Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

The University at Albany has evolved rapidly, transforming itself from a distinguished college for teachers into a high-quality research university with an internationally recognized and highly productive faculty, an accomplished student body, and nationally recognized academic programs. Its traditional missions of undergraduate and graduate teaching, research, and service are distinctively integrated to produce an intellectual and programmatic synergy that defines the University. Today, the University ("UAlbany") is distinguished by excellence within distinctive disciplines and professions, and by extensive scholarship and teaching across disciplines, including many combined accelerated degree options that meld knowledge and application.

Within the context of significantly expanding research and graduate strength, the University is equally defined by its undergraduate enterprise, offering bachelor’s degrees in 58 majors, and a wide variety of co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities. As a highly selective institution that aspires to become most selective, the University at Albany strives to offer an undergraduate curriculum enriched by its research environment, as well as a student body that is among the most ethnically, culturally, and geographically diverse within SUNY. In recent years, the University’s stature and achievements have also been greatly accelerated through increased capital investment, upgrades to create a Division I athletics program, and increased outreach and advancement efforts.

In this introductory chapter, we begin with a brief outline of the University’s historical development from a normal college to a college for teachers to a research university. Next, we talk about UAlbany’s most recent past, the self-study period (2000-2009). While, for some, this past decade has been defined by a relatively large number of leadership transitions, there has also been a great deal of stability, as well as progress, during this decade. This chapter thus describes the series of leadership transitions that provides a context for much of the decade, and then presents some areas of strength and challenges the University faces as it moves into the next decade. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the self-study process and lays out the chapters included in this document.

Historical Development of the University at Albany: (1844-2000)

From Normal School to New York State College for Teachers: The University at Albany, the oldest state-chartered public institution of higher education in New York, opened its doors as the New York State Normal School on December 18, 1844. Establishing the institution was a major part of New York’s response to the rapidly expanding education movement in the 1840s and to increasing dissatisfaction with the quality of teachers in the state’s common schools. Thus, the new Normal School’s mission was both to train new and upgrade existing common school teachers. The founders were committed to a new idea of what constituted an excellent teacher, and at the outset sought to establish an institution dedicated to “the instruction and practice of teachers of common schools in the science of education and the art of teaching.” While the linkage of theory and practice, and the conviction that a teacher must be educated in both...
pedagogy and content, were revolutionary concepts in 1844, their implementation in the New York State Normal School was soon emulated across the nation and in Europe as well. Thus, from its earliest beginnings, the institution that would become the University at Albany had a national and international reputation for innovation, excellence, and influence.

By 1890, it was widely recognized that the emerging system of public secondary schools in New York State required an expanded curriculum for teacher training. President William Milne, who served as the institution’s chief executive from 1889 to 1914, led the transition from a two-year to a four-year institution. In 1905, the Normal School became the four-year New York State Normal College, offering for the first time B.A., B.S. and Bachelor of Pedagogy degrees. When the College’s original building burned in 1906, a new campus that reflected the greatly expanded mission of the College was constructed and dedicated in 1909.

In 1914, the institution was renamed the New York State College for Teachers and assigned the mission of training teachers in academic subjects for the state’s burgeoning secondary school movement. In addition, in 1914, the College introduced its first graduate programs designed for the advanced education of secondary school teachers and administrators. Over the next several decades, through the 1940s, the College proceeded rapidly to develop the full range of arts and sciences bachelor’s and master’s programs geared to the continuing professional needs of secondary educators.

From New York State College for Teachers to University Center: In 1948, the College became part of the newly established State University of New York (SUNY), and in the following year Evan R. Collins began his two-decade tenure as president, leading the institution during prestigious years as a college for teachers and then into its transition to university status. In this period, the state’s educational planners concluded that New York’s independent colleges and universities could not address the demands of the post-World War II “baby boom” generation; as a result, under the leadership of Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller, funding for the State University of New York was dramatically increased. As part of SUNY’s expansion plan, the College for Teachers was designated a doctoral-degree granting “University Center” in 1962. And in September of that year, the University at Albany enrolled its first class of undergraduate students in liberal arts programs that did not include any required study in teacher education. The new university adopted the model of a broad-based public research institution, charged with providing a liberal arts education for large numbers of undergraduates, developing graduate programs and professional schools, and building a research program.

The 1960s was a decade of unparalleled UAlbany growth. Student enrollment increased from 4,000 in 1962 to nearly 14,000 in 1971. Curricula and degree programs were expanded at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. A College of Arts and Sciences was established in 1962, and professional schools in business, criminal justice, nursing, public administration, and social welfare were added, joining the long-established School of Education. A new campus, the modern complex designed by Edward Durrell Stone that is now the Uptown Campus, was built and dedicated by 1968. The faculty adopted new bylaws during the 1965-66 academic year and a new Faculty Senate, with its system of councils, began to oversee UAlbany’s expanded academic program. By the end of the 1960s, the University offered 49 baccalaureate programs, 52 master’s
programs and 28 doctoral programs. The first doctoral degree was awarded in 1964 and, within a
decade, 100 doctoral degrees were being awarded each year.

**Defining a New Mission:** After experiencing dramatic growth in the 1960s, the University faced
a number of challenges in the 1970s. And, by 1974, several compelling environmental factors
indicated a need for the campus to re-evaluate its programs. First, it became clear that the
enrollments and resources projected in the 1968 and 1972 Master Plans were not going to be
realized. The state’s fiscal condition was worsening, and preliminary signs pointed to significant
budget reductions for at least a two-year period. Second, students’ interests had shifted away
from once popular fields of study to others. A minor internal reallocation of resources had
occurred, but could not keep up with these enrollment shifts, leaving some schools and
departments under-enrolled and others understaffed. Third, several graduate programs had been
introduced with the expectation of future resources, but those resources had been spread too
thinly to offer a full range of high-quality graduate and undergraduate programs. Finally, the
budgetary erosion of the early 1970s had highlighted the fact that the campus needed to make
hard choices among its programs; it became clearly recognized that the traditional, across-the-
board allocation of resources would not advance the institution’s goals and objectives.

In this context, a Select Committee on Academic Program Priorities was established in spring
1975 to undertake a broad, detailed review of the University’s entire academic program and to
develop options for the future. Their report, issued in May and implemented in June by departing
President Louis T. Benezet, recommended phasing out, by termination or suspension, six
doctoral programs, three master’s programs, and three baccalaureate programs. The committee
also identified several other programs for further study and subsequent review, and
recommended that five programs be given a high priority for increased resources. While no
changes were recommended for 80% of the campus’s degree programs, the recommendations
brought substantial disruption, which continued into the next year following Emmett W. Field’s
appointment as president in July 1975.

President Fields sought to focus the strategic mission of the University by emphasizing the
institution’s comparative advantage in public policy. This approach built on UAlbany’s location
in New York’s state capital city and the institution’s strong faculty and academic programs in the
professions and public affairs, particularly in those areas of critical state need. A Task Force on
Resources and Priorities was created to develop recommendations for implementing this vision.
Impending further state budget reductions beginning in 1976 gave additional urgency to the Task
Force’s work. Following the final report of the Task Force, President Fields acted to eliminate
four doctoral, four master’s and seven bachelor’s programs. One school and three administrative
offices also were eliminated, and others were reorganized or consolidated; significant funds were
reallocated to departments and schools that had been given a high priority on the basis of their
quality, their enrollment demand, and/or their ability to contribute significantly to the strategic
focus on public policy. The July 1977 Report, “Missions, Programs, and Priorities for Action,”
provided a long-range vision and direction that guided the University’s development for the next
decade. In addition, Vincent O’Leary, who chaired the Select Committee and who also served as
a member of the Task Force, succeeded Fields as president.
Fiscal issues and budget constraints continued to affect the campus over the next decade. Although state funding nearly doubled between 1979 and 1989, it barely kept pace with inflation. The 1980s was also a period in which the campus managed relentless annual state budget “mini-crises” (e.g., delayed budgets, mid-year reductions, restrictions on personnel appointments and travel). In spite of these challenges, the University showed remarkable resilience and determination to advance its national stature and reputation. Over the four years following the Task Force report, UAlbany attracted more than 250 scholars to the faculty, including 70 appointed at the senior academic rank. This large cadre of nationally and internationally prominent scholars was recruited with careful planning, particularly to strengthen the institution’s graduate academic program and research profile. By 1989, external research and training support increased to four times what it was at the beginning of the decade; it had become a critical and integral element of the campus’ financial plan. The undergraduate program was strengthened by the introduction of a new General Education program in 1982. Learning centers in mathematics, writing, physics, chemistry and computing, as well as tutoring programs and a faculty mentor program, were established to support student achievement and success. To inform academic and administrative decision-making, the University’s Office of Institutional Research created and initiated an educational outcomes assessment model; it received national recognition in the evolving educational assessment agenda.

In 1987, a statewide initiative developed by SUNY Chancellor Clifton Wharton provided targeted resources for the four doctoral granting SUNY centers. The Graduate Education and Research Initiative (GRI) was a multi-year program directed toward four primary goals: develop multidisciplinary Centers of Excellence to respond to state needs, the growth of research-based industry and the state’s economy; double the volume of externally sponsored research; double the number of Ph.D. programs ranking among the top 10% in the nation and double, as well, the number of others rated in the top third; and increase substantially the enrollment of minorities, women, and other groups then underrepresented at UAlbany in graduate and professional programs. While this initiative was not fully funded, the resources were nonetheless instrumental in accelerating the growth and development of many of the interdisciplinary research and academic programs that had been initiated in the prior years and that would become the basis for UAlbany’s leap in stature in the 1990s.

**Reaffirming a Commitment to Excellence (1990-1999):** The University at Albany’s evolution into a major research university continued during the 1990s, initially under the leadership of H. Patrick Swygert, 15th President, and then, under the leadership of Karen R. Hitchcock, 16th President. During this decade, UAlbany’s trajectory into the ranks of the nation’s leading graduate education and research institutions was articulated for the first time as an explicit, public aspiration. The goal was reflected in key institutional documents created throughout the decade, e.g., the University’s *Mission Statement*, revised in 1992; President Hitchcock’s 1996 Inaugural Address, *Engaging the Future*; the University’s 1998 Strategic Plan, *Charting the Future: Creating a New Learning Environment for the 21st Century*; and a Mission Review statement, developed in 1999 as part of a SUNY-wide process for clearly articulating each campus’s institutional mission. The capacity to realize this goal was rooted in the quality of the faculty at the beginning of the decade, and was affirmed by numerous reviews and analyses ranking many of UAlbany’s academic and research programs among the nation’s best. For example, Graham and Diamond’s 1997 study, *The Rise of American Research Universities,*
ranked the University at Albany 17th in research and scholarship among the nation’s top public universities.

Progress in advancing the University’s reputation during the 1990s was particularly remarkable because it occurred at a time when the campus’s funding base had to be dramatically restructured. Like other major research universities, the University at Albany became less dependent on state tax dollar support in the 1990s, and increasingly dependent on tuition and fees, auxiliary revenues, and increased revenues from external grants and contracts, alumni, industry and other private sources. The proportion of the institution’s annual operating expenditures derived from state tax dollars declined from 43% in 1989-90 to 26% in 1998-99. During the decade, the University developed a number of innovative and successful partnerships with industry and government to leverage resources for expanding and enhancing both facilities and program. The Center for Environmental Sciences and Technology Management (CESTM) and the East Campus, for example, provided expanded and enriched educational and research opportunities for faculty and students, involved UAlbany in collaborative ventures with important constituencies (e.g., industry partners), and were instrumental in advancing the institution’s public service mission.

The institution’s research and graduate education programs expanded further during the 1990s. Doctoral programs in biometry and statistics, English, epidemiology, French studies, history, information science, philosophy, and public health were either restored or introduced. Other important curricular additions at the graduate level established during this period included master’s programs in biodiversity and policy, public health, taxation, and women’s studies; and new graduate certificate programs were initiated in public sector management, policy and analysis, and urban education.

At the undergraduate level, UAlbany began to experience a much more competitive recruiting environment in the 1990s. During the 1980s, the number of high school graduates in New York State, the source of virtually all of UAlbany’s entering freshman classes, declined by 33%, and this trend continued from 1990 to 1994, when high school graduates declined further by 6%. In response to these environmental changes, the University mounted a campus-wide effort, based on its student outcomes analyses, to focus attention on the quality of the student experience in the classroom. The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning was established to promote excellence in teaching and learning throughout the University and to support and assist faculty and graduate assistants in their professional development as teachers. New curricula were developed—e.g., Project Renaissance (an interdisciplinary, living-learning program limited to freshman students), honors courses, faculty-initiated interdisciplinary majors, expanded internships, increased opportunities for study abroad—to distinguish UAlbany’s undergraduate academic experience from that offered at competing institutions. In addition, in order to attract top students, a Presidential Scholars program was established. Substantial investments were also made to strengthen recruitment not only in New York but also in surrounding states and overseas, projecting Albany beyond its traditional pools of applicants.

In 1997, President Hitchcock approved a campus-backed proposal to move the University’s intercollegiate athletic program to the Division I level, a decision highly popular with students, alumni, and the Albany community. This decision appeared to be the appropriate next step, following President Swygert’s initiative to move the campus to Division II status in 1994.
The 1990s was also a time of substantial changes to the University’s infrastructure. At the beginning of the decade, the Uptown Campus, constructed in the 1960s on the western edge of the City of Albany, had not received any significant rehabilitation or new building to accommodate the needs of a student population that had grown to more than 16,000 — approximately 5,000 more than the campus’s original design capacity. The institution’s research program had also grown in excess of original expectations, and the modes of instruction had changed in ways that affected the functionality of classrooms and other teaching spaces. The Downtown Campus was in similar need of rehabilitation and expansion. Appreciating the severe handicap that lack of adequate space and aging facilities placed on the campus, both presidents Swygert and Hitchcock made capital construction and facilities renovation a major priority. Arguably, the momentum for much needed capital construction and improvements dramatically increased in 1996, when President Hitchcock, working with the SUNY Construction Fund, received approval to conduct a $1 million Master Planning Process. The process produced a 10-year Master Plan, and ultimately led to funding for the planning, design, and construction of the Life Sciences Research Building, the Boor Sculpture Studio, a new facility for the University Police Department, and a new administration/admissions building (University Hall) to serve as an attractive and convenient public-friendly “front door” to the Uptown Campus. Funded as well were a Campus Center Extension, the Recreation and Convocation Center (now the SEFCU Arena), CESTM, and the Science Library. The plan also led to the renovation and upgrading of selected academic buildings on both the Uptown and Downtown campuses, major renovation and rehabilitation projects in the residence halls, and improvements in parking, walk-ways, and landscaping. In addition, the 58-acre East Campus was acquired in 1996 to house the University’s School of Public Health and to support partnership initiatives involving industry and other research institutions in the area of biotechnology and biomedical research.

The Self-Study Decade (2000-2009): The past decade has been a decade marked by a considerable number of senior leadership transitions, particularly at the presidential and vice presidential/provostial level. While UAlbany began the decade of the 2000s with relative stability at the senior levels of its administration, the University has been served by six presidents, interim presidents or officers in charge, and five provosts or interim provosts from 2004 through 2009. These transitions have affected, and been affected by, many different aspects of UAlbany’s operation and the achievement of its mission. Specific ways in which senior turnover affected the University’s pursuit of the Middle States standards of accreditation are cited throughout the self-study, most notably in Chapter 2, Mission, Goals, Planning and Resource Allocation and, in Chapter 3, Institutional Resources. While frequent senior leadership transitions have provided some challenges to meeting Middle States standards, the degree to which they have influenced achievement varies by standard. Indeed, as demonstrated in all chapters of the self-study, the organizational structures, long standing administrative processes, and initiatives established by each subsequent administration have in fact strengthened UAlbany’s case for reaccreditation. Furthermore, as documented in the following pages, each successive administration, for the most part, has built upon the initiatives, goals, and priorities of prior administrations to help ensure that UAlbany continuously would meet its overarching goals and objectives. An important case that points to how one administration built upon the foundation set by earlier leaders, is the substantial strengthening of UAlbany’s capacity to assess student learning outcomes and institutional effectiveness, which began in the early 2000s under President Hitchcock. As documented in Chapter 5, Institutional Effectiveness and the
Assessment of Student Learning, the seeds that the Hitchcock administration sowed in the assessment arena back in 2002 have been recognized, nurtured, and strengthened by each successive administration. Similarly, many of the myriad capital infrastructure improvements that UAlbany has made over the self-study period and documented in Chapter 3, Institutional Resources, were spawned in one administration, championed and lobbied for in the next, and brought to fruition in yet another. Of note is the fact that in 2008 then Interim President Philip embraced the self-study process as a valuable vehicle to organize the campus to take stock of its strengths and areas for improvement in preparation for the eventual installment of its next president and leadership team.

For the record, at the time of last accreditation in 2000, Karen R. Hitchcock was the 16th President of the University. In October 2003, Dr. Hitchcock announced that she would be leaving UAlbany, and in January 2004 departed, soon thereafter becoming principal and vice chancellor of Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario. Judy Genshaft, provost in the late 1990s and a major participant in the development of UAlbany’s 1998 strategic plan, left UAlbany in 2000 to assume the presidency of the University of South Florida. Provost Genshaft was replaced in May 2000 by Carlos Santiago, who served as interim provost from May 2000 through 2001, and then was appointed permanently to the position in summer 2001. After Dr. Hitchcock left the campus, Dr. Santiago served briefly as officer in charge during much of January 2004.

In February 2004, the SUNY Board of Trustees named SUNY Maritime College President Vice Admiral John R. Ryan, USN (Ret.), as UAlbany’s interim president, with Dr. Santiago returning to the position of provost until May 2004, when he left to assume the chancellorship of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Jeryl Mumpower, the associate provost and dean of Graduate Studies at the time, was named interim provost, a post he filled until September 2005. It should also be noted that between 2000 and 2005, Dr. Mumpower served in a variety of administrative positions, in both interim and permanent capacities, including dean of Graduate Studies, interim provost, interim vice president for Research, and interim dean of both the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Public Health.

Vice Admiral Ryan served as interim president through January 2005, when Kermit Hall was named UAlbany’s 17th President. In September 2005, Susan V. Herbst joined UAlbany as provost and vice president for Academic Affairs. After President Hall’s untimely death in August 2006, Provost Herbst was asked by the SUNY Trustees to serve as well as UAlbany’s officer in charge. During the 2006-07 academic year, Dr. Herbst asked Frank J. Thompson, former dean of the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy, to serve in a limited capacity as interim provost, with primary responsibilities for provostial review of tenure and promotion cases. In October 2007, Provost and Officer in Charge Herbst left UAlbany to become the executive vice chancellor for the University System of Georgia. George Philip, chair of UAlbany’s University Council, the SUNY campus equivalent of a local board of trustees, was named by the SUNY Trustees to serve first as officer in charge, and then as interim president. Interim President Philip appointed Susan D. Phillips, then dean of the School of Education, to serve as interim provost in January 2008, filling the provost’s vacancy after Dr. Herbst left. In December 2008, Dr. Phillips was appointed provost and vice president for Academic Affairs. And in June 2009, the SUNY Trustees, with the unanimous support of the UAlbany presidential
search committee, approved SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher’s nomination of George Philip to serve as the 18th President of the University at Albany.

For purposes of discussion throughout the self-study, all officers in charge, interim presidents, and presidents are referred to more generically as presidents. Similarly, all interim and permanent provosts are referred to as provosts.

While the particularities of events and the dynamic political interplay that gave rise to the leadership transitions over this time period are beyond the scope of this self-study, it is worth noting that a contributing factor to UAlbany’s senior leadership transitions during the 2004 to 2009 period was a similar period of transition at the State University of New York system level; from 2004 through 2009, a time of significant fiscal difficulty in the New York public sector, the SUNY chancellor’s role was filled by five different individuals. As a matter of necessity, and prudent policy, the SUNY Chancellor plays a major role in the hiring of SUNY campus presidents. As a result, senior SUNY leadership transitions, while perhaps not a driving factor in UAlbany’s transitory leadership, did at various times delay the presidential search process.

Strengths and Challenges

As noted above, while UAlbany’s and SUNY system’s senior leadership transitions have presented challenges for the University’s achievement of the Middle States standards of accreditation, they have differentially influenced the attainment of these standards. The organizational structures and processes that successive administrations have used, and the commitment of UAlbany faculty, staff, and students to the underlying ideals that drive the Middle States standards of accreditation have been instrumental in helping the University build on its successes. Nevertheless, the University faces a number of challenges, some typical of universities around the country and others unique to UAlbany’s particular circumstances. This self-study discusses some of the University’s key strengths and challenges as it moves into the next decade.

Despite leadership transitions over the course of the self-study period, the University at Albany has remained focused on and further developed a number of key areas of strength, which undergird its ability to achieve the standards of accreditation. In particular, UAlbany’s nationally ranked and world-class academic programs; significant capital investments and infrastructure improvements; a strong collegial faculty and staff; a strong emphasis on and refocused commitment to undergraduate student success; and academically driven athletic success are noted as areas of strength in this self-study document.

Perhaps the most distinctive strength of UAlbany is its collection of academic programs. Across the University, a rich learning and research environment is marked by a highly accomplished faculty who have been essential to delivering high quality academic programs. The faculty members who have been recruited to the campus since its transformation into a major research university are dedicated teachers and internationally visible and respected researchers who are active and productive scholars in their respective fields. Indeed, UAlbany now offers an array of 63 undergraduate and 38 Ph.D. programs, comparable to the breadth at much larger flagship
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universities. Many of these programs are already ranked among the very best in the country.\(^1\) Still others are positioned to move into the ranks of our nation’s premier programs for their disciplines. In addition, 23 graduate certificates and certificates of advanced study and 77 professional and traditional master’s programs prepare students for successful careers in a broad range of fields. Through their academic experiences, students acquire the knowledge and skills to bring systematic knowledge to bear on professional practice and policy of New York State, the Northeast and beyond. Chapter 9, Educational Offerings and General Education, details specifically how UAlbany’s educational programs meet the Middle States standard of accreditation, and Chapter 5, Institutional Effectiveness and the Assessment of Student Learning, provides evidence-based analyses that demonstrate the strength of UAlbany’s curricula.

Built upon UAlbany’s academic offerings, the University’s research portfolio has grown considerably over the self-study period and is recognized as a strength that extends into the classroom. As Chapter 8, Faculty, details, UAlbany faculty are now responsible for nearly $350 million in externally generated research activity; the University now boasts five federally funded research centers. In addition, there are more than 50 research centers, institutes, and specialized labs that are funded from other sources.

The 1998 Master Plan largely set the stage for the capital investment and infrastructure developments that have taken place in this decade. As noted in Chapter 2, Institutional Resources, each of UAlbany’s leadership teams has pursued significant infrastructure improvements that successive administrations have advanced and brought to fruition. As noted above, this 1998 plan led to the building of the Boor Sculpture Studio and the Life Sciences Research Building. In addition, there has been a significant expansion of the Fuller Road campus, which houses the College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering, as well as development of the East Campus, home to the School of Public Health and Cancer Research Center. Another welcome outcome of the Master Plan has been a multi-million dollar signage and entry-way improvement project funded from the New York State capital budget; this has significantly enhanced the University’s ability to attract and retain high quality faculty and students.

With eight America East conference championships and five teams in NCAA Tournament appearances, the 2006-07 season was UAlbany athletics’ most celebrated since the University moved to NCAA Division I level in 1999. Conference titles were won by men’s basketball, volleyball, men’s indoor track, baseball, softball, men’s lacrosse, men’s outdoor track, and women’s outdoor track. The UAlbany Great Danes finished second in the America East Conference Commissioner’s Cup standings, a measure of overall sports success, in the closest margin of victory in conference history. Women’s indoor track and women’s lacrosse recorded runner-up finishes, bolstering UAlbany’s Commissioner's Cup point total. In the 2006-07 season, UAlbany boasted 53 all-conference selections, while 46 student-athletes were named to conference all-academic teams. In 2007-08, 64 student athletes were all-conference selections, and 62 were honored as such in 2008-09. UAlbany’s NCAA Academic Progress Rate (APR)

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\(^1\) Many UAlbany graduate program have been rated in the upper ranks by *U.S. News and World Report*, the *Princeton Review*, and *Small Times* magazine.
across the 2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07, and 2007-08 academic years, has consistently been in the high 900s for its Division I sports offerings. In the most recently completed academic year at time of this writing, 2008-09, UAlbany won seven conference titles and placed two teams in NCAA tournaments, bringing the University’s total conference titles to 40, with 15 total NCAA tournament appearances since joining Division I in 1999.

As highlighted in the University’s 2000 Self-Study and the 2005 Periodic Review Report, UAlbany has consistently shown a strong commitment to providing needed support services for its students. Chapter 5, Institutional Effectiveness and the Assessment of Student Learning; Chapter 7, Student Support Services; Chapter 9, Educational Offerings and General Education; and Chapter 10, Related Educational Activities, all provide evidence that supporting the University’s students within and outside of the classroom is a demonstrated strength, aimed toward facilitating the future success of UAlbany students. From residence hall programming to the services provided by the Advisement Services Center, the Office of Academic Support Services and the Educational Opportunities Program (EOP), a variety of measures, such as the SUNY Student Opinion Survey (SOS), indicate that students perceive the support mechanisms they receive at UAlbany to be carefully designed and delivered to support student needs.

Most fundamentally, the University at Albany comprises exceptional faculty and staff, who deliver the academic programs, research, and service components of the institution’s mission. Their achievements have ensured the satisfaction of the Middle States standards of accreditation.

Nevertheless, the University has faced a number of challenges over the past decade, plus some issues the campus knows it needs to address as UAlbany moves into the next decade. First and foremost is the need to update the Mission Statement, which was originally developed in 1992. Similarly, the University needs to develop a new strategic plan, one that recognizes UAlbany’s accomplishments and achievements over the past decade, and focuses its efforts for the years to come. Over the past few years, as several individual units and University-wide committees (e.g., Information Technology Services, the Office of International Education, and the Steering Committee on Community Engagement) have developed focused strategic plans, the campus has become increasingly aware of the need for these plans to be integrated into a larger campus plan. While this is an issue that is raised most strongly in Chapter 2, Mission and Goals - Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal, it is clearly an issue central to the entire accreditation process and therefore salient across all standards.

Another general challenge confronting the University is the need to build upon current efforts to enhance assessment practices. While considerable progress has been made over recent years to promote a culture of assessment on campus, especially with respect to teaching and learning, assessment activities are uneven and inconsistent. Several chapters note the need to refocus attention on institutional assessment so that it can better inform planning and resource allocation. Assessment of administrative units has not been conducted in systematic and regular ways, due in part to the frequent turnover in senior leadership. The chapters below identify a number of additional areas where greater attention to assessment would be desirable. These include academic programs (e.g., interdisciplinary opportunities, internships, the Honors College, online courses), advisement policies (especially for the major and minor), and important services (such as the Writing Center and information technology).
An additional critical theme that emerges consistently in the chapters of the self-study is the need for better communication among the various stakeholders at the University. The decision-making processes by senior administrators pertaining to budgets and the allocation of resources have not always been made clear to faculty, staff, and students in a timely fashion. Frequent transitions in senior leadership have impeded the development of the kinds of trust and mutual expectations that facilitate effective, shared governance. Many in the University are largely unaware of the activities of key governing bodies, such as the SUNY-wide Senate, the SUNY Board of Trustees, and the University Council. Recommendations pertaining to these challenges are proposed below.

A final, more overarching challenge to the University is the need to foster a stronger sense of community. Analyses conducted for the self-study reveal many strengths and reasons for pride in UAlbany. Nevertheless, these analyses also suggest that the University is not doing as well as it could in recruiting and retaining high-performing students and outstanding faculty. Moreover, other research conducted by various units indicates that the University has not done a good job of publicizing its accomplishments; as a result, many faculty, staff, current students and UAlbany alumni, as well as members of the Capital Region community, are unaware of many of the accomplishments of the “UAlbany family.” Along with excellent academic programs, research opportunities, benefits, and infrastructure, an attractive and thriving university is one in which the various constituencies know about, identify with, are committed to, and are eager to support the institution at large.

Self-Study Design

The University at Albany’s stature and achievements have greatly accelerated over the self-study period (2000–present) through enhancements in educational and research opportunities, as well as student services, increased capital investment, upgrades to the recent Division I athletics program, and increased outreach and advancement efforts. The Middle States re-accreditation process was very much welcomed as a powerful opportunity to demonstrate the evidence behind the University’s continuing ascent to the upper echelons of American higher education.

Then-Interim President Philip directed the development of a comprehensive self-study design to best serve the University’s interests as the self-study was initially organized. The comprehensive model, as stated in the MSCHE “Self-Study: Creating a Useful Process and Report,” creates a useful process that “enables an institution to appraise every aspect of its programs and services, governing and supporting structures, resources, and educational outcomes in relation to the institution’s mission and goals.” This approach was initially chosen because Interim President Philip expected that it would be particularly beneficial in informing the next president about the many aspects of the complex organization that is the University at Albany. In order to maximize the efficiency of the working groups, given UAlbany’s historical institutional culture and organizational relationships between faculty and the administration, some accreditation standards were grouped together in the formal self-study design, resulting in nine working subcommittees in all.

The nine subcommittees are:
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- Mission and Goals - Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal
- Institutional Resources
- Leadership, Governance and Administration (including the Libraries and ITS)
- Institutional Assessment and Assessment of Student Learning
- Student Admissions and Retention
- Student Support Services
- Faculty
- Educational Offerings - General Education
- Related Educational Activities

It is important to note that the University’s last accreditation occurred in 2000, six years prior to the publication of the current MSCHE Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education, which delineates the newly adopted accreditation standards by which UAlbany will be judged. That said, the University was cognizant of anticipated changes in accreditation standards, as well as the new emphases on assessment processes that emerged in the 2002 edition of Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education. It also took note of the added emphasis that Middle States now places on the use of assessment results to inform decision-making across the institution and to evaluate student learning objectives.

The University developed an institutional assessment plan prior to its 2005 Periodic Review Report (PRR) to MSCHE; it began substantive assessment of learning outcomes in both the major and in its General Education program in the early 2000s; it continued to support them through senior leadership transitions, as noted below; and it incorporated assessment processes across administrative and academic units in the Compact Planning process instituted in the 2005-06 academic year, and abides by them at this writing. At the time that the self-study process was initiated in 2007, UAlbany had been without a permanent president since President Hall’s untimely death in August 2006. As noted above, this was another reason to inventory and assess the many aspects of UAlbany in preparation for the planning processes and action agenda of the next president. The comprehensive model was also seen as eminently adaptable should a new president be chosen sooner rather than later, and could be modified to focus on particular areas of emphasis should the eventual new president deem that approach desirable. As noted below, Interim President Philip, who gave the Self-Study Steering Committee its charge in June 2008, later was named the 18th President of the University. President Philip reviewed the work of the nine subcommittees and their progress, and re-endorsed the comprehensive self-study design

**Specific Goals and Objectives**

Over the past decade, the University at Albany has experienced the vicissitudes of state financial support and frequent transitions in the upper levels of its administration. President Philip, in consultation with the University Council and the University Senate, has looked upon the Middle States’ self-study process as a timely opportunity to review thoroughly all units of the University, to examine its goals, and to examine how it will continually assess progress toward achieving those goals. As noted above, it has been 10 years since the development of the last formal strategic plan, and the University is now under the direction of its sixth chief executive over this time span. As the Steering Committee undertook this self-study, it was anticipated that the next president would wish to initiate a comprehensive strategic planning process, and
President Philip announced the initiation of just such a process on Oct. 15, 2009, at the fall 2009 faculty meeting. A primary objective of this self-study, as noted by President Philip, is to inform that process. While the execution of the University’s self-study has certainly helped to identify areas of weakness, it is as important that it be viewed by University leadership and the campus community as an opportunity to identify areas of resilience and fortitude as well.

As such, this self-study process began with a goal to produce a comprehensive and forthright reflection on the current state of the University, with the expectation that the resulting document and recommendations would strengthen the unity of the community, giving it greater insight and renewed purpose for carrying out its mission in the decades ahead. The specific goals and objectives of the self-study, as outlined in the self-study design, were:

1. To examine and assess the state of the institution’s current mission, goals, policies, procedures, structures, educational and related offerings and activities, research, teaching, assessment mechanisms, and resources.
2. To empower a broad University constituency to participate in all aspects of the self-study process, ensuring the maximum representation of various constituencies within the University, as well as ownership of the process, its contents, and resulting recommendations.
3. To identify the institution’s strengths and weaknesses relative to each of the accreditation standards, in light of the University’s mission and goals.
4. To make specific recommendations for improvement, particularly in assessment, planning, and resource allocation processes.

Initially, the Steering Committee asked each of the nine subcommittees to complete the following activities to accomplish these goals and objectives:

1. Review their general charges, the Middle States’ standards of accreditation, and their respective charge questions.
2. Further revise, expand, and refine their respective charge questions through the course of their examinations, and with input from various facets of the University community.
3. Inventory and utilize major reports and planning documents, and information generated within each vice presidential area and the schools and colleges, to support analyses and conclusions.
4. Gather additional data and information, as needed, to address issues of interest.
5. Conduct interviews, focus groups or surveys, as needed, to support the information needs of the self-study process.
6. Communicate and be responsive to the broader University community in addressing issues of import throughout the self-study process, culminating in a final self-study document built through consensus and shared understanding.
Conclusion

The University at Albany is currently at an important point of transition. Its remarkable 165-year history, beginning with its roots as a normal school, is one of repeated challenges and of exceptional faculty, staff and students, who, in meeting those challenges, have transformed UAlbany into the major research university it is today. While it is tempting to try to share with external audiences many of the remarkable achievements of the past decade, despite the challenges associated with frequent changes in senior leadership and an austere funding environment, the Self-Study Steering Committee is well aware of the admonition of the Middle States document, “Self-Study: Creating a Useful Process and Report:” wherein it is made clear that “[t]he primary purpose of the self-study report is to advance institutional self-understanding and self-improvement,” and that the Self-Study report “is most useful when it is analytical and forward-looking rather than descriptive or defensive, when it is used both to identify problems and to develop solutions to them, and when it identifies opportunities for growth and development.”

The University at Albany therefore embarked on this process with an explicit goal of being honest with itself. The chapters that follow present the institution's best attempt to examine how successful it is today at meeting the accreditation standards and, where weaknesses are identified, to make specific recommendations for strengthening the campus's capacity to address them. The context of each recommendation is provided within the chapter in which it is presented, and each chapter concludes with a summary that gathers the recommendations made earlier. As will become evident upon review, the nine self-study subcommittees took their charges seriously and provided numerous recommendations based on the evidence provided, and their analyses. In the coming months, the University, with the advice of the Middle States review team, and in consideration of the guidance that will be recommended by the Strategic Planning Committee, will need to prioritize and selectively pursue action items from the many important recommendations made in this self-study document.