

Report to the  
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students  
of  
ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY  
Queens, NY 11439

by  
An Evaluation Team representing the  
Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Prepared after study of the institution's self-study report  
And a visit to the campus on March 19-22, 2006

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**This report represents the views of the evaluation team as interpreted by the Chair; it goes directly to the institution before being considered by the Commission. It is a confidential document prepared as an educational service for the benefit of the institution. All comments in the report are made in good faith, in an effort to assist Saint John's University. This report is based solely on an educational evaluation of the institution and of the manner in which it appears to be carrying out its educational objectives.**

AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

President/CEO  
Donald J. Harrington, C.M.

Chief Academic Officer  
Julie Upton, R.S.M., Provost

Chair of the Board  
Denis P. Kelleher  
Founder & Chief Executive Officer  
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## **I. Context and Nature of the Visit**

St. John's University was founded in 1870 by priests of the Congregation of the Mission (the Vincentians) to educate New York City's immigrants and their children. Catholic, Vincentian and metropolitan have been constitutive elements of the University's mission and identity since then. Today this doctoral/research intensive institution "is one of the largest Catholic and urban institutions in the nation, with a remarkably racially and ethnically diverse population of more than 20,000 students, many of them the first in their family to attend college and a full and part-time faculty of almost 1,500" (*Self-Study Report, Spring 2006 [SSR]*, p.1). Six schools and colleges offer associate, baccalaureate, masters, doctoral and professional programs. St. John's has no branch campus. The University does however have four additional locations, three of which opened relatively recently. The recently opened locations are Rome, Italy, (1995), Oakdale (1998) and Manhattan (2001). Only the fourth location, on Staten Island, did the team, as directed by the CHE staff, visit.

Since your last institutional self-study and Middle States evaluation team visit ten years ago the reality that is St. John's University has made so many and such significant quantum leaps forward that with justifiable pride and accuracy you rightly call yourself "a new St John's" (*SSR*, p. 1). Among the most influential achievements of this planned growth and resulting striking changes are: three new campuses, significant expansion of the pool of potential students by opening the institution's first-ever resident halls (1999, 2000 and 2002) and thereby making possible a dramatic move from no resident students to a resident community of more than 2,400 students on the Queens campus in six residence halls and two off-campus apartment buildings, increasing applications for undergraduate admissions from approximately 7,000 ten years ago to over 23,000 this year, establishing a university-wide wireless network (2003), implementing a university-wide core curriculum for undergraduates (2001), completing a review of all academic programs (2003) and adding additional recreational and sports facilities (2000, 2002 and 2005,) the institution's first free-standing Church on the Queens campus (2004) and new multi-purpose (1998) and academic (2004) buildings on the Staten Island campus (*SSR*, p.2). No longer was the main campus "a group of buildings entirely surrounded by parking lots" (*SSR*, p.7).

The transformation of St. John's into the new university that it is today resulted from the excellence of your 1995 institutional self-study, from the insightfulness of the goals and strategies set forth in your first strategic plan completed early in 1995 and from your highly successful implementation of suggestions and recommendations contained in both. If you as successfully implement the suggestions made in your 2006 self-study and your 2004-2008 strategic plan, the reality of the new St. John's that you are indeed creating will be a jewel of an institution in our nation's higher education community.

From our meetings with members of the Steering Committee, student body, board of trustees, faculty, administration and staff and from our reading of your self-study, it is

apparent that St. John's viewed this 2005-06 self-study as an opportunity to continue the remarkable transformation begun since your last self-study, which in your own judgment "was one of the most meaningful self-assessments in the institution's history" (*SSR*, p. 3). We commend you for focusing in this self-study on four topics that challenge your continued improvement rather than on topics that merely boast of your past accomplishments. Such conscious continuity in your institutional self-studies and strategic plans has enabled you to approach this accreditation process as a means "to strengthen and sustain the quality and integrity" of your programs, making St. John's "worthy of public confidence and minimizing the scope of external control" (*Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education [CoEiHE]*, p.iv). The team acknowledges and commends you for the extent to which both the 1995 and 2006 self-study documents have provided a framework for changes, "reinforcing the linkage between the documents and, most significantly, underscoring how planning and self-study have been integrated within the St. John's culture" (*SSR*, p.113). The Evaluation Team commends you for your enthusiastic embrace of the self-study process.

Your 1995 selected topics self-study was so profound in its institutional consequences that with the approval of the MSA Commission on Higher Education you choose to once again do a selected topics self-study in preparation for our 2006 visit. The topics selected and addressed in your self-study were four: mission with a focus on Vincentian mission, assessment with a focus on learning outcomes, technology and its impact and residence life and its impact. The standards from *The Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education* that you substantially addressed in your self-study were also four: Standard 1: Mission, Goals and Objectives, Standard 7: Institutional Assessment, Standard 12: General Education and Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning.

As called for by the *Guidelines for Generalist Evaluators Conducting a Document Review for the Selected Topics Model* (appendix 2, page 52) of the *Handbook for Conducting and Hosting an Evaluation Visit*, "the review of compliance with those accreditation standards **not** addressed within the selected topics occurs in a manner that distinguishes and separates it from the evaluation team visit focused on the selected topics." Consequently during the preliminary visit of the Visiting Team Chair to St. John's University on October 24-25, 2005, two generalist evaluators joined the Chair to review "existing documentation relative to those accreditation standards that the selected topics self-study either does not address at all or only partially addresses" and "to verify institutional compliance with those standards that are not substantially reflected in the self-study."

Based on the documentation that they reviewed and St. John's had assembled, the Generalists certified that "the University is in compliance with the Standard not addressed (Standard 6) within the Selected Topics of the Self-Study and in those areas of the other standards addressed partially [2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 13] within the Selected Topics of the Self-Study." The letters certifying St. John's University's compliance with these ten (10) standards addressed only partially or not at all in your self-study are attached to this team report.

## **II. Affirmation of Continued Compliance with Eligibility Requirements**

Based on a review of the self-study, other institutional documents and interviews, the team affirms that St. John's University continues to meet eligibility requirements 1-7 (*CoEiHE*, p.xi).

## **III. Compliance with Federal Requirements: Issues Relative to State Regulatory or Other Accrediting Agency Requirements**

Based on reviews of the self-study, other institutional documents and interviews, the team affirms that St. John's University's Title IV cohort default rate is within federal limits.

## **IV. Standards Addressed Substantively within the Selected Topics**

### *Standard 1: Mission, Goals, and Objectives*

Based on review of the self-study, other institutional documents and interviews with members of the student body, board of trustees, faculty, administration and staff, the team developed the following conclusions relative to this standard.

St John's University meets this standard. There are no team recommendations and no team requirements.

### Summary of evidence and findings

St. John's University has a well-defined mission that emphasizes its historic values and its distinctive Catholic, Vincentian and metropolitan nature. The Mission Statement is framed and displayed prominently in University offices, included within the University *Bulletins* and printed on commencement programs and other appropriate documents. The mission is operationalized through six core values (*SSR*, table 2.1, p. 13) that are both incorporated in the University's academic offerings and co-curricular activities and also are foundational to the development of its policies and practices. The mission is transmitted through the Core Curriculum, which was developed by faculty in the five undergraduate colleges and implemented in 2001. The Core Curriculum connects to the Catholic, Vincentian and metropolitan emphases particularly through the required theology courses and the Discover New York first year experience course. Academic service learning, although not required, is used extensively to provide an opportunity for application of the mission to real world experiences.

The administrative structure supports the mission through the Executive Vice President for Vincentian Mission and Branch Campuses, the Vincentian Mission Council and the Vincentian Mission Plan. The Campus Ministry program is well integrated

throughout the campus and fosters student affective development and transmission of the mission. Other noteworthy initiatives include the Mission-oriented Support Programs for Enrolled Students, Mission-oriented Support Programs for Pre-college Students, and Vincentian Center for Church and Society Programs/Resources. Also, St. John's through its Offices of Human Resources and University Ministry is in the process of developing a Vincentian Certificate program for administrators and staff, which program will be administered in conjunction with other Vincentian institutions including DePaul University and Niagara University. In our conversations with St. John's personnel, including those on its Staten Island campus, we found repeatedly that the Board of Trustees, faculty, administration and staff are "living the mission" particularly its Vincentian tradition of service and justice to the poor. As one administrator on the Staten Island campus observed, the Vincentian priests "are not the sole custodians of the Vincentian mission." This conviction was echoed by a Queens campus student who spoke of the responsibility of transmitting the mission as "our challenge."

As indicated in your self-study, "The *St. John's Strategic Plan 2004-2008* articulates an ongoing commitment to 'maintain the unique strength of our ethnic and religious diversity while monitoring our student profiles to ensure that: we reflect national trends for gender; our commuter ethnic profile mirrors the New York City college-bound population; and we retain a critical mass of Catholics in a spiritual, values-based culture'" (SSR, p.24). Central to your inclusive mission is an abiding commitment to financially needy students, defined specifically in terms of eligibility for Pell Grants. For example, "... 95% of St. John's undergraduate students receive some form of financial aid. Over the last ten years the University's financial aid budget has increased 372% from \$19.4 million in 1996 to \$92.2 million in 2005. As evidence that these funds provide access, approximately 40% of all first year students have been Pell-eligible during each of the past ten years" (SSR, pp. 23-24). The team with admiration points out that we know of no other institution of higher education that explicitly states, as a goal central to successful achievement of its mission, maintaining the number of Pell-eligible students at over 35% of total first year enrollments.

As you have accurately pointed out, St. John's "is confronting a precipitous decline in the number of its sponsoring group, the Vincentian clergy" (SSR, p.2). Confronted with this reality, the challenge for St. John's is to institutionalize permanent conversations sharing within the various university constituencies the Vincentian mission with the distinctive vision and values inherent in it. Such permanently institutionalized shared conversations lead to shared institutional self-understanding of the vision and values that by your mission are to shape institutionally what you do, why you do it and how you do it.

In summary the current mission statement, approved by the Board of Trustees, March 15, 1999, is clear, inclusive and comprehensive.

### Commendations

The mission statement of St. John's University is timeless, reflecting its historic

values and establishing the unique strengths and vision of the new St. John's. The mission statement is prominent within the St. John's community and appears to permeate all levels of the institution. We highly commend you for your university-wide recognition of the decline of the Vincentian clergy, for recognizing how important successfully meeting this challenge is to St. John's and for your institutional commitment to see that "the University's mission, and, in particular, its Vincentian mission, is given form and substance through its academic offerings; institutional policies and practices; administrative structure and organizational initiatives; and physical facilities" (SSR, p.14).

We commend St. John's for your bold commitment to continued inclusivity and for the policies and practices that you have adopted to achieve your great success in this area of access as defined by maintaining the level of Pell eligible students at approximately 40% and thereby by reducing the digital divide for these students through a campus-wide laptop program.

### Suggestions

The Team suggests that St. John's develop deliberate strategies at every level for institutionalizing in a permanent way the sharing of its Vincentian traditions with faculty, administration and staff as well as with its students. We urge you to pursue the recommendation in the self-study to provide more intensive orientation and professional development opportunities for faculty members (including part-time faculty) in incorporating the mission into their disciplines and delivery of instruction, perhaps using the mentoring program as a model. We suggest you consider the feasibility of introducing the Staten Island model of the Vincentian Initiative to Advance Leadership (V.I.T.A.L.) program for faculty and staff across all five of campuses. We encourage the University community to extend and advance the broad and intensive discussions that have already taken place, especially regarding the Vincentian tradition and charism, to further explicate and clarify both the enduring values of St. John's traditions and the aspirations and expectations for the "new St. John's."

We suggest particular attention be given to the notion of a required academic service-learning experience to ensure that the very positive nature of this activity is not lost should it be made a requirement. We offer the reminder that student service learning projects alone are unlikely in and of themselves to ensure the long-term transmission of the history, significance and daily application of the Vincentian tradition to the larger St. John's community of faculty, staff, students and graduates.

### *Standard 7: Institutional Assessment*

Based on review of the self-study, other institutional documents and interviews with members of the student body, board of trustees, faculty, administration and staff, the team developed the following conclusions relative to this standard.

St John's University meets this standard. There are no team recommendations and



no team requirements.

### Summary of Findings

The development of the current strategic plan has established institutional priorities that are well-documented across all areas of the University and are supported by the board of trustees, administration, faculty, staff and students. The institution has provided appropriate resources to support the assessment of institutional effectiveness, especially in the area of technology.

Since its last accreditation review, the University has initiated several strategies across a broad range of areas to document institutional effectiveness. The Team found that through its Office of Institutional Research, St. John's regularly collects and analyzes data to assist the University in assessing its overall effectiveness, including important national surveys such as:

- ◆ Student Satisfactory Inventory (SSI)
- ◆ Institutional Priority Survey (IPS)
- ◆ National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
- ◆ Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE)
- ◆ Law School Survey of Student Engagement (LSSE)
- ◆ Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP)
- ◆ ACUHO-I/EBI Resident Student Survey

The University's Inventory of Assessment also outlines other types of assessments and benchmarks used regularly across the University, including items such as surveys, administrative and staff annual reviews and program reviews.

Academic effectiveness is documented and validated through external accrediting bodies across a range of professional programs. Several of its professionally accredited programs enroll a substantial percentage of students, including in pharmacy, business, education, and law.

However, neither the Inventory of Assessment nor external accreditation represent an assessment plan *per se*. The Visiting Team did not find evidence of a comprehensive institutional assessment plan that organizes the ongoing assessment effort.

The 2002-2003 program review project gathered in a systematic and comprehensive manner from all 215 academic programs, as registered with the New York State Education Department, and from 57 academic support and student service programs throughout the University using the format described in *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services* by Robert Dickeson (*SSR*, p. 45). This material was reviewed at several levels and resulted in evaluations and recommendations regarding the viability of programs. This approach could serve as the foundation for a comprehensive assessment plan, but it's not clear what has been done by way of follow-up or implementation to these recommendations.

Commendations:

The Team commends the inclusion of Vincentian values as a factor worth 20% of the annual evaluation system for administrators and staff.

The Team also commends St. John's for its innovative use of the Building Excellence (BE) survey to assist first-year students to concentrate on their immediate surroundings, process information, make decisions and solve problems, approach and complete tasks and assignments, interact with others and retain new and complex information (*Building Excellence through Students*, Susan M. Rundle, p. 3).

Suggestions:

To ensure a more comprehensive approach with regularized assessment activities that support ongoing improvement we urge the University to enhance its assessment plan. We endorse your recommendation regarding the importance of assessing mission-oriented behaviors within the academic and administrative units and thus encourage you to "take steps to better assess the level of faculty and staff participation in mission-related activities, stating specific goals, and giving greater weight to these efforts in personnel reviews" (*SSR*, p. 35). A desirable goal is to have the efforts involving staff and faculty complementary.

The Team strongly endorses the objectives for the Staten Island campus found in your *Strategic Plan 2004-2008*. Specifically the Team suggests that St. John's 1) build upon the particular strengths of the Staten Island campus to define a distinctive identity for the campus and 2) develop academic opportunities and offerings that Marketing and Enrollment Management can use to make the campus better known and more attractive to students (*SP 2004-2008*, p. 49).

*Standard 12: General Education*

Based on review of the self-study, other institutional documents and interviews with members of the student body, board of trustees, faculty, administration and staff, the team developed the following conclusions relative to this standard.

St. John's University meets this standard. There are no team recommendations and no team requirements.

Summary of Findings

The St. John's Core Curriculum has established a unified educational experience for all St. John's undergraduates. The Core also provides an important means for transmission of the Catholic and Vincentian perspectives. The Core Curriculum promotes the study of the arts and sciences, reading, writing, information literacy and

critical thinking. It consists of 9 core courses and 7 additional courses from a list of distributed core courses.

Curiously, however, the Core Curriculum learning goals make no explicit mention of St. John's Vincentian mission in its "knowledge bases" as evidenced in Table 4.1 (*SSR*, p. 57) of the Self-Study. The application of "key elements of the Christian traditions to contemporary issues" does not specifically address St. John's Vincentian mission or the tradition of service to the poor. Similarly, except for the focus on internships and co-curricular activities, there appears to be little discussion of instruction regarding Vincentian traditions in the 2006-2008 Vincentian Mission Plan. St. John's may want to study further how well its Vincentian tradition is accounted for in the Core Curriculum.

The self-study acknowledges the challenge of integrating the Vincentian traditions into the course-work (*SSR*, p. 33) and reports: "While considerable evidence exists that academic offerings are linked to mission, the Committee [the Mission Committee of the Self-Study Steering Committee] found an absence of comprehensive assessment of the degree to which student 'understanding and appreciation' of mission has actually been achieved through these offerings (*SSR*, p.31). Academic offerings remain an important element of institutionalizing and making permanent the University's distinctive mission.

Commendations:

We commend you for your implementation of a core curriculum (consisting of competencies and knowledge areas) for all undergraduate students and the development of a rubric to assess improvement on the core competencies.

The team also commends and celebrates the establishment of an Institute for Writing Studies, to be supported with significant gift moneys and which will allow for a distinctive strengthening in the teaching of the core competencies for students at St. John's. This Institute and its consequences will greatly enhance the uniqueness of St. John's University.

Suggestions:

We urge you to continue to work on the assessment and implementation of core competencies and knowledge areas.

We encourage you to follow through with your recommendation to expand the mission-related content of the undergraduate core (*SSR*, p.34) and to clarify the Vincentian elements in the knowledge base. The Vincentian Certificate program, V.I.T.A.L. and other programs listed above under Standard 1 could serve as possible models for this work.

We suggest that the need may exist for reviewing carefully the roles and

responsibilities of St. John's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the College of Professional Studies. The team observed some tension between these areas that may hinder progress toward core knowledge and implementation of rubrics. This tension was pointed out to us by students, particularly those in professional studies, causing them to express concerns related to access to classes, ability to double major and a perceived lack of respect. Whatever the source of this tension, it is apparent to students and experienced by students in ways that are inappropriate and do them a disservice.

#### *Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning*

Based on review of the self-study, other institutional documents and interviews with members of the student body, board of trustees, faculty, administration and staff, the team developed the following conclusions relative to this standard.

St. John's University meets the requirements of standard 14. There are however team recommendations. There are no team requirements.

#### *Summary of Findings*

Your *Self-Study Report* (p. 5) indicates that the reviewers of your 2001 *Periodic Review Report* recommended that "plans to assess the instructional outcomes of the University should be developed to examine the extent to which each of the major instructional programs of the University meets expectations." This recommendation was translated into a charge to assess "the degree to which all academic programs on both the undergraduate and graduate levels have articulated learning goals and objectives and a method for determining whether those are being achieved" (*SSR*, p. 53).

Consequently St. John's University has been working toward the goal of establishing a comprehensive plan for assessing learning outcomes for all of its programs since the 1995 selection of "Outcomes Assessment" as a topic for the Middle States self-study being conducted at that time. We agree with your own assessment of your progress: "The prevalence of discipline-specific accreditations, particularly in the professional programs and schools of the University, indicates that there is a cadre of faculty, staff and administrators across the University who, through periodic assessment of their own programs, evidence a culture of assessment within the University" (*SSR*, 45). As expected, your *Self-Study Report* therefore notes that "assessment has been most successful in programs which have discipline-specific accreditation and program goals" (p. 71). Because of the number and importance of these programs at the University, it is fair to say a substantial culture of outcomes assessment exists at St. John's. Furthermore, the development of the new core curriculum has been framed in terms of learning goals and objectives and this process has itself been "instrumental in developing the University's culture of assessment" (*SSR*, p. 55). The Core Faculty Group has developed a set of rubrics to assess these goals and objectives and is in the process of completing a pilot project with 25 members of the faculty (report due in September 2006).

Although the culture of assessment seems to be taking hold, the roots are still shallow, and, as your own self-study indicates, there is a need to purposefully nurture these roots during the next few years. Assessment of the new core curriculum illustrates this point (*SSR*, pp. 57-58).

- The new core was introduced in the academic year 2001-02. Although “assessments have been designed for individual courses and are indicated within the syllabi for those courses, assessment of the effectiveness of the core as a whole on student learning has been more problematic” (*SSR*, p.57). The initial assessments of the core that were begun in the academic year 2003-04 were not repeated in 2004-05 since “The Core Faculty Group decided not to repeat the assessment of learning outcomes used earlier.” After the end of the spring 2005 semester the Core Faculty Group “formulated a pilot assessment plan” that “began in fall 2005 and is scheduled to be completed in September 2006” (*SSR*, p. 58). The serious assessment project just now underway involves competencies only with work just beginning on the knowledge areas.
- You have indicated that some confusion and/or disagreement exist among faculty members as to whether the core goals should be measured only at graduation or in conjunction with individual courses. Faculty discussions led to the “determination that assessment of the core’s impact on students could be done only after they had completed the entire core, since no one course bears the entire responsibility of assuring acquisition of the skill and competencies that are expected to result from the core” (*SSR*, p.57). It is of course true that “no one course bears the entire responsibility of assuring acquisition of the skills and competencies that are expected to result from the core,” but it is also true that each course should contribute in a meaningful way that can be assessed separately.
- The assessment workshop in February has been helpful in keeping the assessment effort straightforward and focused on what matters.

At present, the strength of the assessment effort has been at the institutional level (See Standard 7.). Questions in the 2002-03 program review focused on issues of curriculum and pedagogy, but answers were for the most part vague. It is not evident that this information was used for the improvement of courses. Making use of such assessment data is, as the Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee of the Self-Study Steering Committee reported, an important area where “despite the growing use of direct measures of learning outcomes, this final stage is just starting to take shape in a more guided way. Today however this element remains the weakest link” (*SSR*, p. 71).

Your *Self-Study Report* indicates that “Learning objectives for individual courses are posted on course syllabi, which faculty are expected to distribute to students along with a statement on how student performance in the course will be assessed and how the student’s final grade will be determined.” Yet evidence was not provided as to how consistently learning goals are specified on course syllabi. The course syllabus template for the Liberal Arts Faculty Council Curriculum Committee includes no such questions.

Courses taught off campus or via online instruction are held to comparable program quality and assessment requirements.

Suggestions:

We strongly affirm the well-conceived recommendations (*SSR*, pp. 72-74) regarding the assessment of student learning outcomes and urge their implementation.

Recommendations

Since “institutions must articulate statements of expected student learning at the institutional, program, and individual course levels” (*CoEiHE*, p.50), we recommend that the University assess “the degree to which all academic programs on both the undergraduate and graduate levels have articulated learning goals and objectives” (*SSR*, p. 53) and enhance such assessment “with mechanisms for specifying, measuring, synthesizing, and sharing learning outcomes” (*SSR*, p. 73).

We recommend that the University assess the extent to which learning objectives are posted on course syllabi in all areas of the University and develop a more formal and regularly scheduled mechanism for updating syllabi.

Since “commitment to assessment of student learning requires a parallel commitment to ensuring its use” (*CoEiHE*, p. 51), we recommend that the University ensure in a documented, consistent, and regularized process “the integration of assessment data into academic planning” (*SSR*, p. 73) and use the web where appropriate “as a living archive” (*SSR*, p.73) and planning vehicle.

**V. Summary of Recommendations**

*Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning*

“Assessment of student learning demonstrates that the institution’s students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional goals and that students at graduation have achieved appropriate higher education goals” (*CoEiHE*, p. 50).

A. “In order to carry out meaningful assessment activities, institutions must articulate statements of expected student learning at the institutional, program, and individual course levels, although the level of specificity will be greater at the course level” (*CoEiHE*, p.50). These “statements of expected student learning must be available on campus to those planning or implementing assessment activities and to those evaluating the institution” (*CoEiHE*, p.51). And these learning outcomes “should be interrelated, and their continuity, coherence, and integration among the three levels should be evident” (*CoEiHE*, p. 51). Consequently we recommend that St. John’s University:

- 1) assess “the degree to which all academic programs on both the undergraduate

and graduate levels have articulated learning goals and objectives” (SSR, p. 53),

- 2) enhance such assessment with “mechanisms for specifying, measuring, synthesizing, and sharing learning outcomes” (SSR, p. 73),
- 3) assess the extent to which learning objectives are posted on course syllabi in all areas of the University and
- 4) develop a more formal and regularly scheduled mechanism for updating syllabi (SSR, p. 73).

B. “Finally, and most significantly, a commitment to assessment of student learning requires a parallel commitment to ensuring its use” (CoEiHE, p. 51).

Consequently we recommend that St. John’s University:

- 1) ensure in a documented, consistent and regularized process the integration of assessment data into academic planning and
- 2) use the web where appropriate “as a living archive” (SSR, p. 73) and planning vehicle.

## **VI. Selected Topic Three: Technology and Its Impact**

### Summary of evidence and findings:

Since 1995 when technology was identified as an institutional weakness, St. John’s has made a tremendous effort to upgrade its technological resources. In the past ten years, the University has upgraded and enhanced its technology infrastructure, hardware, software, support and professional development opportunities. You also initiated the multi-campus Academic Computing Initiative (ACI) in 2003 that provides laptops to all incoming first year students and to all fulltime faculty who participate in the required training program. St John’s University, including all of its branch campuses, provides wireless access to the internet and intranet for the entire campus community.

The commitment to the enhancement of technology furthers the mission of the institution by providing a vehicle (the web) to promote Catholic and Vincentian traditions. The mission is further realized through the laptop program which provides computers to students whose financial circumstances would have prevented them from obtaining this increasingly important instructional tool. Finally, technology promotes the mission of the institution by providing access to educational opportunities via distance learning globally in programs that promote the Vincentian mission.

The use of technology has impacted teaching and learning by providing faculty with technological resources and training to enhance the delivery of instruction. Classrooms are equipped with podiums, technology support is readily available in each classroom building and training is provided in the use of laptops and St. John’s Central, the campus portal, as well as in all aspects of technology use. Most notable is the training program, the Portable Professor, which is a three-part series that provides a

financial incentive for participation, and the Distance Learning Pedagogy course, which assists faculty in developing online courses. It, too, provides a financial incentive. A variety of surveys have been used to determine user satisfaction with and use of technology by members of the student body, faculty, administration and staff. The results of these surveys are used for improvement and to implement new services being requested by the users. Further, technology has greatly enhanced the University's ability to assess institutional effectiveness, especially with the implementation of St. John Central by providing ready access to data for individual faculty, department, program, or institutional use.

The organizational structure supports and promotes technology enhancement. Academic and administrative computing have been joined under one area coordinated by a chief information officer. Approximately \$13 million has been expended for operations and \$5 million has been expended for capital annually in support of the technology initiative. The University has identified "leveraging the investment in technology" (*SP 2004-2008*, p. 47) as a strategic priority and plans to maximize use of existing technology and move to 24/7 technical support. We support the nine recommendations that you made in your self study (pp. 90-91). They are consistent with the University's desire to continue to move technology to the forefront.

Commendations:

We commend St. John's for the impressive gains that over a relatively short span of 10 years you have achieved in both your investment in and integration of technology to improve the delivery of administrative and instructional services to multi-campus constituencies. We also congratulate you for being named one of Intel's "top 10 most unwired campuses" in 2004 and 2005 (*SSR*, p. 78).

The mandatory lap-top program, the wireless environment and the Portable Professor program have been integral components to the establishment of the 'new St. John's.' Students consistently lauded the value of the university's lap-top program in helping them to improve knowledge, study skills, and their awareness of campus events.

We commend St. John's for your attention to providing comparable services at all of your off campus locations.

Suggestions:

The plans of action delineated in your self-study (pp. 90-91) and your strategic plan (p. 47) are well-conceived. We encourage their implementation as outlined.

## **VII. Selected Topic Four: Residence Life and Its Impact**

Summary of Evidence and Findings

"The construction of residence halls and the establishment of a Residence Life



program, principally on the Queens campus, has been central to the institutional transformation that has resulted in a ‘new St. John’s’” (*SSR*, p. 94). You have achieved in six short years what many institutions struggle to do for decades and the transformation has been nothing short of remarkable.

By your successes in this area you have created a vibrant, sought-after and engaging residential community that not only enhances the student experience on many fronts but has also contributed dramatically to the number of first year applications as well as increased SAT scores of the entering class for both resident students and commuters. Approximately one-fifth of entering students were in the top 10% of their high school class in 2005. St John’s has been successful in fulfilling its global mission of increasing national and international diversity and at the same time maintained its commitment to serve students from the New York metropolitan area. Thus we agree with your judgment: “Residence life has enabled the University to recruit and enroll incoming students from an applicant pool that is larger, stronger, and more geographically diverse, and in so doing, it has changed the demographic profile of the undergraduate student population” (*SSR*, p. 94).

We also agree that the establishment of a residential program fully supports the mission of the institution and in addition “has provided opportunities for the University to fulfill its Catholic and Vincentian mission in new ways“ (*SSR*, p. 94. For “the introduction of Residence Life has facilitated development of programs, activities, and services that allow students to immerse themselves in an environment that promotes the development of spiritual and moral values, ethical principles, an appreciation of human dignity, participation in innovative service learning, and volunteer activities” (*SSR*, p. 101). A broad range of programming initiatives have emerged that were not possible previously. Sunday Night Mass, Take Back the Night programs and an interfaith residence hall council are just a few examples.

As would be expected the addition of a residential component has had a major impact on student services. The University has responded very well to the challenge of moving from a Monday through Friday operation to a 24/7 environment. St. John’s currently offers approximately 2700 spaces for residential students on its three campuses with the majority being at the Queens campus (about 2400). This year the room selection process left 281 students without the option for University housing. St. John’s has responded to the growing demand for housing by adding a Director of Off-Campus housing to assist these students as well as the 300 to 400 “commuters” who currently live in the neighborhoods surrounding the campus. This person maintains a directory of off-campus housing and acts as a liaison between the students and potential landlords. This has helped to ensure that students are renting facilities that are safe and meet zoning codes and also has resulted in a greater level of student satisfaction for those who must find off-campus housing.

A full array of services and programs has been developed within the residential community. 12 professional staff members live within the University residences as well as 56 peer resident advisors (RA). Active student advisory and program boards are in

place and RAs have a council that interacts regularly with the administration to assure the student voice is represented in all decisions. The RA Council was particularly effective in helping the administration define visitation hours and rules regarding guests. A spirit of cooperation and collaboration appears to permeate the residential philosophy and practice. This open communication is valued and encouraged.

Living Learning Communities have been particularly successful. Currently approximately 300 freshmen participate in communities encompassing the following themes: honors, allied health professions, social justice and leadership. While data indicate that the retention rate for resident students is less than that for commuters it is just the opposite for resident students who live in one of the Living Learning Communities. This suggests that these communities are potentially key elements in student retention. Another key aspect of these environments revolves around the role of the Resident Director who oversees the particular community. This individual is often the instructor for the Discover New York course that is part of the core curriculum. When this occurs, students truly experience a living learning environment and have the opportunity to get to know an instructor both inside and outside the classroom setting.

Services such as the health center and the counseling center were not staffed sufficiently to meet the demand of a residential component. Alcohol and other drug programming did not previously exist. To address these needs and provide more adequate services for both resident and commuting students a new position, the Executive Director for Student Wellness, has been created to oversee counseling, health services and alcohol and other drug programs on all campuses. The individual will report to the Vice President for Student Affairs and will begin in June.

The shuttle service has been expanded to serve both the resident and commuter populations. There is daily loop that runs from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. and connects the campus residences with the academic buildings as well as train and bus stops. A shuttle between campuses runs several times daily and a Saturday bus into Manhattan is available any time for programming initiatives.

It is clear that St. John's University has undertaken an ambitious residential program and is well-positioned to achieve continued success. Providing a residential community appears to be the key to the staggering increase in applications as well as the geographic diversity that has been achieved. St. John's is not afraid to try anything in which they believe. In this case you appear to be absolutely on the right track. Continue the course!

### Commendations

You have done a commendable job of developing a successful residential component in a mere six years. This is a phenomenal achievement that not only benefits current students but positions the university to attract a national and international student body. The University is dedicated to accomplishing its stated goals in the residential community and is poised to do whatever is necessary, including providing the necessary

facilities, staff and programming, to ensure success. We commend you for this commitment.

### Suggestions

We encourage implementation of the well-articulated recommendations that you made in your *Self-Study Report* (pp. 110-112). We suggest special attention be given to the following areas: 1) Retention rates-- It is possible that St. John's is a victim of its own success and the demand for housing has quickly out-paced the available beds. While planned new facilities will address this, the addition of more Living Learning communities may help as well. 2) 24/7 culture- While great strides have been made in this area, it is important to ensure that all residential campuses have comparable amenities and services. We suggest that particular attention be given to amenities and services on the Staten Island Campus.

Communication to all constituents is a key element of success. We encourage you to continue and enhance all efforts on this front.

On-going monitoring and assessment are of course crucial to your success. We encourage you to maintain and strengthen your efforts in this area where ever possible.

### **VIII. Conclusion**

The institutional and community reality of the new St. John's that you have created and continue to create constitutes an eloquent living and vibrant testimony to the excellence and continuity of your self-study and strategic planning efforts. In the midst of all your self-studies and planning efforts and of the consequent institutional changes resulting from your highly successful implementation of plans you have managed to sustain and strengthen your mission and identity as a Catholic, Vincentian and metropolitan institution with the consequent vision and values shaping what you do, how you do it and why you do it. The sense of warmth and family that we experienced during our visit is indeed remarkable for an institution with over 20,000 students and almost 1,500 members of the faculty. Your continuing commitment to such excellent planning and successful implementation of plans will, in our judgment, enable the new St. John's to become a jewel among higher education institutions.

We admire and commend you for what you have achieved during the past ten years and encourage you in your commitment to continue to create and shape the new St. John's University into an even greater institution of higher learning.