

**HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION (NORTH CENTRAL ASSOCIATION)**  
**SITE-TEAM REPORT: SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS**  
**July 2008**

*Andrew Lootens-White, Associate Director of Accreditation for the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), sent President Sweet the site team's final report in May 2008. Listed below are selected key findings and recommendations outlined in the report. The HLC's Institutional Actions Council (IAC) approved the site team's recommendations on June 23, 2008; and the HLC's Board of Trustees validated the decisions of the IAC on July 3, 2008.*

**Institutional Accreditation Findings**

- **Fulfillment of Accreditation Criteria**: the University meets the five criteria for accreditation.
- **Accreditation Period**: team recommends full continued accreditation, with the next comprehensive evaluation in 2017-18.
- **Doctor of Physical Therapy Change Request**: team recommends approval to offer two new doctoral degrees: Doctor of Physical Therapy degree and Transitional Doctor of Physical Therapy degree.
- **Distance-Learning Change Request**: team recommends approval to offer degree programs through asynchronous distance delivery without prior Commission approval.
- **Follow-up Visit**: team recommends "focused visit" on assessment in 2010-2011, with "particular attention to . . . execution [of the assessment plan] as it relates to general education."

**Selected Praise**

- **Integrity and Comprehensiveness of the Self-Study Process**: The self-study process was "meaningful and self-reflective," "thorough and inclusive"; the report was supported by data, "well organized[,] and easy to follow."
- **Response to Concerns Identified in 1998**: YSU has strategically and effectively increased diversity and reversed enrollment declines. In addition, the University "has developed an infrastructure for assessment, clarified its assessment processes, and gained valuable momentum in gathering assessment data."
- **Commitment to and Fulfillment of Mission**:
  - YSU "serves an inspiring mission of access and opportunity."
  - YSU's "leadership, faculty, and staff make strategic decisions grounded in the mission" (e.g., targeted financial aid, Strategic Hiring Policy, provision of student support services).

- YSU’s mission documents “provide a consistent and forceful framework for action to support and enhance diversity, respect for the individual, and the role played by the university in a multicultural community.”
- YSU has balanced “academic and community commitments in lean financial times.”
- **Commitment to Student-Centeredness and Learning:**
  - YSU’s mission documents “specifically mention a commitment to student-centeredness and learning.”
  - The University and its Board of Trustees promote “a life of learning shaped by [YSU’s] mission.”
  - YSU offers depth and breadth of learning: strong academic programs; a comprehensive general-education program; and applied, student-centered learning experiences (e.g., capstone projects, undergraduate research, internships and clinical experiences).
  - YSU links “curricular and co-curricular activities that support inquiry, practice, creativity, and social responsibility” (e.g., Emerging Leader Program, other Student Affairs leadership programs, Intercollegiate Athletics).
- **Shared Governance:**
  - Shared governance “has allowed the faculty to exercise its responsibility for . . . coherence of the curriculum and academic processes. . . . YSU achieved remarkable feats leading up to and through the fall, 2000 semester. During this period the institution not only transitioned from a quarter calendar to a semester calendar but also developed and implemented a completely new General Education curriculum. . . . Each of these can be Herculean tasks taken independently. Taken together they are testimony to the level of collaboration and dedication that this university community is capable of achieving.”
  - The administration “appears to be exercising its responsibilities for ‘management’ while initiating participation effectively in shared ‘governance.’”
- **Planning:** YSU has “engaged in a broad range of planning efforts” (e.g., Centennial Strategic Plan, Information Technology Master Plan, Enrollment Management Plan, Campus Master Plan) that support learning and guide campus activities and future projects.
- **Teaching and Learning Environments:** “It is evident that Youngstown State University values and supports effective teaching with the established policies and procedures in place to help support its educational mission.” Faculty value good teaching and have appropriate academic degrees. The University “provides effective learning environments” and technological resources to “enhance teaching and learning.”
- **Student Support Services:** “One of [YSU’s] strengths is the various offerings of academic support programs and services [e.g., Center for Student Progress, Supplemental Instruction Services] to assist students with their academic success.”
- **Engagement and Service:** It is “clear” that Youngstown State University’s commitments to external constituencies “are shaped by its mission and its capacity to support those commitments, that [YSU] practices periodic environmental scanning, that it demonstrates

attention to the diversity of the constituencies it serves, that it responds to community needs, and that it is well served by programs such as continuing education [and] customized training. . . .” The report cites as evidence such activities as the Youngstown Early College, service to schools, nationally recognized fine and performing arts programs, athletics, and the Wick Neighbors project.

## Selected Recommendations

1. **Build a stronger “culture of assessment” (the quality of assessment is strong for discipline-specific accredited programs but “uneven” across campus):**
  - Practice data-driven decision-making for all programs, academic and nonacademic.
  - “[S]how consistency of commitment to assessment practices that inform curricular and program development,” especially in general education.
  - Link budget to assessment needs and findings.
  - Increase faculty “buy-in” to assessment.
  - Clarify and build on the intersection between general-education and academic-program assessment.
  - Increase support for assessment processes.
2. **Increase students’ compliance with the general-education requirements.** The University “does not consistently apply its general education policy.” Ensure that the “focus of . . . enforcement of university-wide responsibilities and policies [e.g., enforcement of general-education requirements] is at the university, not the college level.” Current assessment of general education occurs at the course level; expand general-education assessment to the program level.
3. **Apply employment practices and policies evenly.** Employ “benchmarking about best practices” in areas such as employment, promotion, and labor relations. Increase transparency about personnel actions. Consider “establishing a cross-college committee to clarify standards across the various academic disciplines in terms [of] load assignments, student credit hour production expectations, reassignments . . . , and research standards” for promotion and tenure.
4. **The Board of Trustees and administration have “made considerable efforts to improve communications within the university” and to increase “transparency around budget processes.” Such efforts have resulted in “considerable improvements . . . in the context of difficult budget years and considerable personnel turnover. They should, however, remain a high priority for the Board and the President.”** Lack of transparency has resulted in “lack of trust among campus constituencies.” Connections between planning, budgeting, and allocation of resources need to be clear and transparent; “consider making the Budget Information Committee a true Budget Committee.”
5. **The University should “take its campus climate issues seriously and dedicate itself to improvement in management/labor relations.”**
6. **Deferred maintenance (e.g., building repair) “requires immediate attention.”**

- 7. Strengthen graduate assistantships and financial aid to attract more graduate students.**
- 8. Provide more faculty-development opportunities and support to advance the scholarship of teaching and learning; consider reinstating a Center for Teaching and Learning.**
- 9. Engage alumni more extensively in marketing, fund-raising, and discussion about how to increase YSU's "visibility and viability in the community." Explore "enhancing coordination of efforts between [the] YSU Foundation Board and YSU Alumni Board."**
- 10. The self-study process recognized the effectiveness and importance of cross-divisional collaboration; however, there "has not been a consistent culture of collaboration between the members of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs." Build on and increase "promising Student Affairs-Academic Affairs collaboration[s]" such as the Center for Student Progress and the proposed Academic Affairs-Student Affairs/Teaching and Learning Council.**
- 11. The "time frame encompassed by the Centennial Strategic Plan is drawing to a close. As the University enters its next planning cycle, it should carefully consider the findings of the self-study and the Higher Learning Commission site-team evaluation as it develops a strategic plan to guide the University in Ohio's changing environment for higher education."**
- 12. The "current model for . . . the Metro College" is "not optimal" if the unit is "designed to grow and generate revenue. . . . A 'standalone' model, with a 'tax' back to the main campus, may provide higher total revenues. . . ."**
- 13. Provide "centralized structures at the institutional level for the tracking, oversight, advising[,] and support of . . . online students."**

For ongoing information about YSU's institutional accreditation, see <http://www.ysu.edu/accreditation/>.