

Saint Joseph's College of Maine

Standish, Maine

Focused Evaluation Report

September 17, 2023

This report addresses the New England Commission of Higher Education's Notice of Concern directed to Saint Joseph's College of Maine and dated June 2, 2022.

Introduction

This Focused Evaluation Visit Report focuses on the two areas of concern identified by the Commission in its letter to Saint Joseph's College dated June 2, 2022, specifically, *Institutional Resources* and *Organization and Governance* ([Appendix A](#)). This document addresses the specific citations of the Commission's requirements by delving into detail about the college's success in: stabilizing senior leadership positions; developing more robust capacity for institutional research; realizing its enrollment goals and ensuing related positive operating results; integrating planning across academic, enrollment and finance; and utilizing assessment to ensure program quality and improvement.

The positive changes at Saint Joseph's College that have been implemented since the Commission's last visit have been remarkable. Many of these changes are recent, however. The college has positive results to report to the Commission in a number of areas, specifically those areas of concern identified in the June 2, 2022 letter. While these changes have led to an improved position for the college in terms of leadership, enrollment, finances, and academics, it will take some time to fully appreciate the impacts of the new hires, growth in enrollment, the implementation of a new student information system, and work on assessment and program evaluation.

The work underlying this report started after the Commission's 2021 site visit to Saint Joseph's College and its Notice of Concern letter. Former President James Dlugos and the Board of Trustees undertook a concerted effort to identify and hire strong leaders in the areas of academics, finance, and enrollment, which resulted in finding outstanding leaders in each of those areas. After President Dlugos announced in the fall of 2022 that he would be retiring at the end of June 2023, the Board of Trustees worked diligently to attract a new president for the college with a track record of building up college communities. This effort resulted in Joe Cassidy joining Saint Joseph's College as president in August 2023.

With key leadership roles filled, the Leadership Team began gathering information and preparing for the report when President Cassidy joined the college. The college sought the counsel of NECHE's Pat O'Brien, to review a draft of this report and to offer any feedback, so as to provide as much information as possible regarding progress that has been made since the Commission's site visit and report. The writing team for this report comprises the Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs, the Senior Vice President of Finance and Administration and the President, with considerable input from others across the organization, who provided relevant information and data to support this report.

The organization of this report tracks closely with the suggestions contained in the Commission's document: *"Procedures for the Focused Evaluation Visit."*

Institutional Overview

Saint Joseph's College of Maine was founded in 1912 by the Sisters of Mercy and chartered by the Maine Legislature three years later. Sponsored by the Conference for Mercy Higher Education, it remains the state's only Catholic institution of higher education. It is governed by a Board of Trustees consisting of lay persons and clergy and is overseen by the Conference for Mercy Higher Education Board and its Canonical Board of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. The college relocated from Portland, Maine to its current home in Standish in 1959 to permit expansion of its physical plant and its student body. The college campus is located on nearly 475 acres on the shores of beautiful Sebago Lake, offering an idyllic rural setting for students and visitors from the surrounding community. A pioneer in distance education since the 1970s, the college also provides online certificates and undergraduate and graduate degrees for learners residing in more than 20 countries.

The Mission of the college, refreshed in 2022, is:

Saint Joseph's College of Maine, sponsored by the [Sisters of Mercy](#) and animated by the vision of Catherine McAuley, is a Catholic college in the liberal arts tradition distinguished by its welcoming community. We foster an ongoing dialogue between faith and reason so as to prepare our learners to live meaningful lives that improve the world around them.

The college's Vision statement, created at the same time as the refreshed Mission, is as follows:

In fulfillment of its mission, Saint Joseph's College of Maine will be a diverse, inclusive, and collaborative community that forms individuals who practice humility, justice, and compassion, as Jesus did, in solidarity with the marginalized.

The college endeavors to make certain that the Mission and Vision are incorporated into all aspects of the Saint Joseph's experience, every single day: teaching, administration, athletics, partnerships, community relations, and student operations. The result is that the college community is almost universally described as caring and supportive. The college strives to develop well-educated and trained individuals who utilize their skills to make the world a better place.

Approximately 700 students attend Saint Joseph's College on-campus programs with the majority living in the college's nine residence halls on campus. The college has more than 40 on campus degrees across nine academic areas, the most popular of which are Nursing, Business, Education, and Psychology. The college has another roughly 900 students taking courses through Saint Joseph's College's online programs. Full time faculty number 58 at SJC and our programs are supported by an additional 142 adjunct faculty members. The college employs 213 staff members and has an annual operating budget of approximately \$32 million.

In the past year, the college has experienced significant changes to its Leadership Team. These recent additions have led to an integrated and high-functioning administrative team, positive forward momentum across key metrics, and the sense across campus that the future of the college is bright. The Leadership Team has a very strong and respectful working collaboration, and over the course of this past year, worked closely together to identify and introduce three **Institutional Pillars: Health and Well-Being; Mercy; and Stewardship**. These Pillars will help the institution focus on key strengths of the college and provide guideposts by which we determine future areas of growth and investments as well as resource (re)allocation. These Pillars are not a change in strategic direction as outlined in our refreshed strategic plan: Sustaining the Promise: 2021-2026, but rather a new framework that provides more focus and intentionality to achieve the goals of the strategic plan. Additionally, the college is in the final stages of implementing a new Student Information System (Salesforce) which promises to improve productivity and streamline processes in many offices across the institution, enabling us to be a more efficient and productive organization. The new SIS will consolidate data and provide a robust, flexible platform for all constituent data. It also promises to greatly improve the student experience.

Another important change at Saint Joseph's College worth noting is our trajectory in enrollment. For the second consecutive academic year, the college has experienced positive enrollment growth as the result of thoughtful design and implementation of an enrollment plan. This planning has, in turn, resulted in a more stable budget picture at Saint Joseph's College. We will explain in more detail below how these changes have positively impacted the college and its operations and outlook.

Areas of Focus

1. Achieving Stability in Senior Leadership ([Appendix B](#))

A critical component to SJC's achievement of strategic finance and enrollment goals is appropriate leadership staffing. Since the time of the Commission's last letter, the

college has made significant progress in this area and has appointed the following full-time senior leaders.

In May 2022, Will Rothermel was hired as the new Associate Vice President and Chief Athletics and Recreation Officer for the college. Rothermel brings an extensive background in athletics administration in numerous leadership positions at all three NCAA levels over the last 13 years.

In July 2022, Dr. Monique LaRocque joined the college as Senior Vice President for Learning and Programs and Chief Academic Officer (renamed to Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs). Dr. LaRocque was previously Associate Provost for Lifelong Learning at the University of Maine and brings to her work at Saint Joseph's a wealth of experience in higher education, including both classroom and online learning as well as creative revenue-generating strategies for new educational programming.

Also in July 2022, Dr. Liz Wiesen was promoted from Interim Associate Vice President of Student Life to Vice President of Student Life. Her promotion to a permanent position has contributed greatly to the stability of the Leadership Team. Dr. Wiesen has significant experience at Saint Joseph's College (more than 25 years); her position provides continuity in Student Life and strong leadership in advancing initiatives to promote mission, health, safety and learning among students, all critical attributes to support growing enrollment and persistence rates.

In October 2022, the college hired a Senior Vice President of Finance and Administration and Chief Financial Officer, Jonathan Greven, who brings experience from both the private and governmental sectors. He has over 15 years of experience in finance, revenue generation and diversification, and cost control and continues to identify non-tuition related sources of income to accomplish projects to improve liquidity for the college.

In July 2023, the college hired Nannan Dong, a new Institutional Research Administrator. Mr. Dong is an experienced professional in institutional research and data analytics at both public and private universities. His strong skills and experience will support data collection and analysis at a very high level and will improve data integrity and governance across the entire institution. Mr. Dong has already provided exceptional service over the past two months and promises to raise our institutional research capacity to a whole new level.

In August 2023, Joe Cassidy joined the college as President. President Cassidy brings more than twenty years of college experience to Saint Joseph's College with ten years

as president of three of Maine's Community colleges, including Maine's largest—Southern Maine Community College.

In October 2023, Michael Griffin will join SJC as Vice President of Enrollment and as a key member of the Leadership Team. Mr. Griffin is an experienced professional who has demonstrated success in leading and empowering admissions and enrollment teams in meeting institutional goals and has deep experience in leadership, campus and online admissions, international recruitment, and financial aid. It should be noted that the college had hired Dr. Hernan Buchelli as Vice President of Enrollment in October 2022. While Dr. Buchelli left SJC in the spring of 2023 to begin a new position at a large R1 university, he has remained with the college as a consultant to ensure continuity in our recruitment and enrollment planning. Dr. Buchelli will work with Mr. Griffin to coordinate the handoff so as to ensure seamlessness in our enrollment strategy. This new strategy is informed by the work of Miller/Cook Inc., a consulting firm specializing in helping colleges meet and exceed their goals for admission, financial aid, student retention and net revenues. Continued partnership with Miller/Cook provides additional continuity in our enrollment strategies.

Also in October 2023, Haley Thompson will join SJC as Vice President of Institutional Advancement. Ms. Thompson has deep experience in fundraising and engagement in the state of Maine and has demonstrated a track record of success in maximizing fundraising returns from a small team and a small community. The college is looking forward to her guidance and expertise in a role that was last filled in June of 2022.

The new staff above join several long-term Leadership Team members in the areas of Mission, Marketing and Communication, and Information Technology. Together the college's Leadership Team, led by the new President, work collaboratively on strategic planning and governance as they implement the vision and the strategic priorities of the institution.

While the college has made significant progress in these high priority areas, a key role that remains unfilled at this time includes leadership for Justice, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. At the time of the last update letter to NECHE, an Associate Vice President of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion had been hired to begin employment in July, 2022. After serving one year, the AVP departed the college in June of 2023. During this past year, however, we have made progress in our JEDI efforts and are committed to prioritizing this work and building on our momentum as we move forward. The college has in place a DEI All-College Committee that serves in an advisory capacity to the Leadership Team as we prepare for a new leader in JEDI work. In the fall 2023, the college will also

be engaging a consultant with JEDI expertise to help the college develop a strategic plan and measurable goals for our work in this important area.

With its Leadership Team fully staffed with experienced and talented professionals, as described above, Saint Joseph's College now has the experience and vision in place to truly integrate planning across all departments of the college. As the college emerges from a difficult FY2023 (ended June 30, 2023), leadership has redefined priorities, reengaged in strategic planning and forecasting, and has worked to not only assess but reallocate resources to areas that are critical for the institution's mission and long-term viability. The financial assessment that has taken place goes beyond the coming year's budget process, and any success achieved to date has come from deep collaboration between departments and VPs in a way that has allowed the college to impact both revenues and expenses in real time.

2. Realizing Enrollment Goals and Maintaining Positive Operating Results

As shown by the submitted Finance and Enrollment Forms (F&E), fiscal year 2023 was characterized by low enrollment, unfavorable revenue and deep operating losses (see [Appendix C](#)). In many ways, the issues should not have been surprising, as the budgets and plans created by interim staff and a largely disconnected process led to the execution of a spending plan that was not sustainable. Upon hiring a VP of Finance and Administration in late fall of 2022, it became clear that the college would end this fiscal year, not only in a deep loss, but also in the midst of a cash flow crisis. Plans were discussed, vetted and executed to ensure that the college would be able to meet its working capital requirements to receive fall 2023 students.

Financial Management

A number of cost-saving initiatives were introduced during this critical period that allowed the college to meet working capital requirements, including: the deferment of unnecessary capital expenditures such as planned furniture replacement; premature purchases of replacement vehicles; investment in new wayfinding signage; and cosmetic building envelope investment. Together, these capital deferrals saved approximately \$260,000 of cash which has now been reprogrammed for FY24. Additionally, there was a divestiture of unutilized assets—primarily a parcel of undeveloped excess land, as well as an unutilized skid steer—which added \$590,000 to working capital. To further reduce expenses, leadership tackled strategic decision-making on staff replacement and departmental reorganizations which saved \$600,000 in expenses, and refinanced the 2013 Maine Health and Higher Education Facilities Authority bond that preserved \$232,000 in working capital through the

reduction of principal payments. In addition to these capital preservation measures, the college also worked to increase borrowing capacity by increasing an existing line of credit by \$1 million to \$2.5 million and by reaching agreement with a donor to secure the ability to borrow against a restricted funds account which expanded borrowing capacity by \$850,000. While these initiatives served to provide additional funding to SJC during seasonal cash fluctuations, only \$300,000 of the \$4.35 million has been borrowed to date and the college is anticipating full repayment of these funds in the current fiscal year.

Efforts to reduce expenditures were carefully considered and in some cases, department reorganizations were strategically planned to reduce staff but maintain or improve services. This was challenging, as there were many previous staff cuts aimed at expense reduction which reduced the ability to generate sufficient savings with this method alone. Other challenges included identifying departments within Saint Joseph's College where staff and faculty retention were absolutely critical and required additional funding to maintain or accelerate progress. Areas that were impacted by strategic investments included enrollment, athletics, certain academic programs and more recently foodservice.

More broadly, a deep analysis of human resources has underscored the issue of staff retention and engagement for all staff and faculty. The college is working to address these concerns and started by implementing an incremental cost of living increase for faculty in spring 2023, with additional increases planned in FY24. Staff increases will also be addressed as the budget allows. Prior to the start of the fall 2023 semester, the college also implemented an increase in adjunct faculty pay, which was severely underfunded, by 29% per credit hour of instruction. In addition, compensation for key staff in many departments has been increased with more increases planned in the current fiscal year. The college recognizes that despite challenging financial times, it must prioritize investment in its employees to maintain continuity in its work and to build morale across all departments.

The difficulties experienced in FY23 informed the college's FY24 budgeting process. Budgets were developed alongside cash flow projections and forecasts to help inform and build a strategic financial plan moving forward. The FY24 budget process was characterized by shared assumptions and models, as well as discussion, testing and analysis. While the FY24 budget is not "balanced" and demonstrates a loss of \$575,000, it is cash positive and allows SJC to sustain its mission while also making strategic progress on initiatives (see [Appendix D](#)).

Enrollment

While the NECHE Financial Screening Dashboard reports a three-year decline in undergraduate enrollment of 27%, (see [Appendix E](#)), that reporting window obscures recent progress that the college has made in this area. From 2021 to 2022, the total undergraduate enrollment declined by 2%, driven by a 9% decline in online undergraduate enrollment. However, the campus population remained essentially even (758 headcount in 2022 compared to 759 in 2021).

Enrollment declines from 2019 to 2020 and to 2021 were driven by a combination of factors including the pandemic, which impacted both the recruitment of new students as well as the retention of those already enrolled. The improving situation from 2021 to 2022 in campus enrollments is the result of progress in both the recruitment of new students and the retention of current students. For the fall of 2022, first-time, full-time student enrollment grew by 15%, and retention rates approached their pre-pandemic levels of 93% from fall to spring, and by 77% from fall to the following fall, resulting in essentially flat enrollment overall. Retention rates for classes that were COVID impacted remain lower than the historical trend (see [Appendix F](#)).

The fall 2022 actuals were used to update the dynamic, five-year enrollment model that the college has developed for financial and other planning activities (see chart below). It is important to note that the retention assumptions reflected are conservative and are a running average of retention through the COVID pandemic years, when many colleges across the country experienced lower than planned persistence. As the college is able to execute on new planned retention strategies, persistence rates will exceed values in the model and allow for more rapid increases in total enrollment.

Full-Time Enrollment	FY23 (actual)	FY24 (goal)	FY24 (actual)	FY25	FY26	FY27	FY28
Freshman & Transfers	205	250	271	275	300	320	340
Sophomores	167	156	172	193	215	237	256
Juniors	165	142	137	132	166	184	204
Seniors	143	155	130	133	126	157	175
5th Year Seniors	16	11	7	11	10	10	10
Total	696	714	717	744	816	909	985

Two simultaneous initiatives begin to offer the college a roadmap to achieve these projections, and have already - as part of a newly integrated enrollment management approach - helped us achieve a significant uptick in enrollment numbers this past year alone (see [Appendix G](#)).

The first, led by the college's recent VP of Enrollment (Dr. Buchelli), restructured the Admissions Office in an effort to recommit to relationships at area high schools, as well as fine-tune enrollment processes, outreach, and campus events. In addition, the college has entered new partnerships with recruiting firms, rebooted existing partnerships, and has met its target of 250 incoming students this semester, with a stabilized discount rate from the current year. Incoming admission staff members will continue this work and are committed to success with consistent strategy and presence in the New England recruitment market. Similar efforts are being made to boost online enrollment by creating new partnerships with learners from local organizations such as hospitals and private employers. There is a focus on creating alliances with other institutions of higher education that could be considered "feeder" institutions such as community colleges in the area and across the region.

The FY24 enrollment projections, which already exceed the college's admissions goals for the year, are a testament to the power of these strategies. As of the date of this report, SJC has secured 271 first time full-time and transfer students for fall 2023 (FY24), which exceeds the established goal by 8% or 21 students. Achievement of strategic goals in admissions is a critical component of the college's ongoing success. The new VP of Enrollment, with additional staff in admissions, is poised to continue the momentum achieved this past year and is projected to meet and perhaps exceed goals for FY25 and beyond.

The second strategy saw the creation of a college-wide Retention Summit, launched in the spring of 2022, which invited multiple departments across the campus to review best practices in student retention and persistence, and propose new retention ideas for SJC. The Summit drew over 100 participants across the organization to identify, and then implement three to five, high-impact strategies that align with the college's initiatives related to student retention. These strategies were to: reduce summer melt; build more efficient connections among student service departments; and enhance advising systems.

A Retention and Persistence Task Force, an outgrowth of the Summit, now meets bi-weekly to discuss how the identified strategies will provide an engaging and productive environment where all students are supported to persist, succeed and graduate. The work of the task force, which includes representatives from the Academic

Center of Excellence, Career Studio, Student Engagement, Mercy Center, Health and Wellness, and Athletics, has enabled more streamlined communication to support New Student Orientation in June to Move-In weekend in August. For example, rather than multiple communications being sent by various departments to incoming students, resulting in a lack of coherence and oftentimes conflicting messaging, the campus now provides fewer and more efficient communications through postcards, emails and one *Readiness Checklist* for students to complete, which has items needed from all student success departments. Working together on these issues has also led to improved collaboration among student groups and between departments in an effort to better serve students.

The use of a new Pinestand Student Success Hub creates a more holistic approach to supporting students and better communication among advisors with regard to a student's progress. As one example, digital advising notes allow students who have changed majors to settle in with a new advisor without having to provide a detailed record of their previous experiences. Faculty are using Pinestand to streamline their advising appointments and keep more accurate notes on their advising meetings. Additionally, Academic Alerts information is housed within the platform and thus more readily available to support students in their academic progress. Students are also collaborating with their faculty advisors much earlier in the registration process to better enable progress towards degree completion. These significant efforts will continue to support improvements in retention rates as we move forward.

One final initiative worth noting is a new pilot program that we expect to contribute to mission and revenue goals in the near future. Integrated Studies –a non-degree certificate program for students with intellectual disabilities – is launching in the 2023-24 academic year, and will build upon our vision of inclusivity and access. This is a two-year program for students 18-26 years of age, who have completed high school. The goal is to provide an inclusive higher education experience and to help students increase their employment opportunities by improving their independent living and social skills. During the first year of implementation, we anticipate serving approximately 2-4 students, with plans to grow the program to 5-15 students over the next several years. Our program is modeled after the highly successful Integrated Studies program at Gwynedd Mercy University, another Sisters of Mercy institution in Pennsylvania. We are excited about this mission-aligned program and the positive impact it can have on our campus community as well as communities in which these students live and work. This pilot year is funded by the college's operating budget in conjunction with federal and foundation grants.

Operating Revenues and Expenditures

The college's total operating revenue declined from FY21 to FY22 by \$2.1 million or 5.7%. We are projecting an additional decline during FY23 of \$4.4 million or 12.9%, as the year has not yet been closed. Factors in the year-over-year reduction include diminished enrollment and greater financial aid as a percentage of tuition and fees, which accounts for 145% of the FY22 reduction and 32% of the projected FY23 reduction. Most of the projected revenue shortfall in FY23 results from a 91% reduction in federal grants from FY22 to FY23 which were associated with Higher Education Relief Funding and the COVID Pandemic. While net student fees and government grants have declined in the reporting period, both private gifts and other auxiliary enterprises have increased dramatically for FY21 to FY22 and again for FY22 to FY23 – a testament to the college's planning and execution in the area of Advancement and in the diversification of revenues. These categories combined increased 309% between FY21 and FY23 (see [Appendix C](#)).

There are many noteworthy initiatives underway that will impact revenues moving forward. One that the college is very excited about is the newly accredited (December 2022) online Accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing (ABSN) program that is welcoming its first class of 25 students in fall 2023. The program allows learners with bachelor's degrees in other disciplines to earn a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree within 15 months. The program is projected to generate approximately \$409,000 for the college in FY24 and grow to \$1.9 million in FY25 and \$2.2 million in FY26 when the program reaches its target capacity of 150 students. This ABSN is the only one offered online in the state of Maine and helps address a critical shortage of nursing staff in the state. As the program is online, it also serves prospective nurses across the country.

To further underscore a commitment to the growth of Nursing education, this fall the college opened a new state-of-the-art Nursing Simulator Laboratory (SimLab) to bolster its on-campus and online Nursing programs. With the SimLab up and running, students, faculty, and the local medical industry are excited about the learning opportunities it will offer. It is important to note that the SimLab is a nearly \$3.5 million investment that the college has made without the use of debt or general fund cash of any kind. All of the funding has been provided by federal grants and gifts from the college's donor base. This is a game-changing asset for our learning community and the college is excited to leverage it as part of our continued commitment to nursing education and enrollment growth.

Additionally, the college is looking at its infrastructure in new and exciting ways with a heavy focus on revenue generation. As an example, with lower on-campus enrollment

from pre-pandemic days, the college has available underutilized dormitory space. In FY23, an agreement was reached to lease some of this space to the Roux Institute for incoming international students which generated \$280,000 for the college. A similar agreement has been reached with a local junior hockey league for FY24, which has generated \$200,000 for the college and adds the likelihood of expanding the partnership to academics, as athletes plan to take classes while residing on campus. Similarly, we are pursuing both housing and co-enrollment relationships with local community colleges such as Southern Maine Community College, which is bursting with enrollment due to the state of Maine's Free College Tuition for community college students. This program, which was initially for 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023 high school graduates, has now been extended another two years for students graduating in 2024 and 2025.

Other initiatives include the launch of a new May Term to support students towards a four year graduation rate, which served approximately 80 students in May 2023, and generated approximately \$40,000 in tuition. The college also launched two non-credit professional development programs in the summer of 2023, which served over 100 high school teachers through an online and an on-campus Advanced Placement Summer Institute (APSI). The college was selected as one of only 25 colleges in the country to be granted the opportunity to offer online APSI to teachers in the near future.

While revenues have declined over the reporting period, expenditures have remained relatively stable with a standard deviation of less than 2% over the reporting period. The college is keenly aware of the issue at hand and understands the importance of both increasing revenues and decreasing expenditures. The current inflationary environment has been a unique challenge for the college in the creation and approval of the FY24 budget. Through collaboration, strategic planning and some negotiation, the college has been able to reduce its spending plan by over 2% to \$32.2 million from FY23 projection of \$32.9 million despite across-the-board cost increases. At the same time, increasing recruiting success and the launch of new programs has allowed the college to conservatively budget an almost 7% increase in revenues to \$31.6 million over FY23 projected revenues of \$29.5 million. These developments work together to build the base for a recovery from FY23 and the deep losses that the college sustained.

3. Integrating Academic, Enrollment, and Financial Plans

Like many colleges, the college's recent operations have been shaped by austerity - a natural response to declining enrollments, the looming demographic cliff, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Putting the college on a path first to financial stability has meant turning around our financial outlook using four key metrics: market durability, cash flow, wealth, and liquidity. Positioning us to improve on each of these areas, as we have done

and will continue to do, will allow us to offer more competitive compensation, fund program renewal and strategic initiatives, update our infrastructure, and grow our reserves to manage operating expenses.

These key metrics and the strategies in place to achieve them, are actionable, measurable, and are within reach for an institution such as Saint Joseph's College that prioritizes and understands them as guiding principles for decision making. When crafting the strategic plan, the college could not have anticipated how difficult it would be to emerge from the COVID pandemic with regard to enrollment. As plans were only beginning to come together for strategic progress on these goals, the college entered fiscal year 2023, which would prove to be a test of resolve and ingenuity for the community at SJC. As shown in the financial data, FY23 operating result will amount to nearly a \$4 million loss, which made progress on these goals elusive. As discussed above, FY24 has allowed the college to return to a more balanced state with increased enrollment and revenues and expenses that have been contained to more sustainable levels. Now is the critical time to begin forging plans to execute against the strategic goals, and that is exactly what the Leadership Team is in the process of doing.

As noted above, the college has identified the three Pillars of: Health and Well-being; Mercy; and Stewardship as our guiding parameters to improve the fiscal, enrollment, and academic health of the institution moving forward. This includes guidance for new program development, program assessment, and prioritization of strategic investments, inclusive of funding, space allocation, and other resource-based planning. The Pillars also provide the college with a common message that can be articulated through marketing and recruitment that are so vital to the college meeting enrollment targets and achieving differentiation in the marketplace.

The most critical components of closely integrated academic, enrollment, and finance planning is a shared set of values that represents the community and its priorities. For the first time in years this rubric exists with the Pillars, and the Leadership Team is excited to move forward with them as our guide posts. Saint Joseph's College is small and nimble enough that these Pillars are championed by all Leadership Team members, who regularly meet to share priorities, challenges, and plans in an effort to multiply the impact on the organization through teamwork, shared initiatives and decision making. Several of these team members presented integrated marketing, enrollment and finance plans to our Board of Trustees in June, 2023 (see [Appendix H](#)).

In an effort to continue the work of integrating academics, enrollment, and finance at the college, the Leadership Team has begun to create shared models and thus a shared understanding of the metrics that will be used to measure performance. Many of the key

goals for FY24 involved on campus and online enrollment, and shared revenue models were created to ensure that all leadership members work on a shared set of goals and understanding of performance against those goals. Other shared models include program assessment and enrollment, room and board, auxiliary revenue estimates, as well as maintenance work order management and capital expenditure tracking.

In addition to planning and forming the coming year's budget, the shared models created by the Leadership Team have also informed the college's longer term budget planning for FY24 through FY26. The financial model includes shared projects and initiatives, which were improved by discussions at the department levels, leadership level as well as vetted by the Board of Trustees. The three-year financial plan (see [Appendix I](#)) allows the college to continue serving its mission while also making strategic progress on initiatives and departmental plans for the future. There are some strategic initiatives, however, that remain unfunded in the FY24-FY26 budget plans. These initiatives were discussed, weighed and are currently being vetted by the College's Revenue and Resources Committee, a subcommittee of the Board of Trustees, for guidance and input on prioritization. The Leadership Team is committed to working together to find innovative ways to fund these initiatives. Examples of these projects include hiring a new leader for SJC Online, subscribing to new online recruiting platforms, adding to the college's mental health counseling capacity, launching new athletic teams, and securing a public transportation partner to aid in connecting students with the broader community in Southern Maine, primarily Portland.

While these models are already in place and working, the college is excited about the new dashboards, real time key performance indicators and metrics that will be accessible through the new Pinestead Expansion Project. The Pinestead software, which is already live for some departments, is a student information system that is based on Salesforce CRM software and has state-of-the-art capabilities for reporting, shared understanding, and transparency. The shared dashboards and reporting tools will allow appropriate staff to view real-time milestones and measure strategic progress with much greater ease and speed. The college's admissions teams are already using the software, with the athletics staff projected to use it in early fall, and a full SIS implementation for the rest of the college community later in the calendar year 2023. Plans to implement modules for Advancement, Finance and Events are also underway and have generated great excitement, as these departments are currently constrained by legacy operating software. While information availability and transparency are keys to effective management, the most significant benefits of the system will be to support decision-making and will allow the college to optimize coordination across departments to meet strategic targets.

4. Demonstrating Progress in Program Assessment

On-Campus Program Assessment

Academic program assessment has been a top priority for the new Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs (VPAA). During the 2022-23 academic year, the VPAA met with a number of staff members to gain a better understanding of the state of assessment work at the college.

One of the efforts towards assessment was the appointment of Dr. Nina Eduljee, professor of psychology, to serve as assessment coordinator for the 2022-23 academic year (she will continue in this role for AY 2023-24). During the year, Dr. Eduljee created a comprehensive Student Success Matrix (see [Appendix J](#)) that was shared with academic departments to collect and compile measures of student success within the various student majors. This data collection will be ongoing and department chairs, with their faculty, will be responsible for updating the matrix on a regular basis. As the data is collected, it will be used to help identify how programmatic and institutional learning outcomes are being met and what improvements can be made to collect more information moving forward.

In addition, Dr. Eduljee and Dr. Dale Brooker, Associate Dean of Academic Initiatives and Innovation, have been working collaboratively to determine plans for the assessment of the new Core Curriculum: “Building Leaders for 21st Century Sustainable Communities” which launched this 2023-24 academic year. Together, they are developing strategies to assess the effectiveness of the Core and to measure key student learning outcomes that have been established by the Faculty Senate. In the spring of 2023, an online advising workshop for the new Core was created. Faculty had access to this online training throughout the summer. It is expected that all faculty advisors will have completed the online training before the end of the fall 2023 semester. The Core assessment will also include a measure of the effectiveness of the Core Advising Training process for faculty. Dr. Brooker and Dr. Eduljee have also begun a review of the Institutional Assessment Plan (see [Appendix K](#)) to address assessment of experiential learning, including community-based learning and internships, both of which support the mission of the college and the goals of the Pillars.

While the efforts outlined above have provided a measure of continuity in assessment work, there has been a lack of focused leadership and support for these efforts from the Office of Academic Affairs. The current VPAA, however, has created a vision for assessment work for the next several years so that all academic programs—both on campus and online—will be reviewed and assessed and improvements be made as needed to ensure the integrity of the curriculum.

At the start of this academic year 2023-24, the VPAA announced at Faculty Day the two

critical priorities for the upcoming year: integration of the new Institutional Pillars, and a comprehensive assessment of all academic programs. The following goals were set for the year:

- that departments review and revise course and program outcomes, and align with institutional Pillars;
- that departments review curriculum and establish verticality of courses within the major;
- that departments complete a student success data matrix (as described above); and
- that a rotation cycle be established for academic program reviews commencing in spring 2024. It was announced that the on-campus Business program and the Criminal Justice Program will be the first two programs to begin their rotation.

The Office of Academic Affairs has formed an assessment team which is composed of the VPAA, Dr. Eduljee, Dr. Brooker, Ms. Kristin Soule, Senior Director of the Learning Commons, and Ms. Mylan Bannon, Executive Associate to the VPAA. Other faculty will be asked to participate and provide their expertise in leading assessment work as needed. The team will be meeting bi-weekly to develop the plans for implementation to ensure the work identified above will be completed. A project plan will be created in early fall 2023 semester, similar to the plan developed for online programs (see below), which will include goals and timelines for completion of objectives.

In addition to the goals set for department chairs, the assessment team will be charged with the following actions in AY 23-24:

- finalizing the Institutional Assessment Learning Plan and aligning it with the new Pillars;
- developing an assessment plan for the New Core;
- developing an assessment plan for experiential learning, and
- establishing the five year cycle for all academic program reviews, which will include external reviewers in the relevant disciplines.

Ms. Bannon will provide operational and project management support to ensure that the college meets these objectives.

Online Program Assessment

Over the past four to six years, there has been a lack of investment in the online enterprise which has greatly affected the performance of online programs. Significant

cuts were made to online personnel and operations, and increasing competition from local as well as national online providers has exacerbated the challenges. No new degree programs have been launched over the last few years and enrollments in most degree programs have suffered a decline.

In the spring of 2023, the VPAA, who brings over fifteen years of experience in online administration, gathered a team of stakeholders to develop a new model for the assessment of the online enterprise at SJC.

The model, called a *360 Degree Health Assessment Review (360 Review for short)* is a deep dive into the curriculum of each of the online programs as well as a thorough analysis of each of the functional areas supporting online students, namely: admissions, recruitment and retention, marketing, academic advising, program director roles and responsibilities, and other key areas of student support services including business services, financial aid and the registrar's office. A comprehensive project plan and assessment tool was created and a cross-functional team was brought together to review each of these areas. The *360 Review* process for each online program kicked off in the summer of 2023. During the kick-off meetings, the team met with individual program directors to review the assessment tool, the project outline, a financial analysis of the program, course mapping and program plans to ensure adequate course availability by term, and a review of marketing efforts— both organic and non-organic lead generation—for the online program.

Following the kick-off meetings, Phase I of this assessment process launched, which was an information- gathering phase to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of policies and procedures that support online students, and to identify gaps that exist in our processes and communication flow. Multiple meetings were held between the program directors and the lead of each of the support service areas to get a more comprehensive understanding of the many issues related to program health. Phase I included an in-depth analysis of SJC Online's admissions funnel, advising process, course design and improvement, and management practices. A Gap Summary and Heat Map (see [Appendix L](#)) provides an overall view of areas of strengths and weaknesses in our online programming. The results, across all operational areas, highlight the need for a less transactional experience in favor of a more intentional, personalized approach. The following represents some of the findings and strategies needed to improve our processes.

Admissions

Leah Pottle, the Director of Online Admissions, shared that there is an overreliance on paid lead generation over organic lead generation. Ms. Pottle estimates that nearly 75% of student leads come from paid content, and that some paid content did not accurately reflect the program, mission, or objectives of SJC Online and could be a detractor to potential leads. She further noted that a majority of student leads should come from organic sources as there is a higher prospective student conversion rate. As a result of this insight, SJC will work with colleagues at University Professional and Continuing Education Association (UPCEA) to obtain market research and outline program specific outreach at a local, regional, and national level.

Some examples from the gap analysis include:

- Ensuring content created by Collegis (online enrollment services provider) adequately represents our programs. Program directors will work with Brand Studio to validate pictures, ads, and monitor the comments section on social media feeds.
- Personalizing the prospective student experience by including program directors in communication plans to put a face to the program.
- Ensuring acceptance letters are personalized to align with the student populations we seek to attract (e.g. alumni, returning student, faculty/staff, new students)
- Alerting program directors when students accept and enroll in their program for additional personalized outreach.

Advising

It was evident during the advising meetings that the absence of accurate enrollment and retention data severely impacts the ability to anticipate students' course needs. The result is that SJC schedules more classes than needed to offer greater course options. These classes are largely low-enrolled which reduces course integrity and could be a factor in low engagement and retention. It was also discovered that program directors, while collaborative by nature, had little opportunity to engage with students during the advising process.

The Senior Associate Director of Online Advising, Sarah McEachin, has created new opportunities for collaboration with program director's to include new advising tools, a new process for course planning, and joint term planning opportunities. Phase II of the

health assessment will further analyze these collaborative efforts and offer student-centered planning by addressing the following:

- Revising the New Student Orientations to be less generic and to create more online program-specific communication with students.
- Involving the Technology Enhanced Instruction team at the front-end of the term planning process so as to eliminate the bottleneck in the course revision timeline.
- Creating more efficient three-year course mappings for improved program planning
- Finding opportunities for more program director involvement in the student experience. It was noted that a program director may never have direct communication with a student during their entire duration of the program.

Management

The 360 Degree Program Health Assessment offered the opportunity for program directors to discuss their job descriptions and how current operations may or may not align with perceived expectations. Due to many transitions of leadership in Academic Affairs, many program directors were unclear about what was expected of them, including their required teaching loads and essential job functions. Program directors had been removed from involvement in major operations including marketing, budget, and performance evaluation. Program directors need to have clarity of job responsibility and a better understanding of key performance indicators.

Specific examples from Phase I of ways to improve management function are:

- Utilizing current post-course teaching evaluations to better inform program directors and adjunct faculty of teaching performance;
- Ensuring program directors hold regular department meetings to better support adjunct faculty in meeting expectations;
- Involving program directors in market research or outreach efforts as stated by the job description.

During Phase II of the *360 Review* process, we will address the program directors' essential job functions of marketing and budget management. Phase III will focus on key performance indicators for adjunct faculty, full-time faculty and department administration.

Quality Assurance and Course Design

As part of the *360 Review* process, one of the critical areas for review was academic course and academic program quality. In January 2023, the Senior Director of the Learning Commons, Ms. Kristin Soule, and members of the Technology-Enhanced Instruction department implemented a quality course review process to evaluate courses based on a customized rubric. The adopted rubrics are based on nationally recognized standards for online education. The rubric encompasses standards from the Quality Matters (QM) Higher Ed Rubric, Online Learning Consortium (OLC) OSCQR Course Design Review Scorecard, as well as institutional standards created by the college. The rubric was further customized to differentiate graduate and undergraduate course expectations (see [Appendix M](#)).

Over the span of the following six months, every course in the online programs was evaluated based on the same set of standards. The results were disaggregated by graduate and undergraduate education levels for each department. In July 2023, discussions were facilitated with each program director to review the results.

Each program area's results varied based on a number of factors. For example, the Education department had experienced leadership transitions over the previous two years, which affected the performance of the online programs and the quality of the curriculum. This program had previously been reviewed as part of the Department of Education's (DOE) accreditation. While the program did receive full accreditation, notable concerns were identified with the expectation that plans be put in place to resolve these issues. The results from the *360 Review* coupled with the Department of Education accreditation feedback has helped us prioritize where we need to focus to strengthen our programs, namely: strong program leadership; focused course quality improvements; and identifying human capital and budget to support the work.

As another example, the Health Administration *360 Review* results were overwhelmingly positive. The majority of courses met all standard criteria in the course review rubric and minimal adjustments were needed to remedy deficiencies. The Master's of Health Administration Program (MHA) had previously been reviewed as part of a multi-year process by the Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Management Education (CAHME). In May 2023, we received notice that the program received full accreditation. Critical focus, attention and resources were provided to this program area in order to achieve this accreditation, which further underscores the correlation between resources and quality. The results from the *360 Review* along with the CAHME feedback provided a wealth of information to assist us in further refining our *360 Review* process. This assessment work provides a valuable model and template for the review of all online programs (specifically curriculum) in AY 2023-24.

In summary, the data gathered during Phase I of the *360 Review* shows that many of the proposed solutions, while viewed individually, are low-cost, easy-to-fix solutions. When analyzed in totality, however, it is clear that there is not sufficient human capital at this time to effect all of the changes needed to achieve desired objectives. It is anticipated that, as we correct many of the issues identified, we will strengthen our online programs, generate more enrollments and thus more revenue to address some of the shortages identified. We will need to have a realistic and incremental plan to increase staffing as we see further enrollments.

360 Review Process-Next Steps

Phase II of the *360 Review* will pursue the three most systematic gap areas identified in the first phase, namely: developing a more effective enrollment and communication strategy; creating a more student-centered approach to program planning and management; and better alignment between course development priorities, the Educational Policies Committee (EPC), and Course Catalog revision processes. Planning will continue to evolve as targets are created and timelines and strategies are established to accomplish our strategic goals. Our strategy is to complete Phase II planning ahead of the FY25 budget cycle to align assessment work with the budget and further the integration of academics, enrollments, and financial planning (see [Appendix N](#)).

Phase III, which we hope to begin in Spring 2024, will be the implementation of the objectives outlined in the previous phases and creating plans for continued maintenance and improvement.

Further Support for SJC Online and Assessment

As noted above, an Institutional Research Administrator was hired in the summer of 2023. The IR administrator comes to Saint Joseph's College with over seven years of experience in institutional research and has already made a significant impact on how we gather and report data at the college. He has established more efficient means to collect data and is working on automating functions that are currently done manually and are very time-consuming. He will be supporting the 360 review process by collecting and analyzing data to support program directors in managing their programs, as well as in improving the overall assessment process.

In addition to the IR administrator, a new director of the online graduate Education programs was hired in the summer of 2023. The online graduate Education programs saw considerable losses in enrollments over the past several years and there is work to

be done in rebuilding relationships with k-12 institutions across the state. The new director comes to SJC with a doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction, strong relationship-building capacity, and an innovative approach to online education and the use of emerging technologies. Dr. Thompson has been working collaboratively with the various support service personnel to work through the 360 review process.

These two recent hires will bring more capacity and expertise to the online enterprise and will support our continued improvement of our online programs and the data that informs their development.

One of the most important investments that will be made in the academic year 2023-24 is the hiring of a Director to oversee the online enterprise. A search for this leadership position will commence in the fall of 2023 with the goal of hiring for the beginning of the spring 2024 semester. The primary role of the director will be to support the assessment process by working closely with program directors and other support service areas as well as engage in market analysis and program development for the potential launch of new online programs that will respond to market demand and ensure overall online growth.

Summary Appraisal and Plans

While Saint Joseph's College staggered a bit coming out of the pandemic as it experienced upheaval in its Leadership Team and experienced a steep decline in its enrollment, the college has gathered itself and is again steady on its feet. The Leadership Team overseeing college operations is now complete and is full of talented, committed, and creative people. Members of the team are taking a collaborative and integrated approach to planning. This has led to a streamlining of operations and a focus on communal responsibility and commitment to meeting our mission. As we have revamped the college's approaches to recruitment, enrollment, and retention, we are seeing growth in the college's enrollment. As we engage in vigilant oversight of expenditures, we simultaneously seek creative and innovative ways to improve our financial outlook by diversifying our revenue streams and expanding our educational offerings to support more diverse learners. With a comprehensive plan for assessment of online and on-campus academic programs, as well as new marketing efforts to support organic lead generation, we are confident that we can build upon our enrollment portfolio over the next several years. Once we have stabilized some of the infrastructure and have made improvements in a number of our processes and procedures, we will explore the launch of new online programs as well as consider potential new on-campus programs that meet the demands of today's learners.

The next few years will be exciting as SJC realizes the full advantages of a new Leadership Team as well as focused attention to the most critical areas of the college that support its health and viability. In a relatively short amount of time, the college has been able to turn around the enrollment and financial trajectory of the institution and looks forward to a more favorable outlook in the future.

Appendices

[Appendix A](#): NECHE Letter to Saint Joseph's College of Maine, dated June 2, 2022

[Appendix B](#): SJC Organizational Chart

[Appendix C](#): Finance and Enrollment forms (F&E), FY23

[Appendix D](#): FY24 Budget Summary

[Appendix E](#): NECHE Financial Screening Dashboard

[Appendix F](#): Retention and Persistence Data

[Appendix G](#): Fall-23 Admissions Report

[Appendix H](#): Integrated Marketing & Enrollment Presentation to the Board of Trustees

[Appendix I](#): FY24-26 Projection

[Appendix J](#): Student Success Matrix

[Appendix K](#): Institutional Assessment Plan

[Appendix L](#): 360 Gap Summary and Heat Map

[Appendix M](#): Undergraduate and Graduate Quality Review Rubrics

[Appendix N](#): Phase II Project Plans