

Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students
of

FROSTBURG STATE UNIVERSITY
Frostburg, Maryland

by

An Evaluation Team representing the
Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Prepared after study of the institution's self-study report
and a visit to the campus on April 2-5, 2006

The Members of the Team:

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AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT:

President/CEO:

Dr. Catherine R. Gira
President
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Chief Academic Officer:

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Chancellor of System:

Dr. William E. Kirwan
Chancellor
University of Maryland System

Chair, Board of Regents:

David C. Nevins
Chair
The Board of Regents of the University System of Maryland

I. Context and Nature of the Visit

Institutional Overview.

Initial Accreditation: 1953
Last Reaffirmed: 2001
Control: Public
Affiliation: University System of Maryland
Institution Type: Master's II University

Scope of Institution at Time of Visit.

Degrees Offered: Baccalaureate, Certificate, Masters
Branch Campuses: None
Additional Locations: University System of Maryland Hagerstown Center,
Hagerstown, MD

Self-Study Design.

Comprehensive, with an emphasis that focuses on the relationship between the university and the community.

II. Affirmation of Continued Compliance with Eligibility Requirements

Based on a review of the self-study, interviews, the certification statement supplied by the institution and other institutional documents, the team affirms that Frostburg State University continues to meet the eligibility requirements in *Characteristics of Excellence*.

III. Compliance with Federal Requirements

Based on review of the self-study, certification by Frostburg State University, and interviews, the team affirms that the institution's Title IV cohort default rate is within federal limits. Additionally, the team is unaware of any problematic issues relative to state regulatory requirements.

IV. Evaluation Overview

Frostburg State University's most notable change during this past ten years has been its evolution from a comprehensive college to a regional university. The team commends Frostburg on the numerous, effective outreach initiatives into the community. The campus is seen as a major cultural, educational, and economic development resource within the region, and the special emphasis selected for this self-study, "The University and the Community," clearly demonstrates the considerable progress that has been made.

As primarily a residential campus, Frostburg has paid special attention to designing student support systems that assist students with their transition. The team commends Frostburg on its many innovative and effective student service programs. To further assist students with the transition, Frostburg has made the commitment to provide every incoming student with the opportunity to participate in a learning community. Students who have been through this unique educational format were uniformly positive in their comments about its impact on student learning and in helping students feel a closer bond with the campus community.

Budgets have been tight for the past few years, but the campus has effectively managed the downturns and is well positioned to move forward as funding improves during the current year. A portion of the budget difficulties were created by modestly declining enrollments, but this problem was clearly identified in the self-study as an area requiring immediate attention.

As one of the largest employers in the region, Frostburg has been blessed to recruit and retain high quality faculty and staff, who are extremely loyal to the campus and dedicated to ensuring students receive a quality education, both in and outside the classroom. Further evidence of academic quality is demonstrated by the numerous program accreditations achieved in various disciplines, including Business and Education, and the exemplary support system Frostburg has developed for online courses.

The self-study identified several areas for improvement, and the team concurs with the campus findings: assessment needs to be addressed more uniformly throughout the campus, planning and budget processes need to be better communicated and to involve a broader spectrum of the campus community, and recruitment and retention of a more diverse faculty needs to be a higher priority. As a result, the team made four recommendations involving these three areas of improvement that should be addressed in Frostburg's next Periodic Report.

Overall, Frostburg knows its mission and is performing in an exemplary manner. It is an institution of integrity, and a place of significant student learning. One final commendation from the team involves the university's ability to enroll a highly diverse student body, to provide strong programming on respect and inclusion, and to model the behaviors necessary for all students to feel comfortable within the campus setting.

V. Compliance with Accreditation Standards

Standard 1: Mission, Goals, and Objectives

Frostburg State University meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

Frostburg State University has a Mission Statement that “clearly defines its purpose within the context of higher education and explains whom the institution serves and what it intends to accomplish.” Recently, the Secretary of Higher Education of the Maryland Higher Education Commission requested a statewide review of campus Mission Statements. A broad-based committee from the campus community was appointed to revise the Mission Statement, and the revised statement was included as part of the self-study. The statement says Frostburg State University “is a public, comprehensive, largely residential regional university offering a wide array of affordable programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels.” The statement reinforces the institution’s commitment to engage in community service and supports its evolving emphasis on regional economic development. Based upon campus interviews, the campus community expressed support for the revised mission statement, and the team concurs the statement provides an accurate representation of the university. The revised Mission Statement has been approved by the Board of Regents and the Maryland Higher Education Commission.

The team also agrees that the University’s goals and objectives support the Mission Statement. In 1995, the campus goals included seven areas: (1) provide an affordable, high quality education; (2) support regional economic development; (3) enhance diversity; (4) promote faculty scholarship and creative activities; (5) expand service learning; (6) improve physical facilities; and (7) satisfy State of Maryland accountability requirements. These goals were expanded in 2001 by the inclusion of “greater use of appropriate technology,” and again in 2003 with “full implementation of assessment.” These nine goals, and the associated objectives, are published annually as part of the *Frostburg State University Institutional Plan*, and distributed to the entire campus community. In fact, the campus community has a wide knowledge of these goals, as demonstrated by a survey that showed 84% of the campus faculty members are aware of the goals identified in the Plan.

Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

Frostburg State University meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

The annual *Frostburg State University Institution Plan and Selected Implementation Strategies* document is developed by the Cabinet, which “consists of the President, Vice Presidents, Deans, seven faculty, staff representatives, and the Student Government Association President.” The team commends the campus on having such a broadly representative group involved in developing this important document, and also on the breadth of content within the plan. Unfortunately, despite the representation on the Cabinet, the self-study reports that a vast majority of the staff (73%) and only half of the faculty feel they have any input into this planning process. This sense of isolation from the process was confirmed by the team through a number of campus interviews. As a result, the team agrees with the self-study recommendation on the need to “explore ways to more fully engage the broader campus community in the planning processes.”

An even greater concern was identified by the team regarding the current approaches used for budget planning and resource allocation, which involve a two step process: (1) preparation of a set of requests for submission to the system, and (2) allocation of resources across the campus once the state budget is finalized. As described in the self-study, and confirmed by the team, both steps involve a limited number of campus personnel. Requests to the system are developed by the Cabinet, with minimal or no meaningful input from departments and units below the divisional level. Additionally, the subsequent allocations, which are appropriately made to divisions, appear to be exclusively based upon input from the Vice Presidents and the President. As a result, the self-study reports that 70% of the faculty and 67% of the staff indicate they “do not have adequate input into the allocation of university resources.” The self-study reports that the first glimpse of budget allocations is usually the final draft of the budget. While the ultimate allocations may be appropriate, the process has created considerable frustration among faculty, staff, and administrators, and has generated widely held suspicions about unfair treatment.

These suspicions were further exacerbated more than five years ago with the elimination of full explanations of the budget allocation outcomes. Several interviews verified the campus used to hold budget meetings and provide greater explanations of the ultimate budget distributions, but these efforts were abandoned in response to a request from the then Vice President for Academic Affairs. Unfortunately, this discontinuation of full and complete explanations of the budget allocations has created inaccurate impressions about the equity of budget allocation decisions. Frostburg’s budget allocation process would be greatly improved by better explanations, more transparency, and expanded involvement.

- **Recommendation to be addressed in Periodic Report.** Frostburg should fully review and revise its planning and resource allocation processes to more fully engage the broader campus community and to provide for transparency within the process, including the provision of explanations for establishing priorities and analyses of how budget decisions impact each division.

Standard 3: Institutional Resources

Frostburg State University meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

Frostburg has managed its finances well, despite a two-year decline in the state appropriation, maintaining a balanced budget and setting aside a percentage of revenues into a reserve account. The university has maintained a sufficient level of personnel to carry out its mission, assigning faculty and temporary employees to perform administrative functions where reductions in staff were required. Utilizing a technology fee instituted in 2003, the university has implemented several enhancements to the network, and has converted to a state-endorsed PeopleSoft administrative support system. Over the past few years, construction and facilities renovations have appropriately focused on science, technology, and student housing.

Frostburg, in conjunction with Allegany County, the federal Economic Development Agency, the Appalachian Regional Commission, and the Maryland Department of Economic Development, has secured \$1.3 million in federal and state funding toward the completion of a 53-acre technology park on the campus. Also located on campus is a new facility for the Appalachian Laboratory of the USM Center for Environmental Studies, an independent research entity within the Maryland system, which provides research facilities for faculty and students. The team commends Frostburg for these initiatives to serve as an economic resource to the surrounding area.

The decline in state appropriations has necessitated cutbacks in administrative staff and in operating budgets. The self-study recommends a systematic assessment of "...the impact that cost-containment measures have had on departments and offices. A plan, consistent with university priorities, should be developed to restore funding to these areas." The team agrees that the impact of reductions should be carefully reviewed, and a plan developed to ensure that the most critical university priorities receive sufficient budgetary support.

Declines in enrollment, from 2003 through 2005, also have had a negative impact on the financial health of the institution. The self-study recommends "...an in-depth analysis of the enrollment issues facing the institution. The results of this analysis should be widely circulated. Efforts should be made to engage the campus community in exploring ways for offices and departments to assist in recruitment and retention efforts". The team concurs with this recommendation.

Standard 4: Leadership and Governance

Frostburg State University meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

Frostburg has a well-defined system of governance. Written policies and bylaws defined the structure and responsibilities of governing bodies, while the systems of governance include governing bodies at the state and local levels. At the state level, there is oversight by the USM Board of Regents, the USM Chancellor, and the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC). During interviews, the Chancellor and a Regent were very complimentary of Frostburg's overall performance as an institution, and in the campus leadership's ability to represent the campus well to state officials and to effectively advocate for resources.

At Frostburg, governance bodies include the President's Cabinet and Executive Committee (for planning and resource allocation), the Faculty Senate, University Committees, the Faculty Assembly, and the Graduate Council. The Board of Visitors, composed of community leaders, serves in an advisory and evaluative capacity, reporting annually to the state governing bodies and legislators. The team found the Board of Visitors to be a strength of the campus, as its members eagerly and effectively serve as ambassadors for the campus. Further, the Student Government Association provides for student input into governance.

Evaluation of the leadership of the university occurs at all levels. The President is evaluated annually by the Chancellor, and is also evaluated by the faculty. The Provost is evaluated annually by the President, and also by the faculty. The other Vice Presidents are evaluated annually by the President. The College Deans are evaluated annually by the Provost and the faculty. Department chairs are evaluated by their own faculty and by their deans. There is also a state-mandated assessment of management efficiency for the university overall.

One of the issues identified by the self-study was the role of department chairs in the administrative structure. The current evaluation process, as mentioned in the self-study, has proven problematic for some department chairs. The team endorses the campus recommendation that the institution review the chair's role, compensation, appointment and termination process, and position within the structure of the administration.

Standard 5: Administration

Frostburg State University meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

Frostburg is currently undergoing several significant changes in administration. The President is retiring after a 15-year tenure, and the positions of Vice President for Enrollment Management and Vice President for University Advancement are vacant, awaiting the incoming president's assessment of the current structure. The new President was appointed less than a week prior to the team's visit. As a result, many interviews suggested the campus community anticipates some administrative structural reorganization after he arrives.

Frostburg has maintained an administrative structure sufficient to support the living and learning environment of the institution. The University System of Maryland developed the USM Institutional Strength Index "to assess the performance, productivity and financial strength of the public universities." Frostburg is to be commended for achieving the highest index in the system, 83.3%, compared to the USM average of 37.6%.

In contrast to this high system rating, the self study reports faculty responses to the survey conducted by UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute indicate that 43.4% of faculty rate their relationship with administration to be satisfactory, compared with 54.6% of faculty at other public universities. The team found this concern echoed by numerous campus constituencies. Less than adequate communication regarding a variety of issues appears to be the root cause of this perspective. The team suggests the incoming executive leadership make a concerted effort to improve communication between and within divisions, and to develop new avenues of communications for the entire campus.

Standards 6: Integrity

Frostburg State University meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

The integrity of the institution related to its published policies and processes is consistent, clear, and readily available to both the university community and the public. Policies regarding faculty reappointment, promotion, and tenure are easily accessed electronically, are extensive, and are clearly written. Appeal procedures are clear and allow for sufficient recourse through a reasonable step-wise process involving peers and supervisors. The number of grievances, both faculty and student, is very small.

Printed and electronic materials are checked often for consistency through a well-established and effective process. Electronic versions of public and on-campus documents are available in a readily utilized format and updated annually or whenever changes in policy, procedure, or program occur.

Faculty survey responses indicate awareness of the policies and procedures that impact professional life and growth. The policies concerning academic freedom, intellectual property rights, and conflict of interest are published in the *Faculty Handbook*, are clearly written, and reflect those of the University System of Maryland. The team noted that the institution's commitment to academic freedom, unlike the other policies, is not repeated in other written documents, and this omission may deserve some corrective action.

The campus, which has exceptional student diversity for a rural university, has put in place effective measures to address issues of mutual concern and respect. These include the Diversity Center, the National Coalition Building Institute, and programs sponsored by the President's Advisory Council on Diversity. Additionally, programs such as "HallSTARS!" offer workshop training in diversity and culture issues.

Standard 7: Institutional Assessment

Frostburg State University meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

Frostburg has many elements of assessment in place in various divisions across campus, and has engaged in additional student, staff, and faculty surveys to augment assessment for the self-study. The Office of Information Services engages in ongoing institutional research, with an annual cycle of alumni surveys, state reporting, and internal reporting. As reported in the self-study, a review of assessment plans and activities across divisions indicates that assessment is "becoming interlaced with the function of the University. [Yet] More emphasis needs to be placed on using the results of assessment for institutional improvement." As part of the self study process, the institution engaged in an honest appraisal of what aspects of institutional assessment are firmly in place, and what aspects are missing.

Currently, assessment efforts are uneven across the university. Some divisions have been very successful at using assessment as a means of improving the delivery of services and programs, while other divisions and programs are relatively new to the process, and have made minimal progress. Further, the various forms of assessment across campus have not been designed and coordinated under a single, university-wide plan, grounded in the university's mission. Thus, assessment has not yet served as a significant component for university-wide planning and budgeting.

Frostburg now appears to be at a cross-road, as it has just completed the drafting of a comprehensive Institutional Assessment Plan, which will link assessment to mission, planning, and resource allocation. The time has come to take the necessary actions to fully implement and utilize the Institutional Assessment Plan. Further, the development and implementation of an effective Institutional Assessment Plan will need oversight, and the team strongly endorses the self-study recommendation “to establish a university-wide entity to coordinate and advocate for assessment on campus.”

- **Recommendation to be addressed in Periodic Report:** Frostburg should move quickly to adopt and implement its draft Institutional Assessment Plan. Full implementation requires evidence that results from the institutional assessments are used in the decision-making process.

Standard 8: Student Admissions

Frostburg State University meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

Frostburg’s enrollment processes include technological advances that are designed to overcome boundaries and barriers of location and hours of operation. The team also noted that materials used for recruiting students provide a factual representation of the campus and its educational offerings.

As reported in the self-study, there has been an enrollment decline that has adversely impacted the university’s finances. Enrollment declines are occurring despite significant growth in the state’s growing high school graduate population. This negative trend is indicative of a problem that will require support from the entire university. Frostburg should aggressively take steps to identify the reasons for the decline, and take whatever steps are necessary to reverse this trend. The University will need to establish its enrollment targets, and design and implement a comprehensive enrollment plan within a short timeframe.

The self-study further demonstrates how the university has made efforts to examine and improve retention and graduation rates. The efforts to explore this multi-faceted area would benefit from greater coordination and cooperation, especially across divisional lines.

Evidence demonstrated on-going reviews of promotional materials and actions taken to improve the on-line Admissions functions. The team also noted that the Admissions Office works well with other student-centered functions on the campus. With the recent installation of a data management system, the Admissions function has been linked to a number of important offices and programs throughout the campus.

The self-study identified the need for in-depth analysis of the research being conducted on attrition patterns, so that appropriate follow-up can be made. The team concurs that this is a critical need. Recognition of this particular challenge will enable the Admissions staff to more clearly define its goal of what it offers to potential students.

The team also agrees with the importance of the recommendations contained in the self-study that relate to retention and enrollment issues: marketing strategies should be revised to provide a clearer definition of what Frostburg offers to prospective students, the Council on Retention should focus more on student achievements and expand its examination of student retention outcomes, and a comprehensive, university-wide retention plan should be developed and implemented.

- **Suggestion:** Frostburg should move quickly to develop and implement a comprehensive campus-wide enrollment management plan that allows the university to take advantage of the increasing number of Maryland high school graduates.

Standard 9: Student Support Services

Frostburg State University meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

Student support services should reasonably enable each student to achieve what the university defines as being necessary. Clearly, Frostburg's mission statement identifies students as the focus of this University's curricular and co-curricular offerings. The university offers students an array of residential living environments, services that both assist and support student success, activities that promote leadership experiences, athletic programs that complement the academic mission. There also are periodic, careful assessments of available student services.

Frostburg has a long history of nationally recognized professional leadership in providing students with both personal and academic support through innovative programs that link academic and student educational services. The university seeks student success through a variety of living and learning arrangements that involve instruction on learning strategies, bringing students together in common course assignments, and establishing out-of-classroom opportunities that support social needs of students.

There is a well-respected involvement from all parts of the campus community in programs that have been initiated by the Student Educational Services division. Orientation programs prepare students for what will be challenges in the classroom, as well as outside of it. Even with financial challenges that have reduced staff and operating dollars, Frostburg has remained resolute in its mission to provide services to students.

There are clearly defined processes that govern student involvement and recourse for behaviors that are not acceptable. The associated policies and processes are published both in hard copy as well as on-line.

The division also has been actively involved in assessing its programs and learning from those results. It annually receives recognition for its commitments to programs that focus on under-prepared students and is awarded grant funds for those efforts. It is dedicated to serving diverse student populations and their needs, and has been very involved in promoting and strengthening diversity of student leaders.

The team commends Frostburg on its array of student support services. The university clearly is dedicated to insuring student success both academically and socially, and has been innovative in seeking additional funding wherever possible.

Standard 10: Faculty

Frostburg State University meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

Frostburg's faculty is dedicated, well qualified, and committed to the education of its students. Standards for faculty hiring, retention, promotion, and tenure, including academic credentialing, are clear, detailed, and in keeping with good practices in higher education. By all observations, they are adhered to with care. The institution is fully aware of University System of Maryland policies governing part-time faculty, and works to implement these policies fairly and effectively.

Oversight of curriculum is a high priority for the Frostburg faculty, who discharge this critical responsibility with impressive attention to quality and detail. Even with substantial teaching assignments and an expanding role in various service activities, the faculty boasts an impressive record of research productivity, grants acquisition, and professional development. Administrative financial support for professional development struggles to keep pace with rising research expenses and the expanding ambitions of the faculty. Both administration and faculty express frustration over these resource pressures, but their shared commitment to professional development, especially as it relates to teaching and the strengthening of the campus learning environment, is unwavering.

Students speak glowingly about their close personal relationships with faculty as well as the faculty's innovative teaching styles, professional expertise, dedication, and integrity. Comments abound with respect to faculty giving students extra attention and extending themselves on the students' behalf. Frostburg's faculty embraces a strong student-centered philosophy, which is evident throughout the campus environment.

The self-study speaks directly to faculty morale, an issue faculty expanded upon in multiple conversations with the team. While external administrative mandates and state funding problems account for some measure of faculty discontent, the more serious and direct cause is linked to ineffective communication on the critical issues of institutional planning and budget allocation.

The team also shares the self-study's concern about lack of diversity among the faculty. While the self-study acknowledges the need to address both recruitment and retention of minority faculty, there is inconclusive evidence that faculty diversity occupies a sufficiently high priority within the institution. Planning for greater faculty diversity will require a more purposeful and coordinated commitment than the institution presently exhibits. The team strongly encourages Frostburg to consult available outside resources and expertise as part of developing and implementing an effective faculty diversification plan.

The self-study observes that the educational program has increased its reliance on part-time faculty in both undergraduate and graduate programs. Full-time faculty express considerable respect for the quality and dedication of the part-time faculty, but are concerned that uncompetitive compensation levels and the distance from major population centers make finding and attracting part-time faculty increasingly difficult. The team supports the self-study recommendations regarding the role of part-time faculty and their compensation structure.

- **Recommendation to be addressed in Periodic Report:** Frostburg should develop and implement a comprehensive plan for improving the recruitment and retention of diverse faculty. This effort requires special emphasis on the coordination of campus-wide initiatives to expand the size and diversity of applicant pools.

Standard 11: Educational Offerings

Frostburg State University meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

Frostburg's academic programs are developed in consonance with its educational mission and Middle States standards. Undergraduate curricula in all three colleges (Liberal Arts and Sciences, Business, and Education) are characterized by a broad range of curricular programs, designed with close faculty review and oversight. Internships and other opportunities for active learning are widespread throughout the curriculum and sensibly integrated into classroom instruction. Study-Abroad and Honors programs are well established. Through the governance system, the faculty provides thoughtful, serious-minded stewardship of curriculum development, accounting in large measure for the high regard in which the educational program is held by students, employers, and members of the local community. Frostburg's successful accreditations in Business (AACSB) and

Education (NCATE) and selected accreditations within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences provide further evidence of programmatic excellence.

Periodic department and program reviews are important tools for maintaining rigor, currency, and innovation in educational offerings. The decision made in 2001 to make external peer evaluation an integral part of each unit review enhances the quality of the process itself and should prove helpful in linking program review to outcome assessment.

Academic support systems in information and instructional technology are appropriate to Frostburg's mission. The library, an active partner with the faculty and academic affairs administration, provides a well-received and expanding program of instruction in information technology to students as well as to faculty and staff. Ongoing conversion to electronic resources, new consortium arrangements with other colleges and universities, and inter-library loans maximize the library's strained collection and acquisition budgets. Instructional technology services are effective and responsive to teaching and learning needs.

A year-long comprehensive review of graduate studies at Frostburg is nearing completion. The team agrees that an articulation of the mission and role of graduate studies within the context of Frostburg's undergraduate education focus is appropriate. The team commends Frostburg for the ambitious, wide ranging scope of its graduate review and supports the self-study recommendation regarding reconsideration of the administrative structure for graduate studies.

Standard 12: General Education and General Education Assessment

Frostburg State University meets this standard.

Summary of Evidence and Findings:

Frostburg's new, emerging general education reform effort – The Undergraduate Education Initiative (UEI) – models some of the best practices of first-phase curriculum development. Widespread faculty participation, energetic administrative leadership, and purposeful faculty/administration cooperation have been strong throughout the process. The curriculum content demands of students considerable breadth of learning in the liberal arts disciplines, diversity, values, and core skills. On the whole, Frostburg has developed appropriate learning outcomes and thoughtful rationales for the knowledge and skills areas within the new general education program.

The UEI shows strength and boldness in its commitment to interdisciplinary learning, learning communities, and special emphasis on the first-year academic experience. Inevitable implementation challenges of resource support, scheduling, and workload management lie ahead. Administration and faculty are optimistic yet realistic about the institutional support required for successful implementation. Building on a long tradition of interdisciplinary learning in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Frostburg's UEI has the potential to develop into a genuinely distinctive general education program.

The self-study accurately reports that outcomes assessment in general education is insufficiently developed. First steps are promising and show evidence of improved institutional momentum toward a meaningful process of improving teaching and learning in general education with assessment results. Full implementation of the program, plus use of the results for improvement, have yet to be achieved.

Frostburg students, faculty, and staff speak positively about the first-year learning communities. The team commends the university on its recent decision to ensure every incoming freshman has a learning community experience beginning Fall 2006.

Standard 13: Related Educational Activities

Frostburg State University meets this standard.

Summary of evidence and findings:

Systematic testing for reading, writing, and mathematics prior to enrollment appears to be institutionalized and operating well. Programs for Academic Support and Study (PASS) initiatives, including learning communities for under prepared students, are assessed relative to benchmarks, and when benchmarks are not achieved, revisions and improvements are implemented. Documented learning, achieved via structured life experiences, and supervised and assessed by faculty, are offered and viewed as “valuable additions to ... (the) academic program.”

In 2001 Middle States approved a substantive change to allow Frostburg to offer certificate programs. Since that time eight undergraduate and three graduate certificates have been developed, and all seem to be helping the campus to meet specific needs of the community.

Frostburg’s initial offerings of programs in Hagerstown (1988) and its current operation of the USM Hagerstown Center (since 2005), have increased learning opportunities at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Additionally, distance learning technologies had been initiated, and were significantly augmented in 2003 by a program to provide FSU summer and intersession opportunities to currently enrolled students living at home during the breaks. Within three years, enrollments have grown to nearly 2,500. The linking of this on-line opportunity to international studies (blended with travel) and the provision of October-December course offerings (to Katrina and then FSU students) demonstrates the innovation of the faculty, administration, and staff.

A structured program of faculty development to support the quality offering of courses via online or other media has been designed and implemented. Faculty and staff interviewed by the team were highly complimentary of the support services Frostburg has made available to ensure the high quality of these distance academic offerings. The team commends the university on the quality of this support structure.

- **Suggestion:** Frostburg will want to ensure that the online instructional support systems, which are considered model programs, are revised and adjusted to effectively accommodate the significant growth projected for this delivery mode.

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

Frostburg State University meets this standard.

Summary of evidence and findings:

The 2003-04 *Institutional Plan* elevated the “assessment of student learning and institutional assessment” to one of nine major institutional goals. While this '03-'04 date is late relative to Middle States' established expectations regarding the importance of assessment, FSU has recently invested significant energy in both student learning and institutional assessment.

Assessment efforts and documents related to professional accreditations and state expectations demonstrate that many students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional goals. This finding is most evident within undergraduate majors that have achieved professional accreditation. Two of the three colleges (Education and Business) have undertaken significant assessment of student learning, while the third college (Liberal Arts and Science) for the most part exhibits mixed results.

Documents and campus interviews underscored that recently considerable attention has been given to crafting a plan and implementing mechanisms to systematically enhance the assessment of student learning. However, outside of certain areas of strong assessment, sparse evidence was presented to demonstrate that assessment informed decisions to celebrate or improve student learning.

Recently, the campus has made considerable progress as noted by the following documents: *Undergraduate Institutional Learning Goals* (December 2003), *The Undergraduate Education Initiative* (September 2004), and the *Student Learning Assessment Plan* (February 2006). When fully implemented, these plans will provide significant internal tools for celebrating and improving student learning. The team commends the individuals and groups who have developed these plans, and are working diligently to make them an integral part of the campus.

- **Recommendation to be addressed in Periodic Report:** Frostburg should move quickly to implement all components of its proposed student learning assessment plan. This effort requires addressing the unevenness in assessment within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, full implementation of the proposed General Education assessment plan, and evidence that results from the student learning outcomes assessments are used in the decision-making process.

Special Emphasis - The University and the Community

The team commends Frostburg State University on its success in serving the needs of the region.

Frostburg focused on a special emphasis area where it has considerable and growing institutional strength. The campus' commitment to its regional role is embedded in the "Institutional Capabilities" section of the newly revised Mission Statement.

The attraction of the university in the arena of performing arts and cultural activities is notable and appreciated by the community. Frostburg is seen as a cultural hub for the region, and its facilities are seen as magnets for the community.

The university has been nationally recognized for its student volunteerism and community service learning efforts, as evidenced by receipt of American Association of State Colleges and Universities awards in 2002 and 2003. The campus-related and community-based efforts of the Community Outreach Partnership Center, the Institute for Service-Learning, A STAR!, HallSTARS!, and the Student Center for Volunteerism provide innumerable opportunities for students to interact with the local community while providing linkage to on-campus, course-based learning. Additional programs designed to support the educational growth of rural students also are an effective way of providing outreach to the nearby community.

Faculty and students from each of the three colleges interact frequently with community members to address local needs. These activities have been growing and are well-supported by faculty and staff. The only concern stated by some faculty revolved around the way that such services sometimes lacked appropriate recognition in the personnel review process.

Outreach is also embedded in the curriculum of selected programs, exemplified by the development of case studies in the School of Business and the close collaboration with public school teachers in Professional Development Schools affiliated with the School of Education. Outreach is also strongly supported by the Board of Visitors and by various program advisory and town-gown committees.

Another very strong focus of the outreach efforts relates to regional economic development. An entrepreneurial approach has been taken with the development of a small-scale technology business incubator to occupy the vacant Tawes Science Building. Government agencies and technology firms have committed to providing internship, research, and programmatic opportunities for faculty and students in the biological, chemical, geographical, and computer sciences and engineering. A strategic plan incorporating needed mechanisms for assessment is being developed. The team fully endorses the self-study recommendation that a coordinator of these efforts be appointed and supported, particularly as the initiative progresses to the next planned stage of new building construction.