The Circle
Special Edition

by CAREY ALLABAND

A visiting team of faculty and administrators from 11 colleges and universities in the Northeast will arrive on campus on Sunday, October 23, 1992, to evaluate Marist as part of the Middle States Association's ten-year re-accreditation process. The primary purpose of the visit is to study the College's analysis of its own work, as represented in the recently completed institutional self-study. The Middle States team will be on campus for three days beginning Wednesday, October 28, during which time they will be meeting with faculty, administrators, and students to discuss the self-study and its assessment of the College's programs and activities.

Based on a report prepared by the team following their visit, the College's response to the report, the self-study itself, and the team's recommendations, the Commission on Higher Education will decide on whether Marist should be reaccredited for another ten years.

"There is no doubt that Marist will be accredited again," according to Dr. Mark Sullivan, executive vice-president of Marist College. "Marist has fully demonstrated in its self-study that it is adhering to the Characteristics of Excellence adopted by Middle States as part of the assessment process."

The team will have reviewed the self-study prior to their visit and determined which areas to focus on during their stay. The team's primary task is to examine the academic program, organization, administration, and resources and report on their effect on the learning experience of students, according to "Designs For Excellence, A Handbook For Institutions of Higher Education." The team is made up of 11 faculty members from institutions within the Middle States Association region which includes New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Delaware.

Dr. David Rubino, President of Gannon University in Erie, Pennsylvania, chairs the team.

Dr. Sullivan. Dr. Sullivan will prepare a written report on the Marist College's programs and activities and will present it to the team. The report will be submitted to the Middle States Association for review.

The team's recommendations will be made at the end of each chapter are actual strategies for improvement and will serve as benchmarks for reevaluation by Middle States ten years down the road, according to Sullivan and O'Keefe.

Partial list of recommendations — library addressed

- 1. The College should continue to increase its acquisition of library materials, particularly necessary to maintain the level of periodical subscriptions and reference databases purchased in 1990.
- 2. The College should review the library's bibliographic instruction program and update it to accommodate students at the beginning of their major academic programs in order to improve student use of the library.
- 3. The College should increase the critical and professional staffing of the library to meet the needs of the college.
- 4. The College should incorporate the needs of minority students on campus and in the community, and the College should apply to the library faculty in aggregate, and by using library services under each category, the strengths and weaknesses, and recommendations for improvement.
- 5. The College should continue to provide creative approaches to helping faculty, particularly those in the middle-income range, finance their research.
- 6. While there is no evidence of more aggressiveness on the part of the faculty in the release of different entry points into the College, these administrators should be closely checked to ensure that standards for admissions are not being exceeded.
- 7. The College should expand the computer and administrative computing needs, as well as computer support for the expansion of the computer center in the same systematic fashion, as found on the academic level.
- 8. Funds in the library budget should be used to expand the library's services to students in external programs, especially in the correctional facilities.
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Selected excerpts from the Marist Self-Study

Introduction

Since the last Middle States Self-Study in 1981, Marist College has experienced extraordinary growth in enrollment, facilities, academic breadth, and educational services. The number of traditional students (fall 1981 to fall 1992) has increased by 13 percent, while the enrollment of nontraditional students increased by 135 percent.

While growth, it is difficult to identify any one cause that contributed to this dramatic growth. However, the following patterns emerge: the rapid development of our physical plant, the integration of computers, the growth in academic programs, and the expansion of our student body and facilities. All these factors combined to make this an exciting period for Marist College, and it is appropriate to share this information with the public.

Major Findings

As would be expected, many and varied findings on the strengths and weaknesses of the College emerged from this comprehensive Self-Study. The Self-Study concluded that while the Strategic Plan has served as a good foundation for this analysis and has widespread support throughout the College, specific objectives need to be reviewed annually and adjustments made in response to changing external and internal conditions. Members of the College need to be continually encouraged to keep the mission and goals of the College in focus as revisions to the Strategic Plan and departmental operating plans are proposed.

The library has been a significant component of the College's Strategic Plan and has been an area of particular strength. The library has been the hub of the College's academic and intellectual life. The library is a vital part of the educational process and serves as a resource for students, faculty, and staff. The library is well-equipped to meet the needs of the College's students and faculty, and its resources are widely used.

The Self-Study also noted that there is a need to increase the number of full-time faculty (particularly women and minorities) and to support program to serve this need. The College has been successful in this regard, but there is still room for improvement. The College has made progress in increasing the number of full-time faculty, but more needs to be done to improve the diversity of the faculty.

The Self-Study suggested more improvements for the college library.

Self-Study Process

In late Fall 1990 in preparation for the Middle States Self-Study, Marist President Dennis Murray (after consultation with senior faculty and administrators) asked Dr. Ed O'Keefe, Professor of Psychology, and Mr. Mark Sullivan, Vice President, to lead the Self-Study. Eleven other faculty and administrators were then appointed to a Self-Study committee, and by Spring 1991 work began in earnest.

The Self-Study Committee was formed to correspond with the seventeenth annual review of Excellence developed by Middle States. To obtain the widest input possible, each subcommittee was co-led by a faculty member and an administrator, composed of faculty, administrators, staff, and students. Each Self-Study Committee drafted charges for each subcommittee, made these available to the campus community, and appointed a liaison from the committee to each subcommittee.

At a retreat in January, the views of the faculty and administrators were reviewed, and the committee was asked to focus on the most important areas of importance. The committee agreed on the following areas:

- Academic direction
- Financial stability
- Residence hall
- Student center project
- Related problems

The academic direction of the College is the cornerstone of the Self-Study with particular concerns being expressed relative to the following areas:

- Core/Liberal Studies Program
- Institutional support for individual initiatives
- Resource Allocation for Graduate Education
- Programmatic funding for academic diversity
- External academic programs
- Support services, particularly

The academic direction and functioning of the College was reviewed, and the results of the Self-Study were presented to the Board of Trustees.

Financial Scene

Financially, the College appears to be in good shape for the present — but potential problems have already been identified. Concerns have been expressed regarding the allocation of resources, particularly with respect to academics. Marist Self-Study found that Marist is very much in line with comparable institutions. Problems related to the budgeting process have been identified and changes have been proposed to resolve them. The formation of a Budget Priorities Committee (with five faculty members and four senior executive) to advise the President on annual budget priorities will help the Steering Committee to address budgeting process, and the external financial consultant will be involved in this process. The Self-Study committee assures a greater faculty voice in the budgeting process. Thus, the previous assumptions made about the College's financial stability and weaknesses have been buttressed in this self-evaluation. It is also clear that a more systematic approach to outcome assessment must be initiated to substantiate the gains anticipated from this Self-Study.

The Steering Committee also suggests that a system be developed to monitor the implementation of the recommendations contained in this report through the ongoing Strategic Plan process.

In conclusion, we can only hope that in the year 2000 when the College is again evaluated, the internal observer as distinguished as the Carnegie Foundation President Ernest Boyer will echo the comments he made in 1990 following a visit to Marist College. Dr. Boyer, "I think that Marist continues to demonstrate the superb qualities that are the hallmark of a community of scholars, particularly that of quality of life, and on the other hand, a response to their high yearnings of the human spirit. It is an institution that conquers the odds and demonstrates the unbefogged combination of visionary leadership and dedicated faculty."