A Community Growing Together
MOUNT ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY

MOUNT ST. MARY’S UNIVERSITY
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
The 2005 Middle States Self-Study Report

January 15, 2005
faith | discovery | leadership | community
Mount St. Mary’s is a Catholic institution of higher education dedicated to liberal learning in the pursuit of truth.

Mount St. Mary’s, mindful of its role in the church’s mission to the world and respectful of the religious liberty of all, affirms the values and beliefs central to the Catholic vision of the person and society, and seeks to deepen understanding of our faith and its practice in just and compassionate engagement with the world.

In order to enable individuals to understand and to challenge or embrace cultural forces operating on them, Mount St. Mary’s in all its curricular and co-curricular programs encourages each student to undertake free and rigorous inquiry leading to a reflective and creative understanding of the traditions which shape the communities in which we live.

Mount St. Mary’s strives to graduate men and women who cultivate a mature spiritual life, who live by high intellectual and moral standards, who respect the dignity of other persons, who see and seek to resolve the problems facing humanity, and who commit themselves to live as responsible citizens.
The undersigned have read and support the statements made within this Middle States Self-Study Report and find it accurate and true to the best of their understanding.

Kurt E. Blaugher
Chair, Visual and Performing Arts Department

William J. Collinge
Professor of Theology

The Rev. James M. Donohue
Chair, Theology Department

Pauline A. Engelstatter
Assistant to the President

Sr. Ann Miriam Gallagher
Professor, Mount St. Mary’s Seminary

Linda K. Junker
Director of Institutional Research

Robert Leib
Class of 2005

Martin J. Malone
Professor of Sociology

Linda Martinak
Dean of Continuing Studies

David M. McCarthy
Professor of Theology

Meg J. McKeon
Dean of Students

Harold P. Menninger
Executive Director of Intercollegiate Athletics

Stephen P. Neitz
Executive Director of Admissions and Financial Aid

Barbara Palmer
Chair, Education Department

Selena Robinson
Director of Campus Life

Steve Rockwood
Library Director

Elaine Vining
Member, Board of Trustees

S. Frank DeLuca
Vice President for Advancement

The Rev. J. Wilfred Parent
Vice Rector, Mount St. Mary’s Seminary

Dan Soller
Vice President for Student Affairs

David Rehm
Middle States Self-Study Co-Chair
Dean for Academic Affairs

Michael J. Towle
Middle States Self-Study Co-Chair
Chair, Political Science Department

Christopher Blake
Vice President for Academic Affairs

Thomas H. Powell
President

Tom O’Hara
Chair, Board of Trustees
Mount St. Mary’s curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills.
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Mount St. Mary’s University is a community growing together. As we prepare for our bicentennial in 2008, the University is well poised to continue expanding its mission as an institution based in faith, promoting discovery of knowledge, inspiring leadership in the next generation, and building a community of learners.

As we prepare for our bicentennial in 2008, the University is well poised to continue expanding its mission.
**Areas for Growth**

- **Area for Growth 14.1**: The University should complete a written assessment plan detailing planned and implemented activities.
- **Area for Growth 14.2**: The Office of Academic Affairs should improve information dissemination regarding assessment activities and results.
- **Area for Growth 14.3**: All academic departments should incorporate performance-based outcomes as a component of departmental program reviews.
- **Area for Growth 14.4**: Departments involved with the MPAS program should take an active role in the assessment of the program.

*All of the Mount's programs have articulated expectations of student learning, grounded in the mission.*
Assessment at Mount St. Mary’s University is an integrated process grounded in the mission of the University. Mount St. Mary’s aims to graduate students “who cultivate a mature spiritual life, who live by high intellectual and moral standards, who respect the dignity of other persons, who see and seek to resolve the problems facing humanity, and who commit themselves to live as responsible citizens.” All student learning assessment at the Mount focuses on determining the extent to which the institution graduates the kinds of students that it aims to. This is true in the traditional undergraduate program, the nontraditional undergraduate programs, or the graduate programs. For purposes of this discussion, assessment activity in the Seminary is set aside, since it is welladdressed by the ATS report that serves as Appendix 2 to this study.

Conclusion. The Mount has in place an academic assessment plan that has the support of the faculty. That assessment plan was originally designed for the traditional undergraduate program. Academic assessment in the coming years will need to focus more on nontraditional undergraduate assessment as well as graduate assessment. In that context, the institution will also be able to pay closer attention to the connections between academic and institutional assessment.

Strengths

- The undergraduate program’s assessment plan allows for identification of expectations of student learning at various levels.
- The Mount has a history of assessment of majors and the use of divisional essays.
- A culture of academic assessment is developing on campus.
During the last 10 years, Mount St. Mary’s University has made significant advances in planning and shared governance.
INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

In this first half of the report, we demonstrate that Mount St. Mary’s University is an effective institution focused on the education of its students. We are a Catholic university grounded in our mission. This mission guides our planning, resource allocation, and institutional renewal. Governance, a major issue in 1995, has been much improved over the past 10 years. Our administration is an efficient one. We are an institution marked by integrity, and we are developing an institutional assessment plan. We discuss each of these areas in turn.

**Standard 1: Mission, Goals and Objectives**

The mission statement of Mount St. Mary’s clearly defines its purpose within the context of higher education and explains whom the Mount serves. The stated goals and objectives of the Mount clearly specify how the Mount will fulfill its mission. The mission, goals, and objectives have been developed and recognized by the institution through the cooperation of its constituencies and the Board of Trustees, and are used to develop and shape the Mount’s programs and practices and to evaluate its effectiveness.

**Conclusion.** Mount St. Mary’s is an institution guided by its mission statement. The goals and objectives of the University support the mission and flow from it.

**Strengths**

- A strong mission statement that animates the institution
- Student learning as the central focus of our mission
Mount St. Mary’s University offers a number of programs and activities that are defined by their particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorships. These include: basic skills, certificate programs, experiential learning, noncredit offerings, additional locations, foreign studies, distance learning, and graduate programs. Some related educational activities support the University’s residential undergraduate programs (e.g., foreign studies), but many support the University’s programs for nontraditional learners at the undergraduate and graduate levels (e.g., experiential learning, accelerated programs).

**Conclusion.** The Mount’s related educational activities meet appropriate standards.

**Strengths**
- The Mount shows strong attention to underprepared students.
- The Mount has expanded to multiple locations.

**Areas for Growth**
- **Area for Growth 13.1:** The University needs better criteria for establishing certificate programs.
- **Area for Growth 13.2:** The VPAA should consider ways to extend faculty training and technical support for distance learning.
Mount St. Mary’s curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, technological competency, and information literacy.

**Conclusion.** The Mount’s core curriculum provides a four-year sequenced and integrated learning opportunity for students, from exploration of Western culture and history as well as fundamental education in reading, writing and critical thinking in the freshman year, through investigations of social sciences, laboratory science, philosophy, theology, foreign languages, mathematics, American culture, ethics, and non-Western cultures. Through a progressive and additive series of studies of Western culture and simultaneous critical studies of the values that Western culture has developed, the Mount’s core curriculum challenges students at every step of their career, regardless of individual major.

**Strengths**

- A sequenced, coherent core curriculum is required of all traditional and nontraditional undergraduates.
- This core curriculum pays close attention to development of skills and reflection on values.

**Areas for Growth**

- **Area for Growth 12.1:** The Mount should enhance its assessment of the core curriculum.
- **Area for Growth 12.2:** The Mount should engage in periodic study of the core curriculum.
Areas for Growth

• Area for Growth 1.1: Future discussions about the mission statement of Mount St. Mary’s should include community-wide conversations about how various forms of public self-definition flow from the mission statement and coordinate with one another.

• Area for Growth 1.2: There should be a single place where all department and division mission statements are listed.

• Area for Growth 1.3: All non-academic departments and divisions of the University should reflect on their relation to the University’s mission statement.

Mount St. Mary’s University is an effective institution focused on the education of its students. We are a Catholic university grounded in our mission.
Mount St. Mary’s University conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and uses the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal. The implementation and subsequent evaluation of the strategic plan, as well as resource allocation, support the development and change necessary to improve and maintain institutional quality.

**Conclusion.** Mount St. Mary’s has a structure in place to provide for community input into planning. Campuswide goals and objectives are clearly stated and serve as a guide for assessing success.

**Strengths**

- The planning process allows input at many levels.
- Shared governance is effective in building consensus on goals and objectives.
- The planning process provides clearly stated goals and objectives. This allows for clarity in determining achievement success.

**Areas for Growth**

- **Area for Growth 2.1:** The Mount should adopt a much more formal and systematic process for establishing, reviewing, and revising departmental goals and objectives.
The educational offerings of Mount St. Mary’s display academic content, rigor, and coherence that are appropriate to its higher education mission. The Mount has identified learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings.

**Conclusion.** In summary, all of the Mount’s educational offerings are consistent with the mission of the institution. Both types of undergraduate programs, whether traditional or accelerated, rely upon the goals and objectives for the undergraduate program approved by the faculty in March 2000. The Seminary has goals and objectives for its students, as do the graduate programs in business and education. All of these programs display rigor and coherence. There are issues regarding assessment that remain to be addressed, but there is confidence that such issues will be dealt with in the near future.

**Strengths**
- The Mount’s academic programs are grounded in its mission.
- The University has similar standards for all academic programs.
- In recent years, faculty have paid increased attention to student learning outcomes.
- The University possesses resources sufficient for excellent teaching and learning.

**Areas for Growth**
- **Area for Growth 11.1:** The inclusion of learning outcomes should be a requirement on all official documents and syllabi.
- **Area for Growth 11.2:** The VPAA should make consistent the organizational structures of graduate programs.
- **Area for Growth 11.3:** In an effort to encourage unity as a “whole institution,” the VPAA should develop means by which to promote understanding between the traditional undergraduate program and the accelerated and graduate programs.
STANDARD 10 Faculty

The instructional, research, and service programs of Mount St. Mary's are devised, developed, monitored, and supported by qualified professionals.

Conclusion. The faculty at Mount St. Mary's University are central to the life of the institution through their teaching, developing and maintaining the curriculum, and assuring a high quality of academic life.

Strengths

• The Mount's faculty are prepared and qualified.
• The curriculum is designed and maintained by the faculty.
• The Mount provides faculty opportunities for professional development.
• There are published and implemented standards for tenure, promotion, and grievance.

Areas for Growth

• Area for Growth 10.1: The University should discuss the proportion of full-time faculty to part-time faculty teaching in the continuing studies program. (105)
• Area for Growth 10.2: The VPAA, in his role as head of strategic planning, should initiate a review of the 4/3 teaching load with a view toward improving teaching quality, scholarly productivity, and recruitment and retention of new faculty.
• Area for Growth 10.3: Because the amount allocated for travel has not been increased in the last 24 years, funding for faculty travel should be increased to a level appropriate to support faculty scholarship.
• Area for Growth 10.4: The UAC and GAC should lead the faculty in the development of a portion of the student evaluation form that will be standard across all departments and programs.
• Area for Growth 10.5: The Mount should make a concerted effort to hire and retain women and minority faculty and administrators.
• Area for Growth 10.6: Faculty and administrators should initiate a campuswide discussion of adjunct policies, including but not restricted to reasons for hiring, appropriate uses, compensation, and methods of evaluation.
The human, financial, technical, physical facilities, and other resources necessary to achieve the Mount's mission and goals are available and accessible. In the context of the Mount's mission, the effective and efficient uses of its resources are analyzed as part of ongoing outcomes assessment.

**Conclusion.** Mount St. Mary's has a system in place to assure the effective use of its physical and human resources. It uses assessments of its needs to guide campus improvements.

**Strengths**
- The budget preparation process includes input from many areas.
- The timeline for budget preparation is clearly defined.
- Resource allocation is guided by the *Vision Statement* and the mission of the University.

**Areas for Growth**
- **Area for Growth 3.1:** A procedure needs to be implemented whereby the appropriateness of the University's staffing levels can be regularly assessed.
- **Area for Growth 3.2:** The chief financial officer should develop multiyear budget projections. These projections should be shared with the community and should become part of the planning process.
- **Area for Growth 3.3:** Efforts should be made, in accordance with the *Vision Statement*, to improve the conditions of student housing on campus.
- **Area for Growth 3.4:** An assessment needs to be made of the classroom technology needs at the Frederick site, and these classrooms should be brought up to par with the main campus. In addition, a representative from the Frederick site should serve on the Technology Advisory Committee.
The Mount’s system of governance clearly defines the roles of its constituencies in policy development and decision making. The governance structure includes an active Board of Trustees with sufficient autonomy to assure institutional integrity and to fulfill its responsibilities of policy and resource development, consistent with the mission.

**Conclusion.** Mount St. Mary’s has dramatically improved its governance situation since the 1995 self-study. A structure is now in place that assures input from all major campus constituencies. Employees seem generally satisfied with the structure, though some administrators report that they do not feel free to express their opinions. Students seem to feel either disempowered or unknowledgeable about how to provide their input into decisions affecting them. While the Board of Trustees functions well, there is some sense among faculty members that it is not fully in touch with the campus. Still, the dissatisfaction is of a fairly low level, and the board is regarded much more positively than 10 years ago.

**Strengths**
- A comprehensive formal governance structure that broadly represents campus constituencies.
- A favorable opinion by faculty of the faculty’s governance system.
- A Board of Trustees whose members generously commit their personal resources to the Mount.

**Areas for Growth**
- **Area for Growth 4.1:** The Governing Documents should be revised to include: 1) an explicit statement of the procedure for approving revisions to the Governing Documents; 2) provisions for enhancing the presence of graduate students in the governance structure; and 3) formal representation of students in MPAS.
- **Area for Growth 4.2:** There should be a regular schedule put in place for reviewing the Governing Documents and making sure that they are accurate and up-to-date.
Areas for Growth

- **Area for Growth 9.1:** The Division of Student Affairs in collaboration with the Division of Academic Affairs should work together to develop programs to enhance community, volunteerism, and service at the Mount.

- **Area for Growth 9.2:** The Division of Student Affairs should pay greater attention to the needs of nontraditional and graduate students so as to transform the thinking of the community towards greater unity.

- **Area for Growth 9.3:** The Division of Student Affairs should develop Residence Hall Councils and “in-house” processes of mediation for grievances between students.

- **Area for Growth 9.4:** The Division of Student Affairs should develop procedures for students to offer feedback and evaluate the judicial procedures of Residential Life.

- **Area for Growth 9.5:** Faculty should consider adjusting either the workload within classes and/or the rigor of grading so as to encourage students to spend more time in academic pursuits.

- **Area for Growth 9.6:** The role of Public Safety in the residence halls should be decreased so that discipline can be set within the context of community building programs offered by the Residence Life staff.

- **Area for Growth 9.7:** The VPAA and VPSA should develop means by which communication between faculty and Student Affairs staff/administrators is enhanced.

- **Area for Growth 9.8:** The divisions of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs should reflect upon the role and the responsibilities of the Campus Life Committee with a view to enhancing its effectiveness.

- **Area for Growth 9.9:** The Division of Student Affairs should develop an assessment plan consistent with those of other divisions on campus.
Mount St. Mary’s University has a program of student support services appropriate to student strengths and needs, reflective of institutional mission, and consistent with student learning expectations. This program of student support services applies most to students in the traditional undergraduate program and in the Seminary. Since students in the MPAS program and in the graduate programs generally are not residents, the support services for them are primarily academic in nature, and such students can rely upon the academic support services provided to all of our students. Moreover, student support services relevant to seminarians are discussed in the Seminary report, Appendix 2. Thus, the focus of discussion in this standard will be on student support services for the traditional undergraduate program.

Conclusion. Students at the Mount report a generally positive experience of student services. They have a strong sense of belonging and comfort, and the two main areas of dissatisfaction are the enforcement of behavioral policies and student involvement. Because of the positive experiences of students, because of the strong sense of belonging, and because of the clear awareness of the mission of the University (rather than despite these), expectations for community involvement and support are high, and dissatisfaction in areas of student life are experienced keenly.

Strengths

• Students report positive views of student life.
• Attempts at resolving issues with campus life staff quality and turnover have had positive results.
• Student-faculty relationships are very strong.
• There has been a noticeable improvement over the last few years with regards to CAB activities and student life.
• **Area for Growth 4.3:** The administration and the SGA should engage in discussions to strengthen: channels for student participation in governance, communication between the administration and the SGA, and communication between the SGA and students.

• **Area for Growth 4.4:** Board members and faculty members should generate specific job descriptions for faculty/board liaisons, provide advance schedules of meetings, and determine a mechanism for reporting back to faculty.

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There are many formal channels by which members of the community are free to express opinions to their immediate supervisors and to the president, the vice presidents, and others who make policy in one way or another.
STANDARD 5  Administration

The Mount’s administrative structure and services facilitate learning and scholarship, foster quality improvement, and support its organization and governance.

Conclusion. The administrative structure of Mount St. Mary’s University supports its mission and serves the community in the achievement of its goals and objectives.

Strengths

• Appropriate levels of administrative staffing.
• A high degree of employee satisfaction with the performance of administrative policy makers.
• An effective system for attaining annual key goals and objectives within administrative departments.

Areas for Growth

• Area for Growth 5.1: Divisions should increase allocations for professional growth and development among their administrators and professional staff.
• Area for Growth 5.2: Divisions and departments need to develop mechanisms and cultures whereby individuals feel free to utilize channels of “bottom up” communication and assessment.
• Area for Growth 5.3: The Human Resources Office in conjunction with the Administrators Affairs Committee should put into place a consistent evaluation system for all administrators and professional staff.
Areas for Growth

- **Area for Growth 8.1:** The Office of Academic Affairs should ensure that goals and objectives of the undergraduate program are included in all undergraduate catalogs.
- **Area for Growth 8.2:** The Registrar's Office should formalize transfer of credit procedures.
- **Area for Growth 8.3:** The Enrollment Management Committee should develop additional assessment on the characteristics that correlate among student retention, attrition, and persistence as well as annually evaluate efforts to enhance student retention, with concentration given to the articulated performance standard to increase graduation rates.
- **Area for Growth 8.4:** The Enrollment Management Committee should communicate with faculty and administrators about the influences that aid student recruitment and retention.
EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

In this second half of the report, we demonstrate that both our mission and the way we live our mission benefit our students. We begin with a discussion of student admissions, proceed through discussions of student life, the faculty, our majors, core, and additional programs, and turn in the final section to assessment. Our aim throughout is to demonstrate that Mount St. Mary’s University sets and meets high standards for our educational program.

Conclusion. Over the past 10 years, the admissions picture at the Mount has improved markedly. The Mount enrolls more consistent traditional undergraduate classes, and the enrollment for both nontraditional undergraduates as well as graduates has also risen. (See Appendices 45, 46, 47, and 48 for five-year freshman enrollment statistics, MPAS, graduate education, and MBA enrollment summaries.) The Mount retains a consistent number of students over four years and has been gradually increasing in size. The arrival of Dr. Powell as president has also brought new challenges on the admissions front. The University’s Vision Statement calls for an increase in enrollment, an improvement in retention, an increase in the quality of students, a decrease in the acceptance rate, and an improved yield. Such aims will require tremendous creativity on the part of the Enrollment Management Council and other members of the community over the coming years.

Strengths

- The Mount seeks to accept students who will thrive in the context of the mission.
- There has been an increase in applicants and admitted students over the past 10 years in all programs.
- The Transition Program is effective.
- Analysis of admissions data occurs regularly at different levels.
- Admission of nontraditional undergraduates and graduates continues to improve.
STANDARD 6  Integrity

In the conduct of its programs and activities involving the public and the constituencies it serves, the Mount demonstrates adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies, providing support to academic and intellectual freedom.

Conclusion. Mount St. Mary’s is guided by ethical practices in the treatment of its students and employees. It has guidelines in place to assure academic freedom and the free exchange of ideas. It strives for accuracy in communications with external audiences.

Strengths

• Well developed procedures and policies for evaluating and reviewing faculty (both tenured and untenured) that are perceived as clear and fair.
• A system in place to regularly and openly present factual information about the institution.
• A clearly expressed emphasis on respect for diversity, and a Center for Intercultural Development to spearhead efforts to promote diversity and to respond to complaints.

Areas for Growth

• Area for Growth 6.1: The graduate programs should revise their procedures pertaining to the appeal of a grade to allow students to appeal a decision of the Graduate Academic Appeals Board.
• Area for Growth 6.2: All divisions and departments of the University should take care to apply more consistently policies regarding evaluation and dismissal of staff members.
• Area for Growth 6.3: Mount St. Mary’s University should adjust its compensation levels for faculty and staff to be in line with its comparator schools.
• Area for Growth 6.4: The graduate programs should revise their procedures pertaining to academic discipline so as to allow students to appeal a faculty member’s decision regarding academic dishonesty.
Mount St. Mary’s University has developed and is in the process of implementing an assessment plan and process that evaluates its overall effectiveness. Because the institution’s primary focus in the past several years has been on development of academic assessment (see Standard 14), our attention to overall institutional assessment has lagged somewhat behind. But the Mount is now in a position to focus forcefully and confidently on institutional assessment.

**Conclusion.** The strategic plans (the Mount plans and the Vision Statement) have been used to develop annual goals and objectives, the achievement of which can be readily ascertained. The new assessment plan will add to the strategic planning process by providing data that can be used in further planning. This process of using assessment data has already been in place. Data used in the development of the new strategic plan, however, will derive from better coordinated activities of institutional and student learning assessment. The Office of Institutional Research is now aided by the (curricular) Office of Assessment in developing and executing assessment activities, and in assimilating and publicizing the results of these activities.

**Strengths**
- Assessment of effectiveness of divisions and departments occurs on campus.
- Information from assessment is used to improve performance.
- There is a clear process in place for developing a coordinated assessment plan.

**Areas for Growth**
- **Area for Growth 7.1:** The director of institutional research should continue to conduct several administrative workshops, using small-group techniques, to assist individuals in learning about and implementing assessment.
• **Area for Growth 7.2:** All departments and divisions of the University should develop mission statements, and these should be used as guides in continued assessment.

• **Area for Growth 7.3:** There should be a common reporting format for executive directors and directors to utilize when submitting their annual reports. The format should have an assessment component tied to departmental goals and objectives.

*The Mount is now in a position to focus forcefully and confidently on institutional assessment.*