the time of our next institutional visit, in 2021-22.

The College was also notified that, due to a technological problem, the reviewers were unable to open one of our documents for the Verification of Compliance (Part 3--"Official Cohort Default Rate April 2013"). As requested, we are resubmitting that document, this time in two formats, PDF and Word.

SUNY Cortland takes the Middle States assessment process very seriously. We welcome the opportunity for thoughtful self-reflection that enables the campus to continuously improve the delivery of a quality academic experience to our students. On behalf of the College, I greatly appreciate your comments and review.

Yours truly,

Erik J. Bitterbaum  
President

Enc/VOC