

# Self-Study Conclusions

## Criterion 1: Mission and Integrity

**Youngstown State University complies with Criterion 1: The University operates with integrity to fulfill its mission through processes that involve the Board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.** Significant mission-related strengths, challenges, and opportunities are listed below.

### *Strengths*

1. Youngstown State University's Mission, Vision, Core Values, and Organizational Priorities—taken together—clearly and broadly define the University's mission.
2. The University's Mission, Vision, Core Values, and Organizational Priorities express a commitment not only to broad access but also to academic excellence. Although YSU is an open-admissions institution, it also has many excellent selective-admissions programs.

**Recommendation:** Continue to focus on student success and academic excellence by implementing all three sections of the *Academic Strategic Plan*.

3. YSU's mission/commitment to be a student-centered and teaching-focused institution is clear and well supported by faculty, staff, and administration.
4. Mission and planning documents at all levels of the University recognize the value of diversity among internal constituencies and in the world at large; increasing diversity and fostering an understanding of diversity are key institutional and curricular goals.

**Recommendation:** Implement key recommendations of the Diversity Subcommittee and the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity (e.g., provide and encourage ongoing diversity training for faculty, staff, and administrators; work collaboratively to implement diversity and internationalization goals in the *Academic Strategic Plan*).

5. Through the efforts of many, diversity among campus constituencies has increased substantially since the 1998 accreditation visit: minority students, by 74%; minority full-time faculty, by 66.7%; and minority staff, by 22.7%.

**Recommendation:** Continue efforts to diversify the campus (e.g., the Strategic Hires Policy); find creative ways to improve understanding among individuals and to increase awareness of diversity issues.

**Recommendation:** Implement Section II, Goal 3, of the *Academic Strategic Plan* to sustain increases in minority enrollment and improve retention of minority students.

### *Challenges and Opportunities*

1. *Rapid and substantial transformations at the regional and state levels* (e.g., recent changes in the role and reporting structures of the Chancellor and the Ohio Board of Regents; creation of the University System of Ohio; potential formation of a community college in the Mahoning Valley

and a statewide community-college system; recommendations of the Northeast Ohio Universities Collaboration and Innovation Study Commission; and release of the Chancellor's 10-year master plan for higher education in Ohio, expected in 2008) may result in *fundamental changes in YSU's mission* and open-admissions role.

**Recommendation:** Continue to participate in regional and state discussions; educate key state legislators and officials about the special mission of YSU and its importance in Northeast Ohio. This education will be essential (perhaps even *more* essential) even if YSU's mission changes as a result of regional and state initiatives.

**Recommendation:** Use findings of the Higher Learning Commission self-study and site-team evaluation—in conjunction with the new *Academic Strategic Plan*, the community college study, recommendations of the Northeast Ohio Study Commission, and the state's forthcoming master plan—to refine or redefine the University's mission; to develop YSU's next institutional strategic plan; and to plan for successful transition to a refined or redefined mission.

2. Despite core values that call for "all conduct to be rooted in integrity, mutual respect, and civility," labor-management relationships and campus morale have experienced long-term strain. Individuals in *all* employee groups—i.e., faculty, staff, and administration—express a sense that their work is not sufficiently appreciated.

**Recommendation:** Continue efforts to improve campus relations and communication. Provide mechanisms, both formal and informal (e.g., "civility hours"; Labor Management Council; the Budget Information Committee; a more service-oriented Office of Human Resources), to build trust, foster meaningful discussion, and work toward common goals.

**Recommendation:** Facilitate knowledge and consistent implementation of University policies by posting them online. Enhance training of new and continuing administrators, faculty, and staff.

## Criterion 2: Preparing for the Future

**Youngstown State University complies with Criterion 2: The University's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.** Significant strengths, challenges, and opportunities are listed below.

### *Strengths*

1. Through careful planning and environmental scanning, Youngstown State University has increased enrollment to its highest level in 13 years, helping to meet access and diversity goals while reducing ramifications of steady declines in state funding.

**Action/Recommendation:** Continue to practice effective environmental scanning to address goals in the *Enrollment Management Plan*, thus building the institution's resource base.

**Action/Recommendation:** Continue to implement Section I of the *Academic Strategic Plan* to maximize the success of all students enrolled.

2. Youngstown State University benefits from strong capital planning and vision, as well as collaborative, innovative partnerships (e.g., with Wick Neighbors, Inc.; the City of Youngstown, the Youngstown City School District) that serve constituencies while reducing the financial burden to the University and its respective partners.
3. Youngstown State University has a history of financial conservatism resulting in low expenditures, the lowest tuition among comparable Ohio public universities, low debt, and maintenance of healthy reserves.
4. The University has launched—and is on target to meet—a \$43 million, three-year Centennial Capital Campaign to fund endowments for student scholarships, academic programs, professorships, and areas of emerging excellence; capital improvements; and increased annual giving.
5. YSU’s strong financial-aid programs support the University’s mission of access and affordability. For FY 2008, the University allocated \$6.2 million to support scholarships. The Youngstown State University Foundation also provides funding for hundreds of need-based, designated, and performance-based scholarships, including 160 full-expense scholarships for the Leslie H. Cochran University Scholars program. (The Foundation provided funds to more than 3,000 students in 2006–07 alone.)

### ***Challenges and Opportunities***

1. A two-year state-mandated tuition freeze, declines in state share of instruction, uncertainties at the state level, and unfunded state and federal mandates (e.g., increases in minimum-wage, postage, and travel-reimbursement rates) make it difficult to budget and plan. YSU’s state share of instruction decreased from nearly \$47 million in FY 2000 to less than \$43 million in FY 2008.
2. Limited discretionary funds make it challenging to make budgeting/planning processes more participatory. Many employees express mistrust in the budgeting process.

**Action/Recommendations:** Continue efforts to improve communication and understanding of the budget through the Budget Information Committee. Assess the committee’s effectiveness and make changes as needed. Explore ways to involve broader participation by employees from all levels of the organization in setting budget priorities.

3. The campus has many deferred-maintenance projects (e.g., repair; paint, carpeting, and furniture for offices and classrooms); space use needs to be reviewed; and the budget contains inadequate provision for equipment-replacement funding.

**Action/Recommendation:** Continue to pursue funds to address space and equipment needs. Continue to work through the Deans’ Council and Office of the Provost to prioritize equipment needs and allocate funds strategically.

4. The Early Retirement Incentive Program will save the University money, create opportunities for reorganization, and reduce health-care costs. However, managing the ERIP is and will continue to be a challenge. Approximately 140 staff members will have retired between April 2006 and March 2008, with uneven effects across departments and loss of knowledge and “institutional memory.”

**Recommendation:** Facilitate knowledge of University policies and procedures by posting them online, as noted under Criterion 1. Work through the Office of Human Resources to enhance training of new and continuing staff (as well as all employee groups).

### **Additional Actions/Recommendations to Address Challenges in Chapter 2:**

- The Centennial Capital Campaign is providing and will continue to provide funding to address components identified in the campaign plan.
- Increasing annual giving will provide additional funds to fulfill the University mission.
- Continued implementation of the *Academic Strategic Plan* will provide a framework for strategic (re)allocation of funds to increase student success, academic excellence, and campus/community engagement.
- As noted under Criterion 1, use findings of the Higher Learning Commission self-study and site-team evaluation—in conjunction with the new *Academic Strategic Plan*, the community college study, recommendations of the Northeast Ohio Study Commission, and the state's forthcoming master plan—to refine or redefine the University's mission and develop the next institutional strategic plan.
- Keep campus constituencies aware of changes in state funding mechanisms, and use that knowledge to develop programs strategically.

### **Criterion 3: Effective Teaching/Learning**

**Youngstown State University fulfills Criterion 3: The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.** Significant strengths, challenges, and opportunities related to student learning and teaching are listed below.

#### ***Strengths***

1. The campus has developed an infrastructure for assessment, clarified its assessment processes, and gained valuable momentum in gathering assessment data.

**Recommendation:** Continue to provide financial support to departments and programs for substantive and effective engagement with the assessment processes.

2. The University has made great strides in outcome-centered teaching and learning, as evidenced by the explicitly and publicly stated learning outcomes for all six colleges. Publishing these outcomes in the *Undergraduate Bulletin* and/or on departmental web sites ensures easy access for interested students and the community.
3. YSU is committed to excellence in teaching. As a student-centered University, YSU strongly supports and promotes the learning of diverse students across a wide spectrum of backgrounds and levels of preparedness for college.

4. Programs and centers that support student learning have well-qualified and effective staff, provide effective services within the limits of their resources, and work well together.

## ***Challenges and Opportunities***

1. Leadership and resources for faculty development have been inconsistent.
2. Discontinuance of the CATALYST program may hinder faculty development in areas of teaching-learning scholarship. Without an organized, central office to coordinate faculty development related to teaching, these faculty-development activities remain episodic and scattered. More significantly, their effects cannot be leveraged for institution-wide improvements.

**Recommendation:** Implement the faculty-development initiatives in the *Academic Strategic Plan*.

**Recommendation:** Provide visible, institutionally supported programs and services to assist full-time and part-time faculty in improving their teaching and their scholarship of teaching and learning in *one* of the following ways:

- Reinststate CATALYST.
  - Provide reassigned time and clerical assistance for a faculty member to coordinate activities to support faculty in developing and improving courses, teaching strategies, and scholarship of teaching and learning.
  - Create opportunities for faculty to share ideas about teaching, course evaluation, and scholarship of teaching and learning.
3. With additional resources, important academic support programs for students could expand their services.

**Action:** Several centers are moving to larger spaces. Staff, faculty, and students will be better able to share resources.

**Recommendation:** Strategically reallocate funds to ensure that services that directly support student learning and faculty development have adequate resources.

4. The directors of centers and programs that support student learning would like to be more involved in institutional decisions that affect them. Increased communication and coordination will enhance services for students and the entire campus.

**Recommendation:** Establish a system to involve stakeholders, especially those who lead programs and centers that support teaching and learning, in planning related to their services and resources.

**Recommendation:** Create a Council on Teaching and Learning, with representatives from academic programs, centers that provide learning support to students, the Assessment Office, CATALYST (or the individual responsible for organizing faculty development activities), and other relevant offices. The Council will:

- facilitate sharing of resources and collaborative projects;
  - engage in ongoing analysis of the effectiveness of teaching and learning at YSU;
  - offer recommendations for improving teaching and learning.
5. Numerous reports consistently indicate that substantial resources are needed to support academic advising.

**Recommendation:** Continue to implement the “advising” recommendations in the *Academic Strategic Plan* to improve effectiveness of and *support for* advising University-wide (e.g., increase advising staff and provide coordination of University-wide advising; offer training and ongoing professional-development opportunities for professional and faculty advisors).

## **Criterion 4: Acquisition and Application of Knowledge**

**Youngstown State University complies with Criterion 4: The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.** Significant mission-related strengths, challenges, and opportunities are listed below.

### ***Strengths***

1. Through its negotiated union contracts, the University provides excellent employee-development opportunities, including paid and unpaid staff-development leaves; reimbursement for advanced study and terminal degrees; reassigned time for professional development and scholarship; professional-development travel; and up to 10 fully paid faculty sabbaticals, 16 one-semester faculty-improvement leaves, and 18 research professorships annually.
2. YSU is particularly proud of its research opportunities for undergraduate students. Both graduate and undergraduate student have numerous opportunities to participate in research through courses, employment, and special programs. QUEST, research scholarships, the research assistant program, and travel support for conference presentations recognize and reward student research.
3. The increase in external funding during the past few years provides evidence of the growing capacity of the faculty to conduct research.
4. The University implemented an innovative learning-outcome-based General Education program in 2000. The outcomes specifically address intellectual inquiry, social responsibility, diversity, technology, and global awareness. A coordinator, budget, and University-wide committee provide support and on-going development.
5. YSU’s cocurricular organizations and programs provide many opportunities for students to exercise leadership, contribute service, develop creativity, and demonstrate professionalism.

6. Students indicate on the Graduating Student Questionnaire that YSU has prepared them for life-long learning.
7. Students, alumni, and employers provide input regarding the currency and relevancy of the curriculum through college boards of visitors and many program-specific advisory boards.
8. The University offers many programs accredited by specialized accrediting agencies. Professional accreditation requires curricular evaluation and documentation that graduates are prepared to work in a diverse, global, and technological society.
9. Students have many opportunities (internships, clinical experiences, independent study, capstone projects, research courses, etc.) to demonstrate that they have acquired the knowledge and skills for independent learning and living in today's world.

### ***Challenges and Opportunities***

1. A General Education program has been designed to ensure that graduates acquire a breadth of knowledge and skills. Structures and processes to support the program are in place. However, implementation has presented challenges, and budget cuts have generated concern. Some departments have not fully implemented their assessment plans for GER courses and reported assessment results. Not all students complete 100% of the GER. Course substitutions and exemptions are frequently made for students who were enrolled prior to 2000, as well as for transfer students. Maintaining the integrity of the program without increasing the hours needed for the degree is often difficult. A few departments have not developed the required "intensive" courses for the major. The decision rules for granting exemptions are not uniform across colleges.

**Recommendations:** Continuing financial support and evaluation are needed to maintain and develop the program. The centrality of general education should be recognized in developing budget priorities. Academic departments must meet their responsibilities for assessing general education courses and ensure that students can fulfill the writing-intensive, oral-communication intensive, and critical-thinking intensive requirements. More uniformity across colleges in granting exemptions for GERs would be desirable.

2. According to the March 2007 Campus Climate Survey, many employees do not agree that the University's financial allocations support a life of learning for faculty, staff, and students.

**Recommendations:** Involve employees at all levels in developing budget priorities, and continue efforts (e.g., Budget Information Committee) to educate campus constituencies about financial challenges and decisions.

3. Comparatively speaking, few YSU students study or travel abroad, and the percentage of international students at YSU is low.

**Recommendations:** Continue efforts to provide students with international experiences and contacts. Monitor the success of recent initiatives (e.g., international study scholarships, reduction in tuition surcharge for international students), and provide additional support as needed.

4. Despite the attention given to diversity in the curriculum and in cocurricular activities, there is not much evidence that these efforts are highly successful in preparing students to function in an increasingly diverse society.

**Recommendations:** Academic units and appropriate committees (e.g., General Education Committee, Assessment Council, Student Diversity Council) should analyze information provided by the Graduating Student Questionnaire, the National Survey of Student Engagement, and other indicators of student preparation for a diverse workforce. There is a need for improved, direct assessment of diversity-related outcomes and for “closing the loop,” using information to improve curricular and cocurricular experiences.

## **Criterion 5: Engagement and Service**

**Youngstown State University complies with Criterion 5: As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.**

Youngstown State University takes pride in its extensive engagement with its constituencies and the many ways that faculty, staff, and students serve the community. The evidence presented in this chapter indicates the following strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement:

### ***Strengths***

1. Commitment to civic engagement and community service is clearly articulated in the Mission, Vision, and planning documents. There is a long institutional history of planning for engagement and following through on the plans.
2. Acquiring land, demolishing derelict houses, and improving the University’s physical plant have benefited the neighborhood, as well as the University.
3. The University has many outreach initiatives, including a unit, the Public Service Institute, specifically charged with addressing problems of the region.
4. Collaborative ventures with K–12 education and higher learning institutions make effective use of scarce resources and enhance the economic, educational, and cultural capacity of the region.
5. New degree and non-credit programs have been created at the request of, and to serve the needs of, local employers.
6. Faculty and staff have aggressively pursued external funding to address community needs.
7. The University is the premier source for intellectual and artistic programming in the region (e.g., lecture series; theater, art, and music programming; WYSU-FM).

### ***Challenges and Opportunities***

1. Development of the Metropolitan College’s services (off-campus credit courses, non-credit courses, workforce development, etc.) has been hindered by frequent changes in leadership, lack of communication channels with the academic units, changes in physical location, and fluctuations in institutional emphasis on these services.

**Recommendation:** The effectiveness of the new organizational structure for Metropolitan College functions will need to be monitored. The institution should improve connections among Metro Credit, Metro Workforce, and other campus units, and clarify priorities, roles, and responsibilities. The University should monitor evolving state policy on adult education and respond proactively with model programs based on career pathways.

2. Although the University gives high priority to engagement, the constrained resource base makes it impossible to respond to all the numerous community needs and opportunities for involvement. Engagement activities are often the result of soft money or individual faculty/staff interests, rather than conscious prioritization.
3. Community engagement is typically managed at the college or unit level, and the result is a very active and rich set of programs, but programs that sometimes lack strategic intent, strategic direction, and strategic support at the institutional level. Because engagement activities are so numerous and diffused throughout the institution, it is difficult to collect data or assess the collective impact of such activities. Improved coordination and focus could prevent duplication of effort, as well as omissions, and align activities with resources and strategic intent.

**Recommendations:** To address the challenges and build upon the strengths listed above, YSU should progress from an organization that undertakes engagement at a “unit-based” level to one that undertakes engagement at an “institution-based” level by clarifying strategic intent, strategic directions, and the required strategic support. The University should:

- Use the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching’s *Community Engagement 2008 Documentation Framework* to assess and plan YSU’s advancement as an engaged institution; consider submitting data to Carnegie for inclusion of YSU in the Community Engagement classification; and designate an individual to lead a work group in this assessment, planning, and submission effort.
- Continue the emphasis on engagement in the next institutional strategic plan; prioritize engagement commitments; and link unit plans, reporting structures, personnel decisions, and budget planning to priorities.
- Develop and expand reward structures for faculty, students, and staff who serve external constituencies.
- Improve institutional management of engagement through improved coordination, data collection, and assessment.
- Provide faculty and staff development focusing on collaboration and the “Scholarship of Engagement.”

**Action:** Action is already being taken on many of these recommendations. To implement the *Academic Strategic Plan*, the Dean’s Council identified goals and priorities for 2007–08. A work group, led by Dean Betty Jo Licata, is focusing on placing “engagement at the center of the YSU educational experience, so that all students will encounter the ‘invitation to engagement’ as a permanent element in their curricula.” Tasks to be accomplished this year include:

- Establishing an operational definition of engagement and stating the desired learning outcomes of “engagement”;
- Identifying how to achieve these outcomes and at what level (i.e., academic program level and/or university level);
- Creating/refining an inventory of ways in which engagement is achieved in various academic programs;
- Identifying means of development and recognition for faculty who serve as “ambassadors for engagement”;
- Identifying resources (finances, processes, people) that are in place to support the achievement of engagement objectives;
- Hosting a faculty development program on engagement and its relationship to academic programs;
- Establishing a service learning team;
- Creating a web site on engagement/service-learning.