

Xavier University
Self-Study Report 2011 For Accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission
Strengths and Challenges/Opportunities for Improvement

Xavier maintains accreditation through the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (hereafter, HLC), one of six regional institutional accrediting organizations in the United States. The HLC evaluates post-secondary educational institutions for accreditation in 19 states in the US. The HLC has operated since 1895 (albeit under slightly different titles); Xavier has maintained continuous accreditation under the HLC since 1935.

Every 10 years or so, the HLC evaluates its accredited institutions using two primary processes: an institutional self-study developed by the institution and a peer review of the institution based on a review of the self-study and a site visit by a team of consultant-evaluators, the Peer Review Team. The consultant-evaluators are individuals who work in higher education (typically faculty members and university administrators) who have undergone training by the HLC to provide an independent assessment of how well the institution meets the HLC's five Criteria for accreditation.

In Spring 2009, Xavier sought continued accreditation by submitting a self-study to the HLC; a team of consultant-evaluators subsequently visited campus. The team concluded that Xavier met all of the HLC's Criteria for continued accreditation, but they voiced "significant concerns about the comprehensiveness of the Self-Study Process and the resulting integrity of the Self Study Report." The Team recommended continued accreditation (which was supported by the HLC Board of Trustees in September 2009), but they required that Xavier conduct another comprehensive and inclusive Self Study and undergo a new Peer Review Team visit; that visit is scheduled for April 4-6, 2011.

Even before we had received the final determination from the HLC Board in September 2009, President Graham constituted a Steering Committee to oversee the development of the new Self Study. That committee was comprised of members from all the divisions of the University; this group, in turn, solicited information and input from across the University to identify evidence that Xavier meets the standards for accreditation, as well as areas of challenge and/or opportunities for continuous institutional improvement. This process, which included two opportunities for feedback to initial Self Study drafts, resulted in a 284-page Self Study report.

Below are the Strengths and Challenges and Opportunities for Improvement portions of the Self Study Report for each of the HLC's Criteria for accreditation.

CRITERION ONE
MISSION AND INTEGRITY

Xavier University operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.

Strengths

- Xavier's mission is grounded in the 450-year-old Jesuit tradition of education.
- Xavier's mission is to serve society by forming students intellectually, morally, and spiritually, with rigor and compassion, towards lives of solidarity, service, and success. The University's mission documents articulate its commitments clearly and consistently, and the core curriculum stands in the strong Jesuit tradition of education.
- The University successfully orients trustees, administration, faculty, staff, and undergraduate students to the mission, and it continues to support that mission diligently through numerous curricular and extracurricular programs and initiatives.

- Xavier has made significant progress in the past decade toward valuing diversity. The leadership, strategic planning mechanisms, personnel, and curricular commitments are now in place to provide a diversity framework for serving Xavier’s mission.
- Assessment results show that undergraduate students grow to understand Xavier’s mission-centered values more by the end of their academic careers than at the beginning, and that in the years following graduation their appreciation progressively deepens.
- Xavier has earned a national reputation for its high academic integrity. Recent publicity surrounding our high graduation rates among student-athletes laud the University for achieving the success without sacrificing the quality of our educational mission.
- The people of Xavier represent its greatest strength. By understanding the mission and honestly communicating our values to internal and external constituents, the people of Xavier—the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students—daily live the mission of the University.

Challenges and Opportunities for Improvement

- Though the Core Curriculum is a strength of the University, it has been too long since Xavier’s general education requirement has been thoroughly assessed. A Pilot Core Curriculum Committee is currently articulating the criteria by which to perform such an assessment. It is important that this work be followed up in a timely fashion with a thorough reconsideration of current Core course requirements.
- Despite marked improvements in areas related to diversity, Xavier still has work to do in fostering a genuinely welcoming climate for all its diverse populations and perspectives. African-American, international, LGBTQ, and disabled students, minority staff members, and women across all ranks continue to voice concerns that Xavier’s rhetoric of inclusion is not always matched by satisfactory action to achieve those ideals.
- Numerous mission documents affirm the compatibility of Catholic, Jesuit educational values with liberal arts values of free inquiry and open debate; nevertheless, these values are still sometimes perceived in conflict with one another, and this tension is most evident in matters concerning women, bodies, and sexuality.
- As the University prepares to hire its next Provost and Chief Academic Officer, conversations initiated by the hiring committee about the proper definition of the position assume greater urgency. Concerns have been raised about the necessarily diffuse focus of a Provost, as opposed to an Academic Vice President. Other concerns have been raised around the fact that divisions and offices crucial to the academic enterprise do not all answer to the Provost. The Xavier community needs to reassess the current Provost structure to determine what model best meets its academic needs and best serves the mission.
- Several progressive efforts notwithstanding, shared governance remains strained at Xavier. The administration exacerbates the problem by periodically exercising unilateral decisions outside of shared governance structures. The faculty exacerbates the problem with inconsistent communication and lack of full participation based upon a sense of disempowerment. Goodwill on both sides gives hope for improvement, but the University seeks advice from the HLC on how to make progress in this area of lingering concern.

CRITERION TWO PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Xavier University’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.

Strengths

- Xavier’s various planning documents—including the University and Financial Strategic Plans, the Academic Vision Statement, the Campus Master Plan for facilities, and the Campus Sustainability Plan—align the University’s preparations for the future with its mission and with its goals for continuous improvement.
- The new James E. Hoff, S.J., Academic Quad represents Xavier’s commitment to technological innovation, teaching and learning excellence, and responding to the needs of future students, faculty, and staff. The new complex also provides tangible proof of Xavier’s ability to assess future needs, establish strategic plans for meeting those needs, and allocate/raise the resources necessary to translate those plans into reality.
- Xavier has experienced robust undergraduate enrollment growth in the past two years, even in the midst of a stagnant economy and an increasingly competitive recruitment environment. This growth affirms that the total educational experience offered by the University is highly appealing to today’s prospective students. This growth is also testimony to the hard work performed by members of the entire Xavier community to recruit and retain quality students and to deliver upon our promises to them after they join our community.
- The University has demonstrated the capacity to mobilize its collective energy and ingenuity in response to budgetary threats. The Academic Planning Task Force of 2003 and the Structural Review Task force of 2008-2009 both employed models of shared governance to recommend reprioritization of resources guided by the values of Xavier’s mission.
- The formation of the University Planning and Resourcing Council marks an important step forward for strategic planning at Xavier. It institutionalizes a more collaborative and integrated approach to planning, and it links budgetary decision-making much more securely to the University’s strategic goals.

Challenges and Opportunities for Improvement

- Xavier’s Strategic Plan, operative since 2005, needs refreshing. Refreshment plans were put on hold by the President in early 2010 so that more data-driven evidence could be gathered and more campus-wide input could be sought. The new UPRC will be challenged with refreshing the Strategic Plan. More than that, the UPRC must replace the notion of simply revising a document with the notion of institutionalizing a continuous strategic planning process for the University’s future. In order to do this, the UPRC must maintain a broad level of involvement, communicate transparently, solicit and utilize reliable data, and serve as a strong advocate for mission-driven resource allocation.
- While the new Hoff Quad is a legitimate source of campus pride, some offices scheduled to be housed there discovered that the new facilities were inadequate to their needs. These problems expose systemic shortcomings in consultation and planning that must be improved upon in the future, particular on the University’s next major academic construction to replace Alter Hall.
- Several prominent resource challenges have emerged from the self-study process:
 - ◇ Financial: the University is over-dependent upon student-based revenues, its endowment is too small, and its capacity to issue new debt is limited.
 - ◇ Physical: the pressing need for more student residence is being addressed, but improved classroom space and more laboratories are needed, safety-related initiatives need better funding, and too much of the West Campus has been allowed to lapse into disrepair.
 - ◇ Curricular: several departments and programs face space and budget challenges, and trends toward increasing dependence upon non-principal faculty is a concern.

- ◇ Human Resources: compensation is a concern at almost every level, from tenured/tenure-track faculty whose salaries are below target levels, to non-tenure-track faculty and staff whose salaries are conspicuously inadequate, to some administrators whose salaries are widely regarded as disproportionately generous.
- Growth is a sign of health and success, but managing that growth responsibly is one of the biggest challenges facing Xavier. Neither increasing the size of the student body nor expanding the size of the campus can be regarded as an unqualified good in itself. Rather, growth must be planned for carefully, with broad input, sound research, and honest assessment of the full ramifications, both positive and negative. Managed growth at levels that allow Xavier to enhance its educational mission and the academic profile of its students may be welcome. However, ill-planned growth, while reaping increased revenues in the short term, can only damage Xavier's long-term interests by compromising the quality of education.

CRITERION THREE STUDENT LEARNING AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING

Xavier University provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

Strengths

- There are many examples of departments and academic programs actively using assessment results to drive programmatic improvement. Of particular note is the continuing importance placed by many academic programs on a variety of senior or "capstone" experiences often targeted to demonstrate, and evaluate, students' ability to achieve our vision to "integrate theoretical and applied knowledge."
- The importance of effective teaching is well documented in the University's hiring, retention, and promotion policies. Xavier also celebrates and honors outstanding teaching.
- Xavier has developed a number of cross-disciplinary faculty development programs related to the University's strategic initiatives and effective teaching. The opening and staffing of The Center for Teaching Excellence will provide additional resources and support for such initiatives and faculty development activities.
- The current strategic plan and capital campaign have placed significant emphasis on expanding, upgrading and enhancing academic facilities and the campus learning environment. To be sure, the recent completion of the Conaton Learning Commons and Smith Hall significantly add to the physical facilities that directly impact the University's teaching and learning environment, and provide students with the information and technological resources and support services that assist them in mastering a broad set of essential skills. In addition, there are continuing efforts to expand the university's stock of technology-enhanced classrooms and update and maintain a variety of discipline-specific teaching and research facilities.
- There has been a significant reorganization of Xavier's academic support resources, including the blending of the skills and expertise of librarians and technology professionals, which has improved the quality of the services these groups can provide.
- External gifts and grants have enabled the University to increase support to specific academic programs and initiatives, such as the Downing Awards for faculty and student research in WCB, the Conway Institute for Jesuit Education, and the Eigel Center for Community-Engaged Faculty Academy.
- Xavier's career support services have been reorganized to provide students with increased internship opportunities, mentoring programs, and support to successfully navigate the job search process. One of the results

of the re-organization is to assign Career Services Representatives to each field of study, which has been well-received by both students and faculty.

- Xavier has demonstrated an increased dedication to and awareness of students with diverse backgrounds and needs. Examples include the establishment of Women's Center in 2007, the expanded mission of the Office of Multicultural Affairs, hiring of an Executive Director of International Education, our longstanding CAPS program, the recent creation of the Veterans' Affairs Office, and our various student retention efforts through the TRiO program and Office of Student Retention and Success.
- Despite disagreements and tensions, most faculty, staff and administrators have not lost sight of Xavier's mission to educate, and maintain that focus in the work that we do with students. There is strong campus-wide support for the centrality of our academic mission, and difficulties that we face regarding communication, governance, or other issues do not prevent us from our focus on student learning and effective teaching.

Challenges and Opportunities for Improvement

- Establishing and maintaining a campus culture supporting ongoing and effective assessment of student learning remains a challenge. This is particularly true regarding assessment of student learning in the Core Curriculum. Acknowledging this concern, a new position, Executive Director for Grants and Academic Assessment and Planning, was created and filled, effective June 1, 2010. This individual attends AAPC meetings in order to better coordinate and communicate assessment findings.
- Creation and maintenance of effective learning environments rest on adequate resources. Significant increases in enrollment, particularly of full-time undergraduate students, are envisioned for the near-term future. Unless carefully planned and executed, this will jeopardize Xavier's reputation for academic excellence and care for and attention to the individual student. Concerns in this regard have been expressed by:
 - ◇ The faculty regarding the (shrinking) percentage of classes and student credits hours taught by principal faculty. The number of adjunct faculty challenges the intent and coherence of our academic mission.
 - ◇ Academic and student support units regarding adequacy of staffing and space to maintain the level of services offered and continuing to enhance areas identified as strategic priorities;
 - ◇ Members of academic programs whose curricular offerings demand specified facilities such as science laboratories, clinical and computing laboratories, studios, and practice spaces.

In addition, the replacement of Alter Hall, the University's primary, and aging, classroom building, is overdue, particularly given planned enrollment growth.

- Even with recent increases in funds in recent years, inadequate funding for professional development activities such as research, travel, conference attendance, professional memberships, and enrollment in professional development courses is an expressed concern, especially in CAS and CSSHE. The inequity between the resources available in the WCB and the other colleges creates a climate of injustice.
- Despite well developed pockets of evaluation efforts related to student learning, we must develop an effective system to both drive the data collection process and facilitate means of sharing the information across the University and with our wider community. To date, we have missed opportunities to better understand our institution and the effectiveness of our programs and education.
- The Library acquisitions budget has been basically flat over the past several years. Meanwhile, costs for library materials have been rising 5% or more each year. Benchmarking with other AJCU institutions, as well as other competitors and flagship universities, shows that Xavier spends far less per student on its library resources, in

every area. If this flat budget continues, Xavier’s Library will fall even farther behind, and will have to continue cutting the number and quality of resources it can offer.

- As Xavier continues to develop off-campus sites and the number of alternative delivery programs and courses, there is concern regarding the participation of full-time faculty and support services to ensure academic excellence in these areas. It will also be important to create standards for the assignment of credit hours to alternate delivery modes, to insure that such courses are in compliance with educational standards and are maintain the quality expected of a Xavier education.
- Whereas Xavier is self-described as a “primarily undergraduate institution,” our multiple graduate programs educate nearly 40% of the students at our institution and we have longstanding programs for nontraditional undergraduate students through CAPS. Particularly as the University looks to these areas as holding potential for growth, it may be time to expand our self-perception to that of a comprehensive university and devote the attention and resources that these programs deserve.
- As Xavier continues to grow and attempts to effectively organize its academic and support resources to continue to provide an outstanding teaching and learning environment, a challenge will be to develop clear communication concerning organizational structure, and resultant responsibilities, to the campus community. In particular, the current interpretation of the “provost model” must be examined. This is especially crucial as we create the job description for the search for the new provost.
- As a number of the specific concerns and challenges listed above demonstrate, there is concern about the growth trajectory that Xavier has experienced over the last two years and plans to pursue in the future. In addition to specific concerns regarding ensuring faculty, staff, and academic resource growth to match growing enrollments, there is a concern about keeping our focus on providing an outstanding environment that focuses on student learning and supports excellence in teaching.

CRITERION FOUR ACQUISITION, DISCOVERY, AND APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

Xavier University provides support to ensure that faculty, students, and staff acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly.

Strengths

- The University offers a variety of professional development opportunities for faculty and staff, such as the Manager Leader Programs, Xavier Leadership Academy, and AFMIX, and supports a variety of professional development opportunities for faculty, including the newly developed Faculty Fellowships and faculty development leaves.
- The opening of the Conaton Learning Commons and the Center for Teaching Excellence have brought excitement to the campus, and hold promise for the development of innovative teaching and learning experiences.
- Xavier University has a well qualified faculty that is devoted to teaching and also engages in active scholarship.
- The faculty’s active engagement in scholarship informs their work in the classroom and provides opportunities for students to engage in research activities with them. Finding means to support engagement of undergraduate students in the scholarly work of faculty will enhance the educational experiences of students, and increase their qualifications for post-graduate work. Improving the University’s infrastructure to support this collaboration will be an important area of growth.
- Xavier’s Core Curriculum provides undergraduate students with a breadth of knowledge and skill and the opportunity to engage in intellectual inquiry.

- Xavier remains devoted to providing support to our student-athletes to allow them to complete their education in a meaningful way.
- The variety of Xavier's co-curricular opportunities provides students (and the broader University community) with experiences that enhance students' classroom learning and allow students to develop and apply their leadership abilities.
- Xavier's honors programs produce excellent students, encourage individual research, use innovative teaching techniques and add to the University's intellectual life.
- Xavier's faculty takes its responsibilities as scholars seriously, and has developed mechanisms to assist their efforts to engage in teaching and scholarly activities in keeping with high ethical standards.

Challenges and Opportunities for Improvement

- Given the talent of our faculty, a conversation about grant seeking might be undertaken at the department and college level to examine the role that external grants might play in supporting research and curricular goals. Given the increasing national stature of the University and its faculty, and increasing pressure to identify additional means of generating revenue for the University, external grants could play a larger role in academic departments in the future. In this discussion, it will be important to consider how grant seeking would affect the academic lives of faculty and the education of our students. In light of the primary role we have placed on teaching, this will be an important conversation.
- Although survey responses of our students indicate that they are obtaining strong skills in many areas, we may not be making adequate progress in helping our students develop quantitative skills or in keeping our students abreast of rapidly changing technology. Continued monitoring of this feature of our students' educational experience seems warranted.
- Particularly as a religiously-affiliated university that seeks to balance its religious commitments with discussions of ideas that may contradict Church positions on a variety of issues, academic freedom is an area of concern for many members of University. It is not clear that all University divisions understand the challenge of protecting academic freedom and the responsibility that all sectors bear for defending its centrality in the University. There has been discussion of a Discernment Group IV to begin in 2012 that would be charged with a consideration of these issues and their impact on the University culture.
- The Faculty Development Committee has supported increasing numbers of faculty development leaves, but there are no funds to replace faculty while they take advantage of those opportunities. This has placed strain on many departments, and faculty members often feel they cannot pursue these opportunities because courses will not be covered in their department. No doubt, faculty members' ability to make use of faculty development leaves or other faculty development opportunities will continue to be limited unless the size of the principal faculty increases to keep pace with enrollment.

CRITERION FIVE ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE

As called for by its mission, Xavier University identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

Strengths

- Community engagement and service to others are core commitments deeply embedded in the University’s mission. The people of Xavier distinguish themselves in the Jesuit tradition as “men and women for others” through a variety of curricular and outreach programs and initiatives.
- The University has made concerted efforts to be a good neighbor by forming mutually beneficial partnerships with nearby communities, civic organizations, local schools, and regional affiliates. Xavier’s Community Building Initiative has anchored these efforts in recent years, and the new Eigel Center promises to coordinate and extend these efforts still further in the near future.
- The University promotes engagement with the world through its curriculum and through co-curricular programming. Through various efforts, from international Academic Service Learning Semesters and Study Abroad, to renowned lecture series, exhibits, and fellowships sponsored by the Brueggeman Center, Xavier challenges its members to be informed and responsible global citizens.
- Several Xavier programs benefit enormously from the expert advice generously dispensed by local professionals in both the private and public sectors. Advisory boards and mentoring programs provide students with invaluable insights into the opportunities and challenges which will face them in their professional lives after graduation.
- The University values service as a noble end in itself, but it also recognizes that service provides enriched educational opportunities to help Xavier’s learners become better men and women for others. A number of faculty incorporate service as integral to their curricular and scholarly work, and a great many student-led organizations and initiatives extend lessons learned in the classroom out into meaningful action in the world outside the classroom.
- Xavier facilities provide physical space for diverse communities to come together in dialogue. The University has become an important hub for civic engagement in the Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky area. Programs and activities hosted in the Cintas Center, the Gallagher Student Center, the O’Connor Sports Center, and Bellarmine Chapel engage hundreds of thousands of visitors on campus every year.

Challenges and Opportunities for Improvement

- More or less simultaneous turnover in the positions of Provost/Academic Vice President, Associate Vice President of Community Engagement/Director of the Eigel Center, and Director of the Women’s Center poses important institutional challenges with respect to engagement and service. It is imperative that a smooth and effective transition in leadership take place so that Xavier can sustain the momentum it has built over the last several years in its community engagement efforts.
- Evidence suggests that students are dissatisfied with the fitness facilities available at the O’Connor Sports Center. Future plans must carefully weigh the importance of such construction against other University priorities, and they must accurately gauge and respond to user expectations in the design phase.
- The University administration has persistently resisted calls from its internal constituents for daycare or childcare services. While there does not yet appear to be campus-wide consensus on how best to face this challenge, the time has come for robust, inclusive, transparent and institutionally-sponsored discussions surrounding daycare or childcare for Xavier personnel and students. Xavier’s leadership is entreated to give these discussions a fair hearing and to respond with meaningful action if a mandate emerges.
- In order to maintain strong relationships with various communities, Xavier must carefully consider the ramifications of any future expansion plans upon both internal and external constituents. The next testing ground for applying the lessons of consultation, assessment, and communication will be the University’s development vision for the East Campus.