

Saint Joseph's College of Maine

Institutional Response
to the
Team Report

Prepared after study of the Institution's
Self-Study Evaluation Report
and a site visit from
October 31 through November 3, 2021

Saint Joseph's College of Maine thanks the members of our Evaluation Team for the time and energy they committed to our institution as part of our current Self-Study process.

Conducting the Self-Study and hosting the Evaluation Team visit during the global pandemic presented its own challenges and opportunities, and, while the self-study process did not always proceed as smoothly as we would have hoped, we come away again with a renewed sense of the real value that this exercise, with the support of our our colleagues on the Visiting Team and Commission staff, has for this learning community.

While we may differ with some of the Visiting Teams' analysis of where Saint Joseph's is and where it is going, at a global level, we are happy to accept the Team's Final Report.

The Team noted as "strengths" several areas that we clearly agree are among our strengths. Likewise, the two areas of concern, focusing on enrollment and assessment, are ones we certainly recognize.

In what follows, we offer the Commission brief updates on several developments at the College since the time of the Team's visit in early November 2021.

Enrollment

Meeting enrollment goals requires work with current students as well as with prospective students.

Campus-based students

An institution-wide retention effort led to a 93% fall to spring persistence rate among FTFT students who entered the College in the fall of 2021, comparable to the retention rates for this population in the most recent pre-pandemic years.

Our overall fall to spring retention rate was approximately 96%.

The promising mid-fall numbers of applications and admissions for entry on the fall semester of 2022 have remained. As of January 31, 2022, we had 1300 applications toward a goal of 1600 by the end of the cycle and had extended 977 offers of admission. This compares with 1114 applications and 806 admissions as of January 31, 2021.

The undergraduate, campus-based Admission team is now focusing on yield activities, which will be complemented by an entirely redesigned new student orientation program aimed to bring as many deposited students as possible into the fall term.

Based on our current application and admission results, we continue to believe that the fall 2022 target of 250 new FTFT students is reasonable and within reach. We will certainly know more by the time of the Commission meeting in April.

Online students

Our online enrollments are currently running approximately 7% behind the FY22 budget targets largely due to lower than expected enrollment of new students. We have been in intensive discussion with our external marketing partner about this, and they have indicated that renewed effort on their part should show positive results by the time of the March term start. While we certainly hope that we see these results, we have also begun discussions with other potential enrollment marketing partners.

We have also introduced several initiatives to encourage the timely re-enrollment of current students. We should have some indication of the success of these initiatives with March term start.

Next academic year, we will be adding another term start, which will increase the opportunity to grow our online enrollments.

Revenue Generation

While the College's primary source of revenue will continue to be degree seeking students, we have also made additional progress in revenue generation from other sources.

Concerted and focused effort on the part of the Institutional Advancement team with the assistance of a number of dedicated volunteers, will result in unrestricted giving to the College in FY 22 at a level twice what has been achieved, on average, over the previous five years. The FY22 budget of \$850,000 will likely be exceeded. As of February 8, 2021, \$760,876 had already been received or pledged for the current year.

The easing of pandemic related restrictions will bring a return to our conference and events activity and the potential for the return of significant revenue. For FY 19, the last pre-pandemic year, conference and events produced net revenue in excess of \$360,000.

The College will introduce later this spring our first three non-degree workforce development programs developed with an external partner to reflect the College's core identity and values and existing areas of expertise.

The programs are: Early Childhood in Catholic Education; Inclusive Practices for Leaders in Parochial Schools; Catechetical Certification – Basic Level; and Responding to Children with Disabilities in Catholic School Settings.

Two additional certificates are in the planning pipeline: Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion for Catholic Communities; and Specialized Trainings to Equip an Aging-Informed Workforce.

We have also begun working with the Director of Workforce Development for Hospitality Maine to identify needs and opportunities for their members in the non-degree learning space.

Senior Leadership and Personnel Matters

At the time of the Evaluation Visit, three of the College's leadership team positions (Chief Learning/Academic Officer, Chief Enrollment Officer, and Chief Student Development Officer) were held by interims and a fourth (Chief Business and Finance Officer) was about, unexpectedly, to be vacated.

As of this writing, we are finishing the in-person interviews for the next Chief Academic Officer, whose title will be Sr. Vice President for Learning and Programs. We expect that appointment to be confirmed at the upcoming Board meeting at the end of February.

Semi-finalists have been chosen for the Chief Enrollment Officer, whose title will be Vice President for Enrollment. Campus interviews for the finalists are tentatively scheduled late March.

The interim Chief Student Development Officer was an internal appointment. That person has agreed to accept the appointment on a permanent basis.

Within the past month, we have appointed an interim Chief Business Officer who will work on revenue generation, business development, and business planning initiatives. The interim CBO comes to Saint Joseph's after a successful career as CFO at Lesley University, more than two decades in venture capital, and several years in Harvard's finance office.

Additionally, the College is committed to hiring our first Chief Diversity Officer. That position is currently being advertised, and we expect to have the finalists on campus while students are on-campus before the end of the spring term. The hiring of a chief diversity officer is one of a series of specific steps the College has committed to enliven our efforts in the area of diversity, equity, justice, and inclusion. An update on this activity can be found [here](#).

Finally, with the retirement of our long-serving Registrar who had also been the director of Institutional Research for the past six years, the College has decided to hire a dedicated Institutional Researcher separate from the Registrar's function. This position will be filled during FY23.

Public Comment

Upon review of the Visiting Team's report, it became clear that we had failed to comply with the institutional Public Comment component of the Self-Study process, a lapse we attribute to the departure of the former NECHE Institutional Liaison Officer in July of 2021, during the later stages of the process.

Upon consultation with two NECHE Vice Presidents, it was determined that we still had time and therefore an opportunity to publish an institutional call for public comment and to respond to any comments received before the Commission meeting in April.

The call for public comment was posted on the College's website on February 3, 2022.

<https://my.sjcme.edu/community/accreditation-with-the-new-england-commission-of-higher-education/>

It was included in the February 2022 Alumni Association Newsletter, and it appeared in two local newspapers, *The Lakes Region Weekly* and the *Windham Eagle* on February 11th.

The call for public comments indicates the comments should be received by March 10, 2022, a date worked out with Commission staff so as to allow enough time for any comments to be reviewed and responded to prior to our April Commission meeting.

We are deeply grateful to the Commission staff for their willingness to work with us on this matter.

In conclusion, we would once again like to express our appreciation for the work of our colleagues on the Evaluation Team and for their collegial consideration of our Self-Study. Their sense of who we are, of our strengths and our areas for improvement, will prove invaluable, along with the Commission's response, in our ongoing efforts to improve every aspect of Saint Joseph's College of Maine.