

**NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
MIDDLE STATES ASSOCIATION SELF-STUDY
UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION AT NYU**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New York University has focused its decennial Middle States Association self-study on undergraduate education. Given current national concern about the role of undergraduate education in research universities, this seemed an appropriate time for reflection on what is an essential element of our academic enterprise. A Steering Committee comprised of faculty, deans, administrators, and students was responsible for overseeing preparation of the self-study. Two other committees were formed to consult in this effort: the Undergraduate Academic Affairs Committee and the Undergraduate Student Affairs Committee, which conducted most of their studies in the fall 2002 and spring 2003 terms. A succession of drafts of the report was reviewed by members of NYU's faculty, student body, and administration between February 2003 and January 2004. The final version, which reflects this extensive process of consultation, consists of one volume of narrative and one volume of appendices. Additional relevant documents, such as the University's and the schools' outcomes assessment plans, are also being provided to the Middle States Evaluation Team.

Prologue

NYU is, first and foremost, a research university. With strong professional schools, the unparalleled resources of New York City, and global aspirations, its goal is to provide its undergraduates with a distinctive educational experience of the highest quality. After outlining how undergraduate education is organized at NYU through eight different schools, the self-study recounts the progress of the past decade, in which the student body has increased dramatically in size and quality, as a result of the greater selectivity made possible by a much broader applicant pool. At the same time, the University has been transformed from a commuter school into one that is largely residential. Significant investments in faculty, financial aid, and program enhancements have led to major improvements in undergraduate academic and student life. That challenges remain is indicated by the finding that NYU remains below other prominent private and many public research institutions in the United States with regard to retention and six year graduation rates. The recently formed Analytical Planning Group has begun to study the causes of attrition, NYU's various programs for special categories of students, and faculty composition and deployment within its schools. The results of these studies will inform ongoing assessment and planning. Meanwhile, without prejudging the outcome, but making use of what is already known, the present self-study examines the undergraduate experience at NYU under the three principal categories of enrollment and financial aid, academic affairs, and student affairs, with a final section on alumni relations.

Enrollment and Financial Aid

The Office of Undergraduate Admissions services all the schools except the College of Dentistry (which offers two undergraduate degree programs) and the McGhee Division (which offers adult degree programs) of the School of Continuing and Professional Studies (SCPS). Given the nearly three-fold increase in the number of applications over the last decade (from 13,591 in 1993 to 33,097 in 2003), the report recommends exploring ways of providing Admissions with the resources needed to make an increasingly nuanced assessment of each applicant. It remains a challenge to communicate to applicants the distinguishing features of the individual schools and, if need be, to move certain students to the applicant pool of a school that is a better “fit.” Compared with peer and target institutions, NYU takes in many more external transfer students; their quality varies and their large numbers can work against community-building efforts on campus. Also, the large number of internal transfers (from one NYU school to another) can present challenges if they reflect dissatisfaction or result in dislocations in the exporting or importing school. The relation between financial aid policies and the yield on admitted students and their retention is now the subject of closer analysis, but the self-study finds it already clear that financial aid strategies should be reexamined and that fundraising for scholarships be a top priority.

Academic Affairs

Introduction. The academic affairs part of the self-study, which relies heavily on the work of the Advisory Committee on Undergraduate Academic Affairs and its subcommittees, examines the academic experience of NYU’s undergraduates under 12 topics.

General Education. The report reviews the various general education requirements at NYU, ranging from the distributional models at the College of Dentistry, the Ehrenkranz School of Social Work, the McGhee Division of SCPS, and the Tisch School of the Arts to the more prescribed programs of the Gallatin School of Individualized Study, the General Studies Program of SCPS, and the Morse Academic Plan (MAP) of the College of Arts and Science (CAS). The MAP, adopted to varying degrees also by the Steinhardt School of Education, the Stern School of Business, and the Cinema Studies Program at Tisch, represents the most ambitious effort of the past decade to provide a common, coherent, and challenging general education for the majority of NYU’s undergraduates. In its fullest form (in CAS) the MAP includes expository writing, foreign language, and courses in humanities, social science, quantitative reasoning, and natural science. With courses that are specifically designed for nonmajors, the MAP has greater coherence than a distributional requirement; in addition, MAP courses are taught only by tenured or tenure-track faculty and all are enhanced by small recitation or laboratory sections. The Academic Affairs Committee’s finding that the goals of the MAP are not always fully understood or articulated by its various constituencies is probably true of the other general education models at NYU as well. Other challenges include improving specific courses, capitalizing further on NYU’s intellectual diversity, aligning general education more closely with departmental resources and intellectual agenda, dealing with TA shortages, and increasing the connections between general education and other aspects of the curriculum. Finally, given NYU’s intellectual diversity, the question remains to what extent there should be a common platform for all undergraduate schools.

The Major. Along with a general education that provides breadth of perspectives and foundational skills, NYU's schools also ensure that all students achieve significant depth in at least one discipline or area through completion of a major. The more than 140 discrete undergraduate majors at NYU differ greatly from one another, sometimes even within a school. The self-study necessarily restricts itself to identifying several challenges that cross programs, departments, and schools. One challenge is to continue efforts to build connections between the major and general education curricula. Another is to use learning outcomes assessment plans to ensure that majors remain intellectually current and challenging, are structured with sufficient verticality, and provide for a meaningful capstone experience. Apparent redundancies involving programs in different schools are being studied to determine whether they make curricular and financial sense. Finally, some schools' generous policies on the number of transfer credits accepted toward their degree are being reconsidered.

Undergraduate Research. In keeping with its research mission, NYU strives, whenever possible, to include undergraduates in the production of knowledge. Given its intellectual diversity, one of NYU's strengths, research on the part of undergraduates necessarily varies widely in nature, context, and extent within as well as across NYU's schools. The report describes the substantial progress in promoting undergraduate research that has been made over the past decade. The primary challenge is to encourage and enable even more students to become directly involved in research activities and to create more incentives and reduce disincentives for faculty to mentor undergraduates, including those from underrepresented groups. To enhance participation, schools should also develop clearinghouses for information on available opportunities and establish or increase financial support for student research projects.

Experiential Learning. The University is committed to connecting with the community in formal and informal ways that include a broad spectrum of internships and public service activities. The report mentions some of the challenges raised by the extraordinary array of practical, experiential learning opportunities available to students in New York City. One is for the schools to embed service learning, which has tended to be largely a co-curricular activity, into a broader range of courses. Another, more pressing challenge is to find ways to help students take fuller advantage of attractive internship opportunities when external providers require that they receive academic credit.

Interrelations of Schools and Individualized Study. The report finds that the variety of intellectual styles, philosophical methods, and practical orientations of the eight undergraduate schools is a great strength of NYU. Of course, this diversity can set up a certain tension between the desire to maintain the mission and spirit of each school and the development of a strong sense of community University-wide. One manifestation of this is the difficulty that some students report in seeking access to offerings of other schools. Relations between the schools take the form mainly of cross-registration in individual courses, cross-school majors and minors, dual-degree programs, and internal transfers. The report recommends ensuring that no undue barriers impede such activities. It also recommends exploring ways to expand opportunities for individualized study, to allow non-Gallatin students, too, to receive the benefits of access to appropriate individually tailored majors.

Study Abroad. As part of its global mission, NYU aims to give as many of its students as possible, regardless of major, opportunities to study abroad, whether in its own programs or at a university with which it has an exchange agreement. An ongoing challenge at each NYU site abroad is to get faculty more directly involved in ensuring across-the-board quality, developing programs, and providing thematic foci for the curriculum. Financial issues include offering departments replacement funds for full-time faculty temporarily lost to teaching in programs abroad, and devising strategies for increasing fall enrollments at sites abroad to balance the distribution of the student body more equitably between the fall and spring semesters.

Academic Advising, Mentoring, and Support Services. The different missions of the schools have led to a variety of approaches to the advising of undergraduates, including centralized advising centers, faculty mentors, and administrative staff advisers. School-based academic support programs are supplemented by an array of University-wide services for all students. Surveys suggest that many students feel that they do not have enough access to faculty as advisers and mentors. Since efforts to promote faculty mentoring must start in the classroom, where personal relationships can be built on intellectual interests, it is important to assign full-time faculty to classes wherever appropriate. At the same time, ways should also be found to increase faculty involvement in the more formal advising structure as well as in co-curricular programs where students live and study.

Libraries. The Library's ongoing program of assessment and communication with users aims to identify and respond to their needs, improve services to diverse groups, and build communities of users. Providing undergraduates instruction in research skills at the right points of their intellectual development is a continuing challenge. A newer challenge is to make students more aware of the enormously expanded electronic resources and, even more importantly, how to use them discriminately. At the same time that web-based services need further development, the physical spaces of Bobst Library need a renovation that reflects the undergraduate populations and their varied modes of study, research, and social interaction.

Technology. The report cites some of the notably expanded and upgraded services that NYU's Information Technology Services has provided the academic community. But the rapid development and availability of new technology has also created a variety of challenges: accommodating growth in the faculty's use of such basic technology as Blackboard without multiplying support resources at the same rate; improving the design and delivery of education and awareness programs for students; making the Student Information System more flexible and user-friendly; and continuing to create and support more technology-enhanced classrooms, while expediting the delivery of equipment to underequipped rooms.

Academic Space. This section of the self-study, dealing with the availability, appropriateness, and physical condition of classrooms, depends heavily on the findings and recommendations of the University Presidential Transition Team (March 2002). Large increases in the numbers of students and of courses have led to shortages of adequate classroom space. Efforts to maximize the use of existing space are necessary, such as enforcing minimum enrollments in courses and requiring that, wherever possible, a modular class schedule, less popular hours, and Fridays be used for instruction. The system for matching rooms with course or instructor re

quirements and for supplying appropriate equipment to rooms also needs to be coordinated better across the University.

Teaching. The self-study affirms the importance of putting regular faculty in the undergraduate classroom wherever appropriate. Studies are underway at the University to examine the present and desirable teaching allocations. In addition, individual schools have been required to submit plans for assessing student learning outcomes and for using the results in planning and resource allocation. The report then focuses on the quality of teaching, which is supported, among other efforts, by the Center for Teaching Excellence and by University and school teaching awards. All schools at NYU also have methods for evaluating courses and instructors. A centralized evaluation process might increase the number of courses assessed and permit the pooling of experience and economies of scale. Further measures of teaching effectiveness that supplement student evaluations should also be devised and a formal mechanism for reviewing assessments and dealing with deficiencies should be developed.

Diversity and Engagement. NYU has a very diverse student body in terms of ethnicity, geographic origin, economic background, religious affiliation, and sexual orientation. The University is committed to promoting this diversity even further by increasing the proportion of students of color, perhaps by means of a revised financial aid strategy. Although the percentage of minorities and women on the faculty has also been rising, the faculty is not as diverse as the student body. The University must continue to explore not only more effective ways of recruiting a diverse faculty but also strategies for increasing the number of minority undergraduates interested in entering academic life. With increased diversity necessarily comes the challenge of integrating undergraduates' academic and social experience, so that students and faculty can learn from people of different backgrounds. This goal can be addressed by developing incentives for greater faculty participation in advising and in co-curricular activities, and by increasing the number of tenured and tenure-track faculty in appropriate courses.

Student Affairs

Introduction. Several organizational changes and the Middle States self-study process have resulted in a renewed focus on student affairs at NYU. The efforts to improve undergraduate student life discussed in this section are guided by the principles noted in the Prologue—the primacy of the University's academic mission, active partnership between the University and its students in all aspects of the learning process, the importance of diversity, and the extension of educational experiences beyond the classroom. This part of the self-study relies heavily on the work of the Committee on Undergraduate Student Affairs and its subcommittee. It explores issues under three topics.

Diversity and Community. The report examines the University's efforts to enhance its academic mission through a wide range of extracurricular programs and services. It highlights the importance of providing opportunities for students to be involved in campus life outside the classroom, contextualizing these opportunities within a community-based framework, and meeting the special needs of particular student groups.

Several key items are discussed: a newly opened university center; student clubs, organizations, and activities; community service; and communication. Non-resident (commuter) and

transfer students are identified as meriting special consideration. A second subsection extends these issues to include the University's role as a transition to employment or graduate and professional education and in maintaining ties to alumni.

The University's size, decentralized nature, urban setting, and the diversity of its student body, faculty, and staff are sources of both strength and challenge in the process of building community. These considerations also contribute to other challenges—achieving and maintaining quality in the management and delivery of services, making community service more accessible and meaningful to students, articulating clear and consistent policies and procedures, meeting the demands of a constantly changing and increasingly important technological infrastructure, and overcoming barriers to an integrated community. Other challenges in this area include locating sufficient space for student needs, such as career services, and creating a culture of greater engagement among alumni.

Residential Life. As the University's ability to house students has expanded, so has recognition that the residence hall environment offers opportunities beyond the classroom for learning and growth. The report focuses on the University's efforts to nurture students' social, intellectual, and personal development, and to promote a sense of community within the residence halls through a range of programmatic efforts. Key factors in this process include strong faculty presence and participation; proper selection, training, and deployment of resident assistants; use of peer educators to provide support; advising and mentoring; community space for gatherings; and thematic learning environments.

Major growth over the last decade has led to a large and varied housing system that presents substantial challenges with respect to housing selection and programming. Initiatives aimed at coordinating students' intellectual and social lives must take into account differences in building size, configuration, location, and cost as well as needs that may differ according to students' class year or other circumstances (e.g., transition to the university for freshmen and transfers, "sophomore slump," expectations of certain residence hall amenities among upperclass students, varying levels of financial need).

Possible strategies that are considered include clustering students by class, building location, and selected areas within residence halls; a uniform pricing structure; and modifying the point/lottery system of selecting rooms and halls to help students make more informed choices. Recommendations include the expansion of three programs — a Faculty Fellow-in-Residence Program, a College Learning Center within Weinstein Hall, and an improved Resident Assistant Training Program — and the creation of several assessment initiatives.

Mental Health and Behavioral Issues. The report recognizes that mental health and behavioral issues can impede efforts to support the University's academic mission and improve the quality of student life. Helping students to cope with these problems and minimize risks associated with drug and alcohol use are important objectives. Issues discussed in relation to mental health include an increased use of counseling services by students, their arrival on campus with more severe problems requiring treatment, greater reliance upon medication to treat these problems, and a significant strain overall on mental health resources. Drug and alcohol use also is examined as a factor affecting student life. NYU's location in a large urban environment may

increase the potential for students to be exposed to these problems. It is, therefore, of the highest importance for the University to maintain a sound and consistent philosophy about alcohol and drugs, appropriate practices as expressions of that philosophy, and maximum effort to mitigate negative environmental influences, particularly outside of the residence halls. The report discusses the role of related support services and programs, which combine prevention, education, and treatment under a wellness model to promote a safe and healthy living and learning environment.

Challenges in the area of mental health include gathering adequate information about our students and their problems; better training for faculty and staff about mental health problems and how to address them; inadequate numbers of staff and insufficient office space; finding ways to encourage students to use alternative mental health interventions such as small groups and peer education services; and improving health insurance coverage for students, especially with respect to mental health benefits and medications.

Challenges with respect to alcohol and drugs include better identification and understanding of these problems as affecting (and affected by) other aspects of undergraduate life; developing programs that address the needs of diverse student populations, particularly those who may be most at risk; enhancing training to incorporate new programs; and clarifying relevant policies and assuring that they are applied consistently. Recommendations include many programmatic and service improvements to address these issues.

Alumni Relations

The University increasingly views alumni status as part of a continuum that begins with the recruitment/admission process and evolves throughout a student's career, so that alumni relations are the culmination of the goal of building and sustaining the NYU community. Improving the quality of undergraduate student life strengthens the foundation for alumni relations by creating institutional loyalty. The section on alumni relations describes the range of activities and programs offered by the Office for University Development and Alumni Relations (UDAR) to communicate with alumni and to engage them in the life of the University through events at Washington Square and in different regions around the country.

Historically low levels of alumni participation and annual giving at NYU are in part a legacy of the days when many of the now older alumni attended the University as commuters or part-time students, and others attended as professional students. These students had less time and opportunity to develop connections to NYU. The primary challenge today is to develop programs and an infrastructure that encourage and support the practice of giving back to the University. Additional challenges include building connections to the significant number of alumni who live in other areas of the United States and abroad; increasing coordination between UDAR and other offices of the University, particularly with the Division of Student Affairs, in order to improve relations with students and alumni; and expanding efforts to involve parents of students in the life of the University community.

Conclusion

The self-study concludes with a recognition of the actions needed to continue the substantial progress that undergraduate education has made at New York University in recent years: a continuing and candid evaluation of strengths and weaknesses, far-sighted planning for the future, and, above all, wise judgments on difficult and complex issues.