REPORT OF THE

HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

Team Visit

March 11 – 13, 2007
October 9, 2007

Mary B. Breslin, BVM  
Associate Director  
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools  
The Higher Learning Commission  
30 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2400  
Chicago, IL  60602-2504

Re: Final Team Report

Dear Ms. Breslin:

This letter acknowledges receipt of the final team report for the comprehensive evaluation visit to Wittenberg University that occurred March 11-13, 2007. The members of the visit team were well-prepared when they arrived on campus and worked diligently throughout their stay. I accept their recommendations and essentially agree with most of their findings—in fact, we had begun to address several of the team’s suggestions as natural outcomes of our Strategic Plan implementation process before we received their written report. We choose the Readers Panel option for the next stage of this review for the continuation of Wittenberg’s accreditation.

Allow me to respond to three observations in the report that I do not find persuasive. First, I see encouraging signs associated with the early stage of genuine discussion of the Lutheran Identity Study across and within the institution’s many constituent groups. The diverse reactions to the report (described by the visiting team as “apparent inconsistency”) reflect deeply held passions for our mission and accurately reflect the spectrum of legitimate approaches to addressing the recommendations that are being considered as the campus responds to the identity report. My second observation points out that we know that we have not completed a systematic review of all institutional web pages and publications for consistency with the recently adopted mission and values statements—that task was underway and will be completed over the next year or so. Finally, I endorse the recommendation that Wittenberg pursue a systematic approach to enrollment management, such an approach is one of the cornerstones of our strategic plan. Although we will consider the visiting team’s concern about what they describe as a high proportion of our students who are athletes, we do so with the conviction that there are sustainable strategies to use our highly-successful, Division III, intercollegiate athletics program to recruit and retain students compatible academically with our strategic goals.

The visiting team’s basic findings that “Wittenberg University is a very sound residential liberal arts college, true to its historic mission” and that “students are receiving a high quality liberal education and have a sense of a social commitment mission” provides an important external acknowledgement of the dedication of the people who make Wittenberg the special place that it is. This affirmation will help sustain us as we face the challenges and opportunities unique to Wittenberg and those shared across higher education. We look forward with optimism as we find “distinctively Wittenberg” solutions for the challenges facing us in the decade ahead.

Sincerely,

Mark H. Erickson  
President

MHE/eb

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ASSURANCE SECTION

REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION VISIT

TO

Wittenberg University
Springfield, OH
March 11-13, 2007

FOR

The Higher Learning Commission
A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

EVALUATION TEAM

James E. Swartz, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the College; Professor of Chemistry; Grinnell College, Grinnell, IA 50112-1690, Team Chairperson

Catherine Hendel, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, Clarke College, Dubuque, IA 52001

Richard C. Rankin, Vice President and Dean for Student Life; St. Norbert College; De Pere, WI 54115

Kathryn H. Swanson, Professor and Chair – English; Coordinator of Writing and ESL; Augsburg College; 2211 Riverside; Minneapolis, MN 55454

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I. CONTEXT AND NATURE OF VISIT

A. Purpose of Visit
The visit was conducted in order to carry out a comprehensive evaluation for continued accreditation at the bachelor's level plus a Master of Arts in Education program.

B. Organizational Context
Wittenberg University was founded in 1844 by “English” Lutherans. It is currently located on 95 acres in Springfield, Ohio, and is connected with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. It remains a residential liberal arts college with a student body of roughly 2000, mostly from Ohio and areas close to Ohio. In addition to the traditional liberal arts program, Wittenberg University offers educational opportunities to non-residential students through the School of Community Education and a Master of Arts in Education program.

Wittenberg University was first accredited by the North Central Association in 1916, and has been continually accredited since that time. The most recent comprehensive evaluation of Wittenberg University took place in March, 1997, and the Commission continued Wittenberg’s accreditation for 10 years.

In the last several years Wittenberg University has undergone a substantial leadership transition with changes in the positions of President, Vice President for University Advancement, and Vice President for Enrollment Management. Since the last HLC visit, the institution has substantially changed the way it invests its endowment, completed a $75 million capital campaign, and developed a new enrollment plan. Two new academic facilities and a new residence hall markedly improve the academic and residential facilities. Wittenberg’s endowment growth (both from investment performance and gifts) has been modest as have been net tuition revenues.

C. Unique Aspects of Visit
None

D. Sites or Branch Campuses Visited
Main campus only

E. Distance Education Reviewed
None

F. Interactions with Constituencies
Senior Staff
1. President; Provost;
2. Vice President for Business and Finance;
3. Vice President for Enrollment Management;
4. Associate Vice President for Student Development;
5. Dean of Students;
6. Associate Vice President for Human Resources and Special Assistant to the President;
7. Secretary of the University; Executive Assistant to President.
Key Administrative Staff
8. Controller;
9. Director of Budgets and Student Accounts Director;
10. Director of Admissions;
11. Director of Financial Aid;
12. Director of International Education;
13. Associate Provost;
14. Dean of School of Community Education and two staff members;
15. Director of Library;
16. Director of Computing Services;
17. Director of Plant, Safety & Environment;
18. Director of Church Relations and Pastors.

Academic and Academic Support Staff
19. Director of Wittenberg Seminars;
20. Director of Faculty Development;
21. Director of Writing Center;
22. Director of Oral Communications Center;
23. Director of Writing Across the Curriculum;
24. Assistant Provost – Academic Services; Director of General Education;
25. Director of the Graduate Program in Education;
26. Director of Adult Leadership Programs;
27. Director of Community Programs.

Department or Program Chairs
28. English; Primary Self-Study Writer;
29. History;
30. Philosophy;
31. Africana Studies;
32. Chemistry;
33. Biology;
34. Physics;
35. Geology;
36. Mathematics;
37. Computer Science;
38. Psychology;
39. Languages;
40. Religion;
41. Communication;
42. Economics;
43. Education;

Committees
44. Faculty Executive Board;
45. Lutheran Identity Study Task Force;
46. Trustees (3);
47. Faculty Assessment of Academic Programs Committee.
Groups
48. Open session for students;
49. Open session for staff (-20);
50. Open session for faculty (-7);
51. Group of Civic leaders (10)

G. Principal Documents, Materials, and Web Pages Reviewed
1. Self Study;
2. Wittenberg University Catalog;
3. Wittenberg University Accountant’s Report and Financial Statements (6/30/2006, 2005);
4. Audited Financial Statements (6/30/2005; 2004);
5. Student Handbook;
6. Wittenberg University Staff Manual (August 2005);
7. Wittenberg University Faculty Manual (2005-06 Academic Year);
8. ‘Distinctively Wittenberg, a Vision for Excellence’ (Strategic Plan);
9. Mini-Manual for Adult College Writers (School of Community Education);
10. Student Handbook (Master of Arts in Education);
11. HLC/NCA documents relative to Master of Arts in Education;
12. Report on Master of Arts in Education Implementation;
13. Report: “Contribution to the Discussion of the Academic Climate at Wittenberg” (4/03);
15. Application to major materials: Management, communication, religion, languages;
16. Lutheran Identity Task Force Report;
17. Governance charts;
18. Course syllabi from various departments;
19. Marketing brochures from School of Community Education;
20. Departmental annual reports and assessment reports;
21. Selection of faculty CVs and course syllabi.

II. COMMITMENT TO PEER REVIEW

A. Comprehensiveness of the Self-Study Process
Wittenberg University has done a sound job in its self-study process. That process has involved all central constituencies and has examined past difficulties and accomplishments as well as future challenges and opportunities. The self-study is consistent with the institution’s mission and strategic directions. All major issues raised by the previous reaccreditation review team have been addressed by the self-study. Enrollment and financial challenges remain, but are well recognized and plans for continuing to deal with them are in place.

Wittenberg University has done a lot of data gathering and has a sound presentation of some institutional metrics. The team, however, found the self-study rather devoid of analytical data. Without analysis of data that has been collected, those data remain an untapped resource for the University.
B. Integrity of the Self-Study Report
We found no evidence that there was any fact or piece of evidence that materially diverged from what was presented in the self-study. The self-study was clear and accurate.

C. Adequacy of Progress in Addressing Previously Identified Challenges
[Refer to instructions for standardized language and team options to insert here]
The previous self-study recognized five concerns. The team believes that all five have been addressed adequately.
1. Tuition discount rate. Wittenberg University still has a well-recognized challenge in discount rate, but is taking steps to address it, including reducing enrollment and more effective recruiting.
2. Enrollment decline. Wittenberg University enrollment has been below budget for several years. The University has decided that it will be better served by decreasing the enrollment target and downsizing the University to a smaller and more achievable enrollment. That plan is well under way.
3. Hesitation to make tenure-track faculty appointments. The University has elected to not replace some tenure-track vacancies in order to balance its budget and align with more realistic enrollment goals (see #2 above). The number of visiting faculty has declined significantly and there appears less hesitation to replace tenure-track faculty when they depart. The team believes that the current plan is both realistic and sound. It will take a few years for enrollments and faculty staffing to come into alignment.
4. Major Fundraising. The University completed a $75 million campaign which funded substantial facility improvements. The University has assembled a strong development team and is optimistic that giving (both annual fund and capital) will increase as a result.
5. Disregard among students for community service requirement. Wittenberg University has energized an impressive community service program involving all students. The team was impressed by the quality of the program (based upon reports from students, administrators, and community leaders) and sense of social commitment from many of the student participants, as well as the positive community reaction.

The team considers the response of the organization to previously identified challenges to be adequate.

D. Notification of Evaluation Visit and Solicitation of Third-Party Comment
The visit was adequately announced. Wittenberg University did an adequate job of soliciting third-party comment, but none was received. Requirements were fulfilled.

III. COMPLIANCE WITH FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS
The team reviewed the required Title IV compliance areas and the student complaint information and was satisfied with its findings.

IV. FULFILLMENT OF THE CRITERIA
CRITERION ONE: MISSION AND INTEGRITY. The organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.
1. Evidence that Core Components are met
   a. Based upon comments from faculty, staff, and community leaders, the President and the new administrative team have imparted a sense of optimism across the campus and among community leaders.
   b. A review of documents indicates that policies for institutional review of research protocols are consistent with Federal guidelines and the ethical standards of the University.
   c. The Board of Directors and the members of the Wittenberg community support the newly developed mission statement.
   d. A review of handbooks and reports from various constituencies indicates that faculty, staff, students, and the Board of Directors have appropriate opportunities to participate in discussions about issues that affect them.

2. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention
   While Wittenberg’s newly-articulated mission clearly highlights its aspirations and outcomes for student learning, the University’s documents are inconsistent in publicly articulating the institution’s commitment to that mission statement. The mission needs to be consistently stated in some publications to reflect the newly-articulated mission in a consistent fashion. [Core Component 1c]

3. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.

4. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)

Recommendation of the Team
Criterion is met; no Commission follow-up is recommended.

CRITERION TWO: PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE. The organization’s allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

1. Evidence that Core Components are met
   a. Wittenberg University has adopted a revised mission statement and is charting a course for the next seven years. The plan appears to be consistent with Wittenberg’s history and the current environment, as well as being aspirational.
   b. The Board of Directors has created a new investment approach and subcommittee responsible for investing the endowment. The committee includes individuals qualified to select managers and monitor performance. This decision is beginning to show evidence of better endowment performance.
c. Wittenberg University has recognized its revenue shortfalls and has taken steps to reduce expenditures, improve admissions and fund-raising systems and practices, and more realistically budget to reach a sustainable financial equilibrium.

d. The Board of Directors has authorized $3,000,000 (over three years) for investment grants to faculty and staff to propose initiatives that will advance the strategic plan, with priority for proposals that strengthen the academic core of the Wittenberg experience.

e. Wittenberg University has added a new academic facility serving the humanities, renovated and expanded the science facility, and constructed new student residential space. All projects look to be very successful and are positively received by students and faculty members.

f. Wittenberg has a reasonable inventory of deferred maintenance and schedule for dealing with it as resources are available. A facilities master planning process is underway.

2. **Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention**
   a. Insufficient resources are allocated to provide for improved physical accessibility, computer replacement, and library acquisitions, resulting in inadequate services for some students, faculty, and staff. [Core Component 2d]

   b. Faculty and administration have not sufficiently worked together to prioritize competing demands for budget dollars that support the student-faculty ratio, sabbatical policy, benefits, and faculty pay levels. [Core Component 2d]

   c. Wittenberg University, while collecting much data, does not effectively analyze that data in informing the institutional review process. The team found that the self-study was remarkably devoid of data-based analysis and review. Filling a newly established position in Institutional Research should aid that process. [Core Component 2c]

3. **Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**
   a. Wittenberg continues to suffer from unpredictable student enrollments and spending a high payout rate from the endowment. These risk the long-term fiscal viability of the University, and cause concerns raised in 2 above. [Core Component 2c]

4. **Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)**

Recommendation of the Team
Criterion is met; Commission follow-up recommended. Progress report on student enrollment and net tuition revenue due December 2010.

CRITERION THREE: STUDENT LEARNING AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING. The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

1. **Evidence that Core Components are met**
   a. Based upon our review of CVs and meetings with faculty members, the faculty are well-qualified, hard-working, and dedicated to students and student learning.
   b. Based upon a review of documents and meetings with faculty and the Assessment Committee, we determined that faculty have clearly identified learning goals for general education requirements.
   c. There is a procedure in place whereby assessment plans are completed each year by departments and programs; a four-year cycle exists for more thorough assessment and feedback, and external evaluations are required for additional or replacement staffing in a department.
   d. The organization demonstrates openness to innovative practices that enhance learning, e.g., there are several interdisciplinary programs which offer majors and minors across several departments.
   e. The organization provides academic support to incoming students through the STARS program, which provides a summer bridge experience for under-prepared students. It also supports current students via the Writing Lab, Oral Communications Center, Foreign Language Learning Center, and Math Workshop. These services are heavily used by students and praised for their effectiveness.

2. **Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention**
   a. For many departments and programs, assessment of student learning occurs at the Capstone level, but there is no evidence of regular and systematic collection and use of data before this end point in a student’s career. [Core Component 3a]
   b. In compliance with the goals of the new Strategic Plan, the University has failed to attend to environmental issues, such as providing adequate receptacles and education on recycling and building in accordance with ‘Green’ principles. It must be noted that attention to the environment is not only a financial issue and is integral to the education of students in a global society. [Core Component 3c]
   c. The organization does not ensure access to facilities for people with physical limitations; newer facilities are compliant with ADA and welcoming to those with physical limitations, but older facilities and the grounds are not. The University should develop a plan to rectify the limitations. [Core Component 3e]
   d. The University must continue to pay attention to all matters of diversity, including greater representation of women and persons of color on its Board of Directors and in the upper ranks of administration, to achieve the goals of its mission and strategic plan, as well as to provide accomplished individuals as role models for students. This need is recognized by key leaders. [Core Component 3d]
3. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.

Learning goals for courses in general education are stated, but data relevant to goals are not systematically collected, maintained, and disseminated. Because these data are nonexistent or incomplete, assessment does not effectively and consistently inform curricular change. [Core Component 3a]

4. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)

Recommendation of the Team
Criterion is met; Commission follow-up recommended. Progress report on assessment of student learning due December 2010.

CRITERION FOUR: ACQUISITION, DISCOVERY, AND APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE.
The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.

1. Evidence that Core Components are met
a. The University's values include explicit commitments to intellectual inquiry, community of learners, citizenship, and service. For students, faculty, staff, alumni/ae, Board members and friends, these combine to promote lifetime learning.

b. The University motivates students to service in their communities both explicitly and implicitly. The general education requirement for a community service course mandates that students provide service, and, perhaps, more importantly, an ethos of service permeates the campus. Town leaders praised this commitment to community service and its positive impact on the local area.

c. The University provides faculty and staff with generous support for professional development, including sabbatical leaves, funds to attend professional meetings and training, and support for scholarly work.

d. The co-curricular opportunities, including over 130 student organizations, varied housing options, and an extensive athletic program provide rich opportunities for students to learn social responsibility and prepare them for a lifetime of learning.

2. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention
a. The current structure of the study abroad programs on campus does not provide appropriate opportunities for global education. On-campus curricular requirements and the lack of financial aid inhibit student participation. [Core Component 4c]
b. Based upon interviews with faculty and administrators, programs that support diversity initiatives and students are not coordinated in ways that optimize their impact on students. [Core Component 4c]

c. It appears that the level of staffing in residence halls (3 for 7 halls) and counseling services (1) are very low for a university of the size and mission of Wittenberg. The University has not done an appropriate review to determine whether it is delivering the services needed by its student body. [Core Component 4a]

3. **Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**

4. **Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)**

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**Recommendation of the Team**

Criterion is met.

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**CRITERION FIVE: ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE.** As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

1. **Evidence that Core Components are met**

   a. The University, through the Community Service 100 course, has effectively provided students with multiple opportunities to serve the greater Springfield community.

   b. Civic leaders report that they are enthusiastic about the evolving partnership between the University and the community.

   c. The student senate has used a portion of its budget to develop a community grant program which provides modest, but significant funding for student community service projects.

   d. Community members appreciate the sense of welcome that they feel the University expresses to them for speakers, fine arts, and athletic activities.

   e. The University and the city are working in partnership to remove or renovate older buildings adjacent to the institution to clean up this area for the mutual benefit of the city and the University.

   f. Faculty and staff from the University hold responsible positions in city government.
2. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention
   a. The University has not yet developed a reliable system for recording data about service done by University students and employees. Since such service is a central component of the University's mission, such data are important. [Core Component 5a]
   b. Based upon conversations with faculty and administrators, the University has not yet developed sufficient coordination between the contributions of academic affairs and student development in term of the holistic education of students [Core Component 5a]
   c. The reaffirmation of Lutheran identity in the new mission statement / strategic plan appears to be inconsistent with recent changes in the representation on the Board of Directors and the President's Senior Staff. This apparent inconsistency may undermine shared understanding of the institution's identity by its constituents. [Core Component 5c]

3. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.

4. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)

Recommendation of the Team Criterion is satisfied.

V. STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS

A. Affiliation Status

   No change; next comprehensive evaluation: 2016-17.

B. Nature of Organization

1. Legal status
   No change

2. Degrees awarded
   No change.

C. Conditions of Affiliation

1. Stipulation on affiliation status
No change.

2. Approval of degree sites

No change.

3. Approval of distance education degree

No change.

4. Reports required

Progress Report
We recommend that the University submit a progress report on student enrollment and net tuition revenue. The report should be supported by appropriate data and be due December 2010. We also recommend that the University submit a progress report on assessment of student learning. That report should provide information on how the data collected are being used for improvement of the evaluation of programs and be due December 2010.

Rationale and Expectations:
Wittenberg University continues to be challenged with under-enrollment and insufficient net student revenues. These challenges lead to other challenges such as deferred maintenance, staffing uncertainty, and unfunded computer replacement. The University is attempting to implement a plan to deal with these challenges. The report should contain data expressing how well it is meeting enrollment and net student revenue targets and whether the University is able to meet its budget goals.

The University has collected a lot of data, but not satisfactorily analyzed that data to see if it is meeting the goals for a general education nor provided evidence that the University is effectively using that data in making key academic decisions. The report should include information on how well students are meeting general education goals and how data is used in continual improvement of the academic program.

Monitoring Report

- Topic(s) and Due Date (month-date-year)
- Rationale and Expectations
- Condition Statement (if . . . then)

Contingency Report

- Topic
- Rationale and Expectations

5. Other visits scheduled
Type of Visit
Topic(s) and Timing (academic year - xxxx-xxxx)
Rationale and Expectations

6. Organization change request

D. Commission Sanction or Adverse Action

On Notice
   Due Date for Report
   Rationale and Expectations
   Areas That Must Be Addressed

Probation
   Next Evaluation Visit
   Rationale
   Areas That Must Be Addressed (requirements for removal of probation)

Denial or Withdrawal of Status
   Rationale

E. Summary of Commission Review
   Next comprehensive evaluation: 2016-17

Rationale for recommendation:
Wittenberg University has demonstrated that it meets the Criteria for Reaccreditation. It clearly fulfills its mission and has a recently adopted and sound Strategic Plan. Financial issues, particularly net tuition revenue, endowment revenue and right-sizing its expenses for enrollment and income remain substantial challenges, but the University is not in immediate danger.

VI. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AND EXPLANATIONS
[Optional]
ADVANCEMENT SECTION

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EVALUATION TEAM

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III. Recognition of Significant Accomplishments, Progress, and/or Practices ..........................
I. Overall Observations about the Organization

Wittenberg University is a very sound residential liberal arts college, true to its historic mission. We saw substantial evidence that students are receiving a high quality liberal education and have a sense of a social commitment mission. Faculty and administrators are committed to the institutional mission and are working hard to effectively carry out that mission.

Wittenberg University has struggled to maintain its targeted enrollment and to finance its overall enterprise. The university has a new President, Vice President for Enrollment, and Vice President for Advancement, and they are taking actions to bring expenses and income into alignment.

The University's new mission and strategic plan articulate an ambitious agenda for the University. The majority of the strategic priorities represent reasonable "stretch" goals for the University. The goal to be among the top 75 schools in the nation may, however, require an unrealistic increase in student academic profile and in the endowment for the time period in which it is to be achieved. Environmental scanning will show that such a dramatic shift of an institution's academic reputation is rarely achievable in a short time. The University may want to reconsider that goal to consider whether that particular ranking is the best measure for the carefully considered vision that it has for its students and its programs.

II. Consultations of the Team

A. University Mission and Values

The University's values include explicit commitments to intellectual inquiry, community of learners, citizenship, and service. For students, faculty, staff, alumni, board members, and friends, these combine to promote lifetime learning. Class assignments and discussions give students valuable learning opportunities — both in and outside the classroom. Many students participate in service learning, and all participate in service. The development of curiosity in the classroom and the habits of community involvement and service demonstrate the value that Wittenberg places on a life of learning. In addition, members of the Board of Trustees and residents of Wittenberg are invited to many cultural and intellectual events on campus, including an outstanding lecture series, thus extending the celebration of learning beyond the campus community.

The University motivates students to service in their communities both explicitly and implicitly. The general education requirement for a service course mandates that students provide service, and, perhaps more importantly, an ethos of service permeates the campus. Students provide extensive direct service, for example, to faith-based agencies that support disadvantaged children in the community (supported by the Nehemiah Foundation). One student who completed her service requirement in a local nonprofit foundation continued to volunteer at the foundation for two years after her course obligation was finished.

An outstanding Office of Community Service that directs the 100-level course serves to fulfill the institutional mission. "An increase in service involvement by students, particularly females, has been growing yearly. Wittenberg University is unique in requiring service for graduation. In an effort to both enhance the institutional focus/involvement on service and to centralize service involvement, the institution may want to consider the creation of a Center for Community Engagement. The staff and students in this center would coordinate service learning, help initiate circular and co-circular service involvement, record and assess service, be sure a reflective component is part of service, and be a conduit for service with the local area. While service is being done at all institutions, the uniqueness of Wittenberg University with its Lutheran identity, Mission Statement and location provides an opportunity to promote service as truly a hallmark of Wittenberg University.
Wittenberg University has had a dual mission since its inception in 1844, one in which the treasured American Lutheran faith is immersed in the academy and one in which the post-secondary educational interests of Springfield, Ohio and its neighboring communities are met. As the institution moves forward it would appear that it has a different set of factors motivating and shaping its future. Among these factors are:

a) changes in Board of Trustee bylaws relative to membership and Lutheran identity,
b) enrollment challenges that clearly reveal fewer "self-reported" Lutheran students,
c) a strong faculty who may support the Lutheran mission but do not have ties to the tradition,
d) negative statistics of environmental scanning of the geographic region—a state with less than 5% Lutheran population.
e) no data appears in the institutional snapshot relative to religious affiliation.

The dialogue initiated by the Wittenberg Lutheran Identity Task Force has begun to name the issues; however, conversations during the HLC/NCA visit reveal that there appears to be inconsistency in the interpretation of this document and the direction or lack of direction it provides. Perhaps most surprising is that in most forums outside the meetings with religion and the Lutheran Identity Task Force, the absence of comments or even allusions to the institution’s Lutheran heritage were conspicuously missing unless surfaced by the team. The institution’s affiliation as a university of the ELCA and its reference in the mission statement to its Lutheran heritage necessitates attention to and acknowledgment of this heritage by members of its board, administration, faculty, students and staff.

B. Budget and Finance

Wittenberg University has faced a series of budget and finance challenges over the past several years. There have been shortfalls in enrollment and net student revenues, modest giving, and dangerously high payout from the endowment. The last two budgets have been in substantial deficit, but the deficits reflect non-current expenses, including depreciation and accrual for health benefits in retirement. Long-term debt is high, amounting to close to half the value of the endowment. Funding for a number of areas, including computer replacement and deferred maintenance, has been provided only through occasional undesignated bequests, congressional earmarks, and similar funds.

Uneven enrollments in the past decade have made budget planning difficult, but the University has developed a three-cycle budget process which invites and incorporates input from budget directors during the fall and early winter so that an initial budget proposal can be brought to the Board in January. As enrollment data firm up, the budget is adjusted for May consideration by the Board; and in October, the final budget is adopted with necessary adjustments based on actual enrollments. The problems with this pattern are almost self-evident: a) cuts made late in the academic year cycle are not always in areas that can absorb them, b) some late cuts may undermine strategic priorities, and c) long-term planning for recurring line items is difficult.

Wittenberg has decided to reduce its enrollment targets with several aims: improving the discount rate, maintaining the quality of the class, and reducing the risk of under-enrollment. There has been a painful process of 'right-sizing' the faculty and staff for a smaller enrollment.

Hopefully this move will be successful and lead to more stability. It is, however, very important for Wittenberg University to reduce its endowment payout if the endowment is to maintain its real value or (hopefully) grow. The Board has moved from a very conservative investment approach to one which trades some additional risk for higher potential returns. The first few years of this approach look successful. It will be important for Wittenberg University to develop a means of budgeting for critically important expenses like computer replacement and deferred maintenance.

Wittenberg University has struggled with trying to achieve a salary average in comparison to three different comparison groups, as well as with the number of faculty positions allocated. In recent years, the number of full-time term faculty positions has been reduced in order to meet...
budgeting targets. It does not appear to the team that there has been a comprehensive review of the total package of faculty costs and appropriate decision-making with respect to the allocation of resources accordingly. We note that tuition benefits and health care in retirement are unusually generous. Sabbatical leaves are supported at a high salary level as well. The student-faculty ratio is not high compared to similar institutions. We recommend that appropriate faculty leadership and administrators engage in a discussion and develop a plan which provides a sustainable approach to student-faculty ratio, faculty salary and benefits, and leave policy. In doing this, it would be worthwhile to compare total compensation (including tuition benefits), as well as salaries, to peers.

The University's new mission and strategic plan link the historic strengths of the University with the challenges of preparing students for the diverse global society which they will enter. Faculty and staff are now working together on goals, resources, and timetables needed for the implementation of the plan. The Board of Trustees has authorized $3,000,000 (over three years) for investment grants to faculty and staff to propose initiatives that will advance the strategic plan, with priority for proposals that strengthen the academic core of the Wittenberg experience.

Advancement

After it completes its hiring, the advancement office's new focus on major donors can be more fully implemented. With so many new persons in advancement, and with some not as knowledgeable about the University as they need to become, it is essential that each learn the distinctive mission and ethos of the University so that they can tell its story accurately and persuasively.

The University has appointed a new Vice President for Advancement, and he is building a team to achieve better fundraising. That team still needs to build an appropriate data set, clean up discrepancies in records of gifts, and put in place appropriate practices in both fundraising and record-keeping. The advancement team has uncovered a several-year-old analysis with a list of high capacity prospects that had not been effectively used by Advancement. The Advancement team needs to develop knowledge of Wittenberg University and a sense of its culture. The Vice President believes that the team is making progress and that President Erickson will be a strong asset in fundraising.

C. Enrollment Management

Enrollment Management, both recruitment and retention, are focused on bringing in a larger class and increasing retention through graduation. The admissions office has reorganized its assignments and added several specialized admissions counselors in order to increase enrollment generally and in specific targeted areas (e.g., Lutheran students, U.S. students of color, international students, math & science majors, students from the Chicago area, and students from the east coast). They have built new systems for tracking data, preparing reports, and monitoring progress. They have developed an entirely new set of messages for the communication flow.

The retention effort is supported by strong support services for writing, mathematics, and foreign language. The STAR program provides a summer bridge program for under-prepared students, and the program is extending into the academic year so that students' transition to the academic year is successful.

During visits with key administrators it became apparent that competent staff members are working hard in their areas of responsibility. There is some crossover and sharing of knowledge, but the institution could certainly benefit from a focused team approach to the umbrella-components of enrollment management. Under this umbrella is the concentrated concern for students from the admissions process through to graduation. Because of the
planning in Admissions, the systems being developed, and quality of marketing materials, it appears as though the recruitment process will be providing a quality freshman class by attaining enrollment goals. A caution, however, is the apparent emphasis on recruiting athletes, approximately fifty percent of incoming class. One needs to examine the retention and cost of athletes, their academic successes, etc. in the academic environment. It is recommended that an Institutional Task Force be established and charged with the development of a complete retention plan. After institutional "buy-in" is received regarding everyone's responsibility for retention, then the plan should be operationalized. Assessment of the components of the plan will detail successes and needed improvements. The lack of comprehensive retention plan through to graduation with data stymies the attainment of a four-year graduation rate of approximately seventy percent that is comparable for institution like Wittenberg University. The components of a plan already in place, to include centers like the four already in existence, and some professionals working together gives the institution a "jump-start" on the development of a plan. However, key folks need to be identified, need to start working together daily, and need to educate all faculty and staff regarding their individual responsibilities for the retention of each student. Obviously, the budget implications of retaining twenty more students per year would be significant.

The institution has continued to struggle with the tuition discount. Working with consultants now should help decrease the fifty seven percent TD for the enrolled freshman of 2006. Identification of the characteristics of students who enroll and graduate may help Wittenberg University move financial aid dollars more effectively to target students who most benefit from its educational experience. In budget planning caution must also be given to the tuition, tuition discount and the indebtedness of graduates. Within the highly competitive Ohio market Wittenberg University needs to continue refining the student profile of those who benefit most from its unique educational process, so as to continue attracting the students and student athletes who matriculate and graduate.

D. Academic Program

Wittenberg University has embarked on an assessment of its general education program. It is not yet clear whether that process will be effective, and there is some concern about the scope and pace of the review. It is essential that the new general education curriculum, whatever its final form, provide an integrated and clearly articulated whole to constituents. Relationships among requirements and rationale for those requirements must be transparent to students and to their faculty advisers.

While there is a lot of activity in the area of student learning assessment, there does not appear to be much evidence that student learning assessment data are being used to inform important curricular and pedagogical decisions, either at the macro or micro level. When assessment data are available and are used to effect change, follow-up assessment is a necessary next step; also, mechanisms for regular and consistent follow-up/assessment of courses approved as writing intensive courses are necessary.

Study abroad is a high priority in the new mission and the University's plan for the future, but to expand its scope, the current structure needs to be reorganized to optimize student enrollments in reputable programs. Currently a lower fraction of the student body studies abroad than would be expected for a liberal arts college with a strong global emphasis. The campus needs to identify the types of study-abroad sites that lead to significant student learning and that are affordable to the institution. In addition, students studying off campus needs to be part of an overall enrollment management plan since the time that they spend away they are not on campus. Some tend to regard study away as a problem with sending 'cash away' but the students are enrolled students, and if they are replaced with on campus students of similar academic quality and discount rate, the University may be able to provide this important academic experience while achieving reasonable financial equilibrium.
To enhance the number of students who use a semester to enhance their education via a foreign country, the university should undertake a study to determine the impediments to increasing such study. One problem may be the inability to “take” institutional financial aid abroad. Another might be overly-structured curricular requirements for general education or major requirements, precluding or making a semester off campus impossible.

With the forthcoming hire of a new Dean for the School of Community Education, it is important to ensure that the School remain a valued part of the university and not relegated to the periphery, as it will continue to serve students in accordance with the university's stated mission.

E. Computing, Technology, and Library

Computing and related technology is a challenge for all institutions of higher education. Wittenberg has a reasonable infrastructure. All faculty members have office computers and there are a number of general-purpose or department-oriented computer labs. Roughly half of the classrooms are equipped with projectors, and the University has a goal to expand this number. The University has budgeted for replacement of servers and network devices, but not desktop computers and classroom equipment.

The University has a goal for replacement of desktop computers, but that goal has not been funded. Rather, desktop computers have been replaced as funds became available from undesignated bequests, congressional earmarks, or other sources. This has resulted in computer replacement being unpredictable and substantially slower than the University standard.

We heard numerous complaints about difficulties in getting computers serviced and in use of the computer network. In fact, the NCA team had considerable difficulty in getting the computers in the resource room connected to the network and usable, sometimes involving close to 30 minutes of effort or a complete lack of success. Faculty members reported difficulty in getting University-owned computers and University-licensed software to work. They also indicated that students were often not able to use their laptop computers on the wireless network due to an inability to effectively ‘register’ those computers. At least one department was told that the budgetary responsibility for a computer lab in its area was now assigned to the department budget, but the University did not make appropriate budget allocations to provide for maintenance. There appear to be territorial issues with respect to computing labs and whether they are to be restricted to departmental use or are open to courses outside the department and general student use. It would appear to us that allowing general use (after providing appropriate dedicated access) makes the most sense in terms of utilizing a scarce resource.

IT and the library have begun to engage in discussions about appropriate collaborations including digital repositories, digital image collections, an information commons and other important technologies that cross the library-IT boundary. It is our sense that these discussions are at the early stages, and much remains to be done. In some cases, there may be a duplication of effort; for instance, IT and the library support different digital image software. Particularly at an institution where there are not sufficient resources to do important things, it is essential to collaborate and not waste funds or staff time on duplication and to get as much synergy as possible from efforts.

The library appears to be a sound operation. The staff size is modest. Wittenberg University is fortunate to be located in Ohio, which undoubtedly has the most effective resource collaboration of any state. Wittenberg University participates in Ohio-Link and other resource-sharing efforts, which provides electronic and hard-copy access to resources well beyond the holdings of Wittenberg University. The budget for acquisitions is modest and shrinking in both nominal and real terms. This shrinkage may well be mitigated by collaborations. Wittenberg University needs to monitor the situation to assure that the library provides the resources needed for the academic program.
F. Student and Residential Life

Students are increasingly coming to all institutions with more complex medical and psychological issues. These students, possibly because of medication, can perform, can achieve well in the classroom. But they are increasingly requiring more "hands on" professional involvement to sustain their academic and socialization stability. To provide these students, and unfortunately in many cases their peers, with the support they desire/deserve, colleges are looking to increase staff members specifically in positions of high student contact. At Wittenberg University these positions could be hall directors and counselors. While students today spend lots of time with technological gadgets, they still seek personal contact with qualified people who possess caring, supportive and therapeutic skills. Housing professionals in direct positions of student contact provide a support and referral system which tomorrow's students will require so they can address their academic pursuits.

The institution has a corrective maintenance budget that is professionally addressing facilities and facility improvements. With the changing life style expectations of students, it behooves Wittenberg University to develop a "life-style" improvement budget so that the Residential Life department has the ability to make yearly improvements in housing units which enhance the quality of student living area. Those items that could be regularly funneled through a "life-style" budget include student room furnishings, recreational and house area furnishings, etc. The institution has made significant facility improvements in academic areas and is blessed with a beautiful campus; attention to the "life-style" furnishings which directly impact students would serve to enhance the campus and perhaps improve student retention because students will be more comfortable in their living areas.

G. Facilities

The Wittenberg campus is beautiful and serves the purpose of the University quite well. In recent years the University has remodeled or constructed two substantial academic facilities and a residence hall. All three projects appear to be quite successful. The University has a well-documented list of deferred maintenance, but the financial situation has presented only modest opportunities to deal with that list. The team found campus signage not successful. We also noted an almost complete dearth of recycling receptacles, anomalous for most liberal arts campuses and inconsistent with the University’s social commitment and mission to educate.

The Wittenberg University campus presents a number of challenges to physical accessibility. The campus is constructed on rather steep hills which are a challenge to traverse. Older buildings were not designed with individuals with physical mobility issues in mind. They do not include elevators, include multiple levels, and often have other barriers, such as door widths and narrow turns, to those using assistive devices such as wheel chairs. Wittenberg University has dealt with some issues, but the campus still presents a rather hostile front to those with mobility challenges. For instance, a person unable to traverse stairs cannot access the President’s or Provost’s offices. The deferred maintenance plan includes $750,000 for accessibility, but that sum does not anticipate installation of elevators in older buildings or other costly adaptations. Even where adaptations have been made (there is a lift to access the first floor of Recitation Hall), no signs direct individuals to the entrance with an accessible entry.

H. Administrative Structure and Faculty Governance

Some faculty members cited problems receiving prompt and relevant responses from administrators. This lack of regular communication can result in trust issues between faculty and administrators. The University may want to consider whether the Provost has sufficient administrative staff members to whom he can assign attention to academic matters.
There appears to be a tendency to address each challenge by adding a program and a director. There also appear to be reporting structures that may make it hard to address key issues in the Strategic Plan, like enrollment management. It is important that faculty and staff not automatically assume that every new initiative needs a new director and new space. The University will benefit from more careful and creative macro-level thinking about how programs might integrate resources so that time and people are not scattered in too many directions. The creation of new programs and the accompanying diffusion of resources undermine the strategic plan implementation. Some programs may have outlived their usefulness and may need to be terminated so that resources can be directed to more important programs.

While the organizational structures of the institution reflect the high level of engagement, it appears that as the workload on a given committee increased, additional “spin off” committees were suggested or formed resulting in a multiplication of working groups. This, in turn, has blurred some lines of communication and resulted in duplication of effort and disparity of role. We heard some faculty frustration with faculty processes taking inordinate lengths of time and consuming much faculty time. It would be worthwhile to assess the faculty governance structure to see if there is a way to retain the needed while eliminating that which is no longer effective.

The inequality of titles within the President’s Senior Staff sends a message related to the women of the university, i.e. women are not as important since they are Associate Vice Presidents, and also places the Student Development Division in a second-class citizenship. A revision of the organizational structure, to include changes in titles, would be helpful in terms of having those with responsibility, working relationships and reporting aligned together, i.e. enrollment management should include admission and retention.

I. Institutional Data and Analysis

Many staff members mentioned the accumulated data that is “sitting” in various offices across the campus. References were made to the greatly anticipated arrival of an Institutional Research Director. This person will certainly provide Wittenberg University with data usage expertise, but for the institution to effectively and efficiently use data there must be an institutional climate created that complements, and reinforces, the necessity of using data for planning, programs, marketing, etc. The creation of a task force to accompany the Institutional Research Director, charged with educating the institution regarding the priorities of data usage, may help motivate folks to consistently use data for change and improvement purposes. We did find the institutional ‘dashboard’ impressive and a good start.
III. RECOGNITION OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS, PROGRESS, AND/OR PRACTICES