Report to:

Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students
Of:
Kean University
Union, NJ

Prepared following analysis of the institution's:
2017 Periodic Review Report

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I. Introduction

As indicated in the mission portion of its web site (http:www.kean.edu/about/our-mission: accessed July 5, 2017):

> Kean is a cosmopolitan university serving undergraduate and graduate students in the liberal arts, the sciences, and the professions. The University dedicates itself to the intellectual, cultural and personal growth of all its members—students, faculty and professional staff. In particular, the University challenges students to think critically, creatively and globally, to adapt to changing social, economic and technological environments, and to serve as active and contributing members of their communities.
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> Kean offers a wide range of demanding programs dedicated to excellence in instruction and academic support services necessary to assure its socially, linguistically, and culturally diverse students the means to reach their full potential, including students from academically disadvantaged backgrounds, students with special needs, and adults returning or entering higher education.
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> Kean is steadfast in its dedication to maintaining a student-centered educational environment in which diversity can flourish and an atmosphere in which mutual respect characterizes relations among the members of a pluralistic community. The University seeks to combine excellence with equity in providing opportunities for all students.
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> Kean is a teaching university, and faculty dedicate themselves to student learning as well as academic rigor. The focus on teaching excellence is supported by a commitment to research, scholarship, creative work and innovative uses of technology. The focus includes the advancement of knowledge in the traditional disciplines and the enhancement of skills in professional areas. Kean is committed to providing global educational opportunities for students and faculty.
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> Kean is an interactive university, and the University serves as a major resource for regional advancement. Kean collaborates with business, labor, government and the arts, as well as educational and community organizations and provides the region with cultural events and opportunities for continuous learning. Kean is also committed to providing students and faculty educational opportunities in national and international arenas.

The Periodic Review Report (PRR) provides the readers with a comprehensive overview of institutional progress since the University's decennial self-study and team visit in 2011.

The report reflects widespread campus involvement in its preparation and review. The readers ***commend*** the institution on preparing a well-written, comprehensive report.

II. Responses to Recommendations from the Previous Decennial Evaluation

The University was required to submit a series of two Monitoring Reports in follow-up to its 2011 decennial visit. All recommendations made by the institution and peer review team in 2011 were addressed in the subsequent Monitoring Reports. Summaries of those responses are provided in appendices to the PRR. In addition, three recommendations were made by the visiting team from the final Monitoring Report site visit in April 2014. Detailed responses to those three recommendations are provided in the PRR. The remainder of this section is organized in terms of those three recommendations.

1. Standard 6 Recommendation

   "Kean University has achieved much over the last two years, and has opened fruitful channels of communication within the institution. We encourage the institution to continue to enhance communications among all its constituent groups."

   Information provided in the PRR indicates that significant progress continues to be made in improving institutional communications. Among the formal University groups that now play an active role in facilitating communications are the:

   a. University Planning Council;
   b. Leadership Council;
   c. Council of Deans;
   d. President's Cabinet;
   e. President's Task Force on Scheduling; and
   f. Board of Trustees.

   Additionally, opportunities for communication among constituencies are provided through such events as an annual "Meet the Deans Dinner," as well as state-wide and regional meetings of school counselor associations with Kean leadership and admissions representatives.

   Significant progress continues to be made, and the institution appears to be sincerely committed to improving communications among its various constituencies. However, new patterns of behavior can take a considerable length of time to become fully institutionalized and part of organizational culture. Therefore, the readers ***recommend*** that Kean continue to make improved communications an institutional priority. Additionally, as an aid to accomplishing this objective, the readers ***suggest*** that Kean include an assessment of the effectiveness of institutional communications, including from the perspectives of

its various constituencies, in its regular protocol for the assessment of institutional effectiveness.

2. Standard 7 Recommendation

   "There has been progress made recently in the development and implementation of non-academic units of assessment related to unit and university strategic plans. There is evidence of assessment occurring in many departments, yet more needs to be done. Clear expectations for direct measures need to be standardized across all non-academic units and should be implemented by the next assessment cycle."

   The PRR provides evidence of continued progress in the development and implementation of assessment systems in non-academic areas of the University. Systematic assessment processes are in place and information generated through the assessment processes is being used in institutional decision-making, including but not limited to decisions regarding the allocation of budgetary resources.

   Information is provided in the PRR regarding the "direct measures" used by the various non-academic units for purposes of assessment. The review indicated, however, that what were labeled as direct measures appear to be a combination of true direct measures, as well as a variety of other measures such as status reports on various near-term initiatives and action plans.

   The readers ***recommend*** that, in order to continue to advance its system of institutional assessment in non-academic areas, the institution develop and implement direct assessment measures for all units that are linked to unit-level goals and objectives.

3. Standard 12 Recommendation

   "*The campus currently is working with 14 student learning outcomes. On the one hand, this level of discrimination is laudable. Unfortunately, it creates an assessment environment which is sufficiently complex as to possibly frustrate progress. The campus should seriously consider folding several of the learning outcomes together to create a slightly more streamlined assessment program in which they can use direct and indirect measures of assessment."*

   Work was undertaken by the institution on this recommendation beginning in May 2014. The effort, primarily spearheaded by the University Senate's standing General Education Committee, also included appropriate opportunity for input by other appropriate campus constituencies, including through the University's semi-annual Professional Development Days. Through this process, a set of eight new general education student learning outcomes, organized into three areas, were developed. The new general education student learning outcomes are as follows:

A. Content (Liberal Arts)

1. Transdisciplinarity

   The ability to integrate knowledge and methods from different fields to address historical or contemporary questions.

B. Building Habits of Mind

2. Critical Thinking

   The ability to utilize reflective analysis to draw informed conclusions.

3. Quantitative Literacy

   The ability to utilize numerical data accurately and effectively to address real world problems.

4. Communication Literacies

   The ability to speak and write effectively to convey and make an evidence-based argument.

5. Information and Technological Literacy

   The ability to utilize information and communications technology critically and effectively in a rapidly changing world.

C. Values

6. Active Citizenship

   A commitment to lifelong civic engagement at a local, national, and/or global level.

7. Ethical Judgments and Integrity

   The ability to draw reasonable conclusions for ethical questions to guide personal conduct.

8. Diversity

   A commitment to promote inclusivity in a diverse world.

These new general education student learning objectives were approved in Spring 2015. The new learning objectives appear to be appropriate for an institution of higher education with Kean's mission. The reviewers ***commend*** the institution's faculty and administration for the development of the new general education student learning objectives in a timely manner, through its established processes of academic shared governance.

Evidence was provided in the PRR of assessment of all 8 new student learning objectives during the 2015-16 academic year, using direct evidence from student work. The assessment undertaken appeared to be appropriate and through, including recommendations for "closing the loop" based upon the assessment results for each objective. Given the short period of time since the adoption of the new student learning objectives, there has understandably not yet been time to assemble a multi-year track record of assessment or to enable follow-through on the recommendations for "closing the loop." Therefore, the readers ***recommend*** that Kean continue with the assessment of the new general education student learning objectives, including implementing the curricular changes and other improvements recommended as a result of its assessment findings.

III. Major Challenges and/or Opportunities

Not unlike the vast majority of institutions of higher education in the Middle States region, Kean University has faced a number of challenges in recent years, and expects to continue to do so in the future.

High school graduates in New Jersey are declining, and are expected to continue to decline through 2031. In addition, there are a number of colleges in direct competition with Kean. Kean has worked to maintain its positioning as the most affordable comprehensive university in the state of New Jersey. While this commitment has assisted the University in maintaining its competitive position, it has also meant that there have been only relatively modest tuition increases (3% or less) in recent years. Adding to the challenge, the State of New Jersey has continued to decrease funding to state colleges and universities from 2008 to 2016, and has provided flat funding for 2017.

Nevertheless, as indicated elsewhere in this report, Kean has been able to maintain essentially stable overall enrollment during the period since the last decennial self-study in 2011 and, through disciplined financial management, has been able to consistently generate solid operating surpluses.

The University has initiated new and innovative recruitment strategies and has devoted additional resources to the Division of Enrollment Management as part of its commitment to continue to address the demographic reality of declining numbers of high school graduates.

The challenging environment notwithstanding, Kean has been able to pursue a number of opportunities in recent years. Among its initiatives have been opening additional locations at Ocean County College in New Jersey and Wenzhou-Kean in China. The University has also successfully pursued accreditation for its online division in 2016, and has since launched a number of new program offerings.

Additionally, Kean has added a number of new degree programs in recent years in areas of current and projected future student demand.

IV. Enrollment and Finance Trends and Projections

The PRR includes both historical and projected enrollment and financial information, as well as related analyses. While it is obviously impossible for anyone to project the future, the University's enrollment and financial projections, and the underlying assumptions, appear to be reasonable.

Kean has maintained relatively stable FTE enrollment at its main campus in recent years. This main campus enrollment has been augmented by enrollments at additional locations at Ocean County College in New Jersey and Wenzhou-Kean in China. Further, the University's online division received accreditation in Spring 2016; while online enrollments are currently modest, they hold promise for enrollment growth in the future.

With over 82% of the University budget coming from student tuition and fees, steady and predictable enrollment is crucial to Kean's financial plan. According to the New Jersey Commission on Higher Education, the State's county colleges reported a 15% decline in enrollment since 2013. During the same period, Kean saw an overall decrease of 8.8% in full-time transfer recruitment, and a 21.3% increase in part-time transfer students. The University has experienced an increase in the number of first-time, full-time freshmen who meet the University's established regular enrollment standards. Additionally, while graduate enrollment has been relatively steady over the past four years, there has been a significant increase in the number of full-time graduate students; this growth in full-time enrollment is attributed to the strategic decision to offer qualitatively superior degree programs that meet current and projected market demands. The University is also taking deliberate efforts to enhance student success and retention, including through the creation of a new Office of Student Success and Retention.

Ratings by both Standard & Poors and Moody's remain strong, attributable to the University's conservative budgeting practices and their demonstrated ability to consistently generate solid, full-accrual operating surpluses.

The PRR includes detailed information regarding enrollment trends at the major/program level. The data indicates impressive levels of sustained enrollment growth in a number of programs, accompanied by consistently low and/or declining enrollments in other areas. Kean has strategically introduced a number of new programs in recent years, and additional new programs are anticipated. These programmatic initiatives have been, and will likely continue to be, important to maintaining reasonably steady overall enrollment levels. However, it is important to note that overall institutional financial resources are unlikely to increase significantly

as a result of these initiatives, and it may be necessary to shift resources from other programs to support these enrollment-driving programs. Therefore, the readers ***suggest*** that the University continue to undertake systematic academic program review to aid in directing scarce resources to the highest priority areas.

V. Assessment Processes and Plans

Both the main body of the PRR and the associated appendices provide extensive information regarding Kean's assessment processes and outcomes. Kean appears to have in place an extensive and well-coordinated system of assessment for both academic and non-academic units, including assessment of student learning outcomes. Regular assessment takes place at all locations and for all modalities of delivery.

Oversight of assessment of institutional effectiveness is provided jointly by The University Planning Council (UPC) and the Office of Accreditation and Assessment (OAA). The involvement of the UPC creates linkages between assessment and resource allocations. The ongoing assessment of the strategic plan is a focus of the university assessment process. Explicit linkages exist between the results of ongoing assessment efforts and decisions regarding the allocation of institutional resources.

Annual assessment processes are in place for all academic and non-academic units. These annual assessments are complemented by a system of more extensive program reviews, which are conducted for all units in accordance with an established, multi-year rotation schedule.

At the end of each academic year, each administrative division head reviews all annual assessment reports and the subset of program review reports. The findings are synthesized and an overall division report created that identifies financial and resource needs as well as challenges. For academic programs, annual assessment reports and program review reports are reviewed at the college level for analysis and synthesis. The office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs then integrates all college reports and prioritizes resource requests in the Annual Assessment Results and Recommendations Report for the Division of Academic Affairs. The UPC then reviews division reports. UPC members evaluate the additional resource requests of each division and then create a prioritized list of resource needs for the institution. This prioritized list is submitted to the President, who utilizes the UPC's report to inform his recommendations for submission to the Board of Trustees for their consideration in the next fiscal year's budget.

The institution appears to have made a significant and appropriate commitment of resources to support both assessment of institutional effectiveness and student learning assessment. As already indicated, the University's Office of Accreditation

and Assessment provides support for assessment efforts at all locations and for all modalities of learning. Assessment-related topics are extensively integrated into the agenda for the university's semi-annual Professional Development Days. The assessment reports accompanying the PRR provide evidence that the established processes are being followed, including "closing the loop" through the use of assessment results to guide continuous improvement activities.

Section II of this reviewers' report regarding prior recommendations addresses the recommendations from the April 2014 visiting team report regarding institutional assessment and assessment of general education. That information is not repeated here. The readers' suggestion and recommendations in that section notwithstanding, it is the conclusion of the readers based on the information presented in the PRR that Kean currently has in place appropriate systems of assessment of both institutional effectiveness and student learning; that these systems are being followed, and the results being used to inform both continuous improvement activities and the allocation of institutional resources; and that Kean is well on the way to having a sustainable, institutionalized "culture of assessment."

VI. Linked Institutional Planning and Budgeting Processes

Kean University's current strategic plan, covering the period from 2013 to 2020, was approved by the University's Board of Trustees on December 7, 2013.

At the start of every academic year, administrative units and academic departments develop annual assessment plans that are linked to the University strategic goals and/or University strategic learning outcomes. In addition, administrative units have clearly articulated goals specific to their units that are aligned to the University's goals and supporting objectives.

At the close of each academic year, administrative units and academic programs complete assessment reports showing how data are collected, analyzed, and are used to make recommendations for continuous improvement and resource allocations. These recommendations are then evaluated as part of the annual budget recommendation process at the institutional level to determine resource needs.

Additionally, administrative units and academic programs evaluate their individual missions and goals every three to five years as part of the University's comprehensive program review process. The annual assessment process and the cycle of program review work in parallel to ensure that short-range and long-range improvements are ongoing, and are grounded in assessment that is linked to the strategic plan.

Evidence of a well-designed and functioning system of linked institutional planning and budgeting, including examples of decisions made through this system, is provided in the PRR.

V. Conclusion

Kean University has continued to make significant progress since the time of its last decennial peer review visit, and subsequent Monitoring Reports and related visits.

The University should take pride in the many accomplishments noted in the PRR. In particular, as noted earlier, the readers believe that Kean is well on the way to having a sustainable, institutionalized culture of assessment. However, the University should also recognize that significant work remains to be done. In summary, the readers restate the following suggestions and recommendations, which appear earlier in this report:

Suggestions:

1. The readers ***suggest*** that Kean include an assessment of the effectiveness of institutional communications, including from the perspectives of its various constituencies, in its regular protocol for the assessment of institutional effectiveness.

2. The readers ***suggest*** that the University continue to undertake systematic academic program review to aid in directing scarce resources to the highest priority areas.

Recommendations:

1. The readers ***recommend*** that Kean continue to make improved communications an institutional priority.

2. The readers ***recommend*** that, in order to continue to advance its system of non-academic assessment, the institution develop and implement direct assessment measures for all units that are linked to unit-level goals and objectives.

3. The readers ***recommend*** that Kean continue with the assessment of the new general education student learning objectives, including implementing the curricular changes and other improvements recommended as a result of its assessment findings.