

## Chapter 9. Conclusions

The 2012 self-study of Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion was designed with ten ambitious intended outcomes. Before the community could address these, it first conducted a gap analysis to determine which of the Middle States fundamental elements for accreditation needed work before the College-Institute could assure compliance. Once this was accomplished, the entire community engaged in an extensive and deep collaboration to achieve the goals of the study. Seven individual working groups with broad representation from across the complex College-Institute organization examined 300 documents listed in the Documents Inventory. Those referenced most often included CN Focused Visit Report; the Strategic Planning Report and Appendices; the National Student Academic Handbook; and various regulations, manuals, and surveys. From their analysis of these and hundreds of other documents, the groups produced fifty-five suggestions for improvement. Many of the suggestions from one group overlapped considerably with those of other groups. This chapter aligns these working group suggestions under the intended outcomes.

One over-arching conclusion from the self-study process and findings is that the merger of the College-Institute's accreditation under the Middle States Commission on Higher Education has been a tremendous boon to HUC-JIR's vision, integration, planning, assessment, discovery, and system development. The guidance of MSCHE's concise, well-organized and state-of-the-art standards and fundamental elements for excellence in higher education has made possible institutional strides over a short period of time that are truly remarkable. As indicated in Chapter 1, the intervening chapters contain most of the original working group suggestions (others have already been implemented during the course of the self-study process). These are summarized and integrated in this final chapter followed by five comprehensive recommendations that HUC-JIR proposes to implement for its 2018 Periodic Review Report. The College-Institute can look forward to further improvements by following the five recommendations that these elements and processes have inspired.

### Common Vision

The first intended outcome of this self-study was to create a common vision of the institution's future direction. There were suggestions regarding vision in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 6. A critically important aspect of this intended outcome was accomplished after the Self-Study Design was approved: a new Academic Vision statement was developed by the VPAA and disseminated to the community. It is currently under discussion. A suggestion from the working group on governance was also accomplished when the Governance Task Force of the Board was made into a standing Committee on Governance by a change in the HUC-JIR Regulations. These left the five-part suggestion below for strengthening the College-Institute's common vision.

1. *Suggestion on Vision:* (a) find further ways to enhance interaction and involvement between faculty, overseers, and governors; (b) Involve faculty deeply in institutional planning, especially in articulating their highest aspirations for the College-Institute; (c) identify new means of enhancing the "financial literacy" of governors, overseers, faculty, and staff; (d) complete and align handbooks for all four Boards of Overseers; and (e) offer more education for alumni and lay leaders, as mentioned in the statement of mission and purpose; and (f) make the Regulations and this Self-Study Report accessible on the HUC-JIR website with links to them in the faculty, employee, and student handbooks.

## Integration across the Four Locations of HUC-JIR

Integration of programs, resources, and opportunities across the four campuses was a primary goal of the accreditation merger mentioned above and of the ensuing self-study. Chapters 2, 5, 6, and 7 produced twelve different suggestions on the topic. Most of these have to do with student policies and have already been resolved through a year-long project that resulted in the completion of the National Student Academic Handbook. The issues included (but were not limited to) transfer, academic hour definition, grading, plagiarism, cross-listed courses, credit by examination or extra-institutional learning, student complaints and grievances policies, student advisement, the posting of the handbook on the website, and ultimately an annual audit and revision of the handbook. Another important aspect of integration involved the development of common assessment tools, understandings, and review procedures, which will be addressed in the next section. This left the following suggestion on the integration of faculty hiring and intellectual-property policies.

2. *Suggestion on All-Campuses Integration of Faculty Policies:* Tenured/tenure-track faculty in concert with the VPAA with due allowance for flexibility in response to local conditions, should (a) integrate across locations the policies and procedures for hiring, evaluating, and retaining adjunct instructors and for deciding publication equivalencies implied in making promotion and tenure decisions (such as what types of articles in aggregation are equivalent to a scholarly book); (b) create policies for protecting intellectual property rights; (c) share information with each other about how local Committees on Faculty interpret and apply the policies and procedures; (d) make policies and protocols more easily accessible online, incorporating the Faculty Handbooks into the HR page; and (e) review and update handbooks regularly.

## Strategic Planning

Appropriately, suggestions regarding planning appear in Chapters 2 and 3, involving Standards 1, 2, 3, and 6. These first two working groups called for a return to, and enhancement of, the broad strategic planning processes of 2006. Steps in broadening the New Way Forward and this self-study into strategic planning have already been taken by the Board of Governors' new standing Committee on Governance and its Strategic Planning Update Task Force. The suggestions help to focus the process now in place.

3. *Suggestion on the Involvement of Faculty, Administration, and Governors in Planning:* (a) renew and enhance strategic planning and improvement processes to be timelier (with annual updates); (b) provide for broader community participation in both conception and application; (c) reconstitute a strategic planning implementation committee of Board members, administrators, faculty, and professionals that includes a visions subcommittee as well as the finance subcommittee; (d) ensure that the self-study findings are integrated into the updated strategic plan; (e) ensure that the updated strategic plan addresses objectives, costs, and assessment of specific educational initiatives, such as asynchronous distance learning, improving Hebrew language competency, and the sixty-year curriculum; and (f) implement justification of budget proposals at all levels by reference to the mission.

## Assessment

The Middle States handbook, *Self-Study: Creating a Useful Process and Report* introduces a special section on assessment with the observation that "every accreditation standard now includes an assessment component" (p. 60). It is, therefore, evidence of their diligence that

every working group provided at least one suggestion on assessment. The intended outcomes divided the topic into academic, administrative, and eLearning. Because of the richness of the 20 suggestions, this division will be preserved. In addition, because the suggestions addressed different points in the assessment cycle for each sub-topic, the cycle itself provides a good sequencing device. Assessment begins when a program or service articulates a goal such as a mission, purpose, or intended outcome. A design appropriate to the goal includes data-gathering tools and procedures. Using the design, data is collected from participants. It is then professionally analyzed and reported. Finally, the results are used to improve programs and services. The suggestions are divided not only by type and sequence of assessment but also by role (faculty, OIRA Director, eLearning Director, and student).

4. *Suggestion on VPAA's, deans', and program directors' responsibility to program assessment:* (a) further promote a common culture of program assessment throughout the College-Institute by making deep use of faculty expertise and communicating the value of the program learning outcomes to them and their students; and (b) oversee term-by-term data collection in a timely, conscientious, and consistent manner, based on reports of instructor participation provided by the OIRA.
5. *Suggestion on faculty contributions to academic assessment:* (a) update their program's mission statement so that it provides simpler and more broadly acceptable terms that comply with both the *Practical* level of their rubrics and with S14\_01; (b) create an internal committee to review the language in their program learning outcomes and rubrics definitions<sup>29</sup> to ensure that members can use them reliably;<sup>30</sup> (c) meaningfully and reliably participate in assessments of student work, as well as propose innovations to improve the assessment processes and the curriculum based on their results; and (d) plan how the ratings related to manageable program assessments will relate to the service-learning assessment by the field supervisors.
6. *Suggestion on National Assessment Committee contributions to program assessment:* work with program faculty and external institutions served by HUC-JIR students to formulate a way to rate non-course curricular requirements.
7. *Suggestion on OIRA contributions to academic assessment:* (a) develop a tool to assess how students and alumni perceive the extent to which learning outcomes are clearly communicated, furthered, and essential to career success; (b) develop methods for assessing the long-term impact of manageable program assessments on student careers; (c) analyze the ratings of specially funded co-curricular activities to trace student development over multiple years to see how they contribute to student learning overall and specifically to course learning; (d) meet with program faculty on each stateside campus on at least an annual basis to discuss the prior year's program-level learning results, how to improve their program assessment (including the exploration of possible alternative forms), work on ratings definitions, and facilitate dialogue with students about manageable program assessment; (e) continue to monitor faculty participation, demonstrate the helpfulness of the data, and develop tools to facilitate faculty proposals for improving the fulfillment of the College-Institute mission; (f) continue to integrate text analyses of syllabi and narrative assessments with data from manageable program assessments, especially to help identify courses that have the most impact as prerequisites or are critical to the success of the program; and (g) research whether the new emphasis on reflection and integration is having a positive impact on the students and the standard of education of the College-Institute.

---

<sup>29</sup>The *Practical* level of rubrics are the learning outcomes and the optional other levels of rubrics are the preparatory *Easy* and career *Inspiring* levels.

<sup>30</sup>Independent pairs of raters should agree on levels of performance over dozens of assessed projects at least 75% of the time.

8. *Suggestion on administrative assessment:* (a) conduct the administrative survey annually; and (b) revise the survey to be a clearer reminder of the educational dimensions in all of College-Institute's activities, by rephrasing the third interview question to be: "What do you do to support student learning outcomes?"
9. *Suggestion on governance assessment:* Conduct the Board Survey on a regular, though not necessarily annual, basis.
10. *Suggestion on faculty contribution to eLearning assessment:* (a) Include assessment of eLearning as a part of faculty deliberations on curriculum; (b) update the Faculty Handbook and Policies and Procedures for Hiring, Promotion, and Tenure to take account of eLearning; (c) have the eLearning Director make available research reviews of the relative costs and benefits of synchronous and various hybrid methods; and (d) expand training of faculty in the use of distance-learning technology combined with timely support so that the quality of teaching using this technology is high.
11. *Suggestion on OIRA contribution to eLearning assessment:* After the ratings of the manageable program assessments have been completed for a few years on all campuses, their evidence should be correlated with the anecdotal data to see if any discernible variance in the achievement of learning outcomes between students in face-to-face and distance settings can be identified.
12. *Suggestion on student involvement in assessment:* Include student perspectives by having a representative on the National Assessment Committee that receives and analyzes the data and evidence and recommends steps for improvement.

## Discovery

Two suggestions relate to involving faculty, administration, and governors in discovering new ways of promoting academic excellence and high-quality mentoring of College-Institute students without diminishing standards and quality of delivery. The academic suggestions come from Chapters 2, 6, 7 and 8, while the administrative ones come from Chapters 3, 4, 6 and 8.

13. *Suggestion on academic discovery:* (a) the VPAA should follow through on his plan to revise the protocols for faculty promotion in line with the suggestions from faculty and relevant committees; (b) the faculty should formalize a comprehensive mentoring process for junior faculty; and (c) the faculty should monitor variations from the standard 3-2 course load and explore innovations that would ensure equitable contributions to the College-Institute (part of the exploration could include allowing students and faculty to broaden the definition of "course" or allowing non-course approaches to achieving *Practical* levels of learning outcomes on a consistent basis); (d) establish a committee to oversee faculty workload including time spent on endowed co-curricular projects, internal service activities, any non-course learning activities being considered for an outcomes transcript; and e) the impact of requiring some programs to be financially self-sustaining needs to be a special focus of analysis of learning outcomes assessment.
14. *Suggestion on financial discovery:* (a) improve communication between the academic and financial arms of HUC-JIR to ensure that financial considerations alone do not drive changes in the role or size of the faculty, and that any adjustment of resources not be separated from student learning outcomes; (b) revise the materials and events for Board orientation to include more information on academic programs and related activities; (c) enhance the role of the Faculty and Academic Affairs Committees of the Board in communicating with faculty bodies around budget development to ensure that processes are clear and that budget development reflects HUC-JIR's academic mission; and (d) develop next steps for administrative hiring or organization, especially to consider a long-term

strategy that prioritizes the strengthening of the VPAA's office while relieving it of as much non-academic responsibility as possible.

## **System Development**

The suggestion on system development comes from Chapter 3 on planning and resources. It was included in the summary section on strategic planning, but it is appropriate not only to be considered here but also to be the only suggestion included twice. This document is its own message: a concise, constructive, and valuable tool for institutional planning, assessment, change, and growth. The broad base of contributors, their diligence and objectivity effectively guided by the MSCHE standards and fundamental elements, and their commitment to HUC-JIR's prosperity exemplify a process that, even more than the report they have produced, should long serve to benefit the College-Institute.

15. *Suggestion on System Development:* Ensure that the self-study findings are integrated into the updated strategic plan and that the Governance Committee clarifies roles of committees of the Board as they pertain to setting institutional priorities and allocating resources.

## **Comprehensive Recommendations**

A synthetic review of all the suggestions for improvement listed above resulted in five comprehensive recommendations listed below in priority order. It is these recommendations that College-Institute commits to implement and report on in its 2018 Periodic Review Report.

1. *Assessment:* Show evidence that each program has updated its program learning outcomes and continues to implement a system of assessment based on them.
2. *System Development:* Each administrative unit and educational program will create brief annual reports that articulate goals, include innovations introduced in the prior year, assessment of recent performance, and propose innovations related to assessment results.
3. *Common Vision:* Show evidence of regularizing the periodic review, updating, and reporting to the President's Cabinet concerning the College-Institute handbooks including those for the Board of Governors, Boards of Overseers, faculty (including the policies and procedures for hiring, promotion, and tenure), personnel, and students.
4. *Discovery:* Develop and implement tools to assess the efficacy of our financial aid policies.
5. *Integration:* Make policies and protocols more easily accessible on line.