Standard 2 • Planning and Evaluation

The institution undertakes planning and evaluation appropriate to its needs to accomplish and improve the achievement of its mission and purposes. It identifies its planning and evaluation priorities and pursues them effectively.

Planning

Description
In recent years, planning at Middlebury has focused on three separate, but related, initiatives: the development and implementation of the College’s strategic plan, the Vermont campus master plan, and the affiliation and merger with the Monterey Institute of International Studies. The strategic planning process, which was extensive and broadly inclusive, was initiated with the appointment of President Liebowitz in 2004. This process involved thoughtful work and contributions from more than 100 people serving on the steering committee and numerous task forces. This work resulted in a strategic plan, Knowledge Without Boundaries, which was endorsed unanimously by the Middlebury College Board of Trustees in May 2006. The plan included a discussion of the then-current state of the College and made 82 recommendations for moving the College forward into the future. The plan, available on the Middlebury College website, also served as the foundation for the Middlebury Initiative, a $500 million fundraising campaign, launched in October 2007.

The strategic plan seeks to strengthen the institution’s global focus, while also reinforcing its core mission as an undergraduate liberal arts college. It highlights several themes which have provided focus to the work of the College in recent years. These themes include the need to strengthen support for a diverse student and campus community, especially through increased commitment to financial aid, an increased emphasis on intensive student-faculty interaction, and a reinforcement and refinement of the role of the Commons system as a context in which academic and residential life can be better integrated. The strategic plan also includes extensive discussion of the College’s graduate and special programs, with 13 of the 82 recommendations focusing on these areas.

We remain committed to the strategic goals outlined in the plan, and we continue to pursue many of the recommendations in the Strategic Plan. Despite its ambitious scope, the strategic plan was not designed to address issues of campus infrastructure. Thus, in April 2006, a Master Planning Committee was appointed to develop a campus master plan to support the vision outlined in the Strategic Plan and to guide building, renovation, and development of the Vermont campus for the next thirty to fifty years. Consistent with the College’s mission, the plan was developed with a particular emphasis on environmental sustainability. The plan is not a blueprint for campus development, but rather a guiding document which makes general recommendations for the development of outdoor spaces and suggests guidelines for long-range building projects. It addresses issues related to the use of open spaces, the relation of different sections of the campus to one another, accessibility, and parking.
During the same period that Middlebury was engaged in these two planning processes, we were also engaged in investigating, planning for, and implementing a significant addition to the institution, namely the affiliation, and ultimate merger, with the Monterey Institute of International Studies. The College entered into the affiliation in December 2005, and the merger was formally completed in June 2010. (See the Progress Report submitted to NEASC, August, 2010.) Middlebury’s overriding rationale for entering into a partnership with the Monterey Institute was the shared belief that language skills, coupled with professional knowledge in areas such as international public policy and diplomacy, international trade and business, language education, and translation and interpretation, are critically important to the education of the next generation of global leaders and problem-solvers. Because of its existing strengths in languages and international education at both the undergraduate and graduate level, Middlebury – including its Language Schools and its Schools Abroad – sought to strengthen its position among colleges and universities in the mission-central areas of foreign languages, international studies, and environment and sustainability in the face of globalization. It also expanded the College’s presence in the field of graduate international education without changing the atmosphere for undergraduate teaching and learning on the Vermont campus.

Much energy and attention was devoted to addressing some immediate challenges at the Monterey Institute. During the period prior to its affiliation with Middlebury, the Institute experienced a number of financial crises that resulted in austerity measures and undermined the quality of programs, facilities, and reputation. Immediately prior to the affiliation, planning efforts had thus been focused on the need to cultivate a partnership with a larger institution with resources to invest in professional graduate education. Once the partnership with Middlebury College was established, the Institute, under a new, Middlebury-appointed president and board, embarked upon a strategic planning process that included participation from all sectors of the Institute and resulted in an interim plan approved by the Institute board in the fall of 2006. This plan focused on three major outcomes: increased academic quality/reputation, financial sustainability, and the development of new, entrepreneurial programs that leveraged the language expertise resident at the Monterey Institute. In January 2007, the Institute added an executive director of planning in the president’s office to coordinate plan implementation in the context of ongoing integration with Middlebury.

Although the College expended significant effort in developing and implementing these initiatives, none of the College’s plans anticipated the national economic crisis of the last few years. Middlebury – like all institutions of higher education – had to face the challenge of adjusting to a new financial reality which included significantly reduced endowment returns, budget shortfalls, and the need to readjust expectations for future revenues, particularly fundraising. The details of these challenges and the College’s responses to them are outlined in Standard 9 (Financial Resources), but broadly speaking, these efforts led us to identify a new strategic goal, namely achieving financial equilibrium and transparency. The president appointed a Budget Oversight Committee, comprised of undergraduate college faculty, staff, and students, which worked closely with the administration to identify short- and long-term strategies for eliminating budget deficits. A survey of the Middlebury undergraduate community (faculty, staff, students, and trustees) was undertaken to assess sentiment around various options, and the results were presented in multiple venues and discussed widely. One result of this process was a decision by the president and Board of Trustees to increase the size of the student body from
2350 to 2400 as a way of generating additional revenue. Costs were reduced through a variety of measures, including College-wide budget cuts. Another was the recognition that we needed to reduce the size of the non-faculty staff, with the goal of achieving this reduction through entirely voluntary means. A series of early retirement and voluntary separation plans were made available, and together with the natural attrition that occurred during that period, as well as a series of reorganizations and internal reassignments, we have achieved an appropriately-sized staff and attained financial equilibrium. (See Standard 9 for more information.)

Appraisal

Initial progress in completing or achieving many of the recommendations set out in the Strategic Plan was rapid and significant. The expectation was that the plan would serve as a working document that would guide institutional agendas for the foreseeable future. An implementation table was included in the plan which identified a member of the President’s Staff as the individual responsible for the initiative, and efforts were made to track progress toward these goals over time. This tool was used to track progress, and by November 2008, 65 of the 82 recommendations had been implemented or significant progress had been made toward the goal. The pace of progress slowed substantially with the economic downturn, as resources and attention were diverted to solving our financial challenges. Attention was turned again to the Strategic Plan during 2009-10, as attempts were made to identify the ways in which the new financial realities might have altered our sense of the priorities outlined in the plan. One significant change was the recognition that the 25 new faculty positions recommended to support the establishment of a new senior independent work requirement would not be able to be funded in the near future. Nonetheless, we remain committed to the primary recommendations of the strategic plan, namely support for financial aid, increasing diversity, and close student/faculty interaction.

Through the process of conducting the self study for this comprehensive review, we have seen the ways in which the process presents an opportunity to refine and update our strategic plan. The primary goals of the plan are featured as several of the areas of emphasis throughout this self study. For example, we continue to direct energy toward achieving greater diversity among the student body and the faculty, as well as in the curriculum. Our current institutional goals, however, reflect the developments of the last five years and our current context, and are articulated as projections in this self study.

Given the severity of the economic downturn, and the significant challenges it posed for Middlebury, it is particularly gratifying to note our achievements in gathering and disseminating information about our financial status as an institution, achieving balanced short- and long-term budgets, and arriving at levels of staffing that we believe are sustainable into the future through entirely voluntary means. The process was sometimes difficult, and we continue to face the challenges of achieving and maintaining the appropriate non-faculty staffing levels across all areas of the College, as well as ensuring that workload expectations are now consistent with new levels of staffing in some areas. This work is ongoing, being overseen by the Staff Resources Committee. But we are pleased that we have been able to achieve financial equilibrium without layoffs and without interfering with the quality of education provided to our students. Similarly, despite the impact of the recession on new initiatives, we have continued to make steady progress on recommendations made in the campus master plan, particularly those related
to sustainability. For example, we have reduced the amount of regular lawn mowing required in several areas on campus and we have planted new trees to help reduce our carbon footprint. Other changes consistent with the Master Plan include accessibility improvements across campus, and the addition of sidewalks and other changes to Old Chapel Road to make this main campus artery more pedestrian friendly. We expect that we will continue to use the Master Plan as a guide for consideration in long-term building and renovation efforts.

Prior to the affiliation with Middlebury College, the Monterey Institute had no tradition of strategic planning, nor was there an institutional capacity for data-driven decision making. Despite this, intuitive leadership and a very committed faculty and staff made extensive progress toward achieving the first two outcomes set forth in the Monterey strategic plan, namely improving the quality of the academic program and achieving financial sustainability. Middlebury investment helped address deficits in facilities, technology, and salaries and benefits. Efficiencies were achieved through the integration of operational functions with the Middlebury campus. Budgets were balanced, and revenues from tuition and fundraising began to increase as these functions were professionalized. On the academic side, an administrative reorganization created opportunities for clearer program definition based on identified strengths, resulting in a suite of professional master’s degrees that are both unique in their focus, and complementary to Middlebury’s existing undergraduate and graduate programs. The recession of 2008 short-circuited the achievement of the third outcome, the development of entrepreneurial language programs, which would have required more extensive investment than was possible in the prevailing economic climate.

Because of the imminence of the planned merger with Middlebury in June of 2010, no new strategic planning cycle has been initiated. Instead, planning efforts have focused on completing the previous year’s academic reorganization; on the merger itself and the integration measures required to assure its continued success; and on preparation for the comprehensive reaccreditation of Middlebury and all its graduate programs. The self-study process has become, in itself, a pre-planning exercise that has challenged Middlebury and Monterey Institute participants to engage with each other in new ways, and examine each area of institutional life from both global and local perspectives.

The addition of the Monterey Institute to the ranks of Middlebury College programs has highlighted the need for planning and integration within and across all the programs of the institution. Within the Language Schools, Schools Abroad, and Bread Loaf School of English, new initiatives come up regularly, though not as part of an explicit and directed strategic planning process. While much progress has been made in creating new opportunities for students that leverage the resources of more than one of the College’s programs, for example, there is currently no structure that brings together the decision-makers from all of these programs to plan, evaluate, and innovate. The programs operate independently in many ways – hiring different faculty, serving different students, operating in different locations – but it is clear that the institution would benefit from more coordinated and integrated planning at the highest levels of the administration. To this end, a College Council, comprised of the presidents of Middlebury College and the Monterey Institute and administrative representatives from all of Middlebury’s programs, is being formed. The group will share strategic initiatives under consideration in each of the major units of the College, and coordinate new opportunities for students that make
meaningful/complementary use of the unique resources at each program. It will also work to ensure that the growth and development of the institution is consistent with the College’s mission and character.

**Projections**
- The dean of planning and assessment will work with the President’s Staff in the fall of 2011 to integrate the strategic plan recommendations that have not yet been implemented with the projections identified as part of this self study to create a prioritized list of institutional commitments.
- The president will establish the College Council in the fall of 2011 to provide oversight for institutional growth and planning and encourage innovation among all the College’s programs.

**Evaluation**

**Description**
Middlebury’s evaluation and assessment efforts are primarily supported by the Office of Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research (PAIR). In recent years, there have been changes in staffing and in the place of the office within the institution. The office is now staffed by several institutional researchers, the director of institutional research, and the dean and associate dean of planning and assessment. In the past, the office has effectively supported several data collection and reporting goals. Much energy was devoted to the reporting of institutional data to external agencies, collecting student survey data, and providing data support for certain offices and constituencies (e.g., the Board of Trustees, College Admissions). The current goals of the office are to build upon these strengths by working to identify the data needed to provide support for strategic College initiatives, and to proactively report data and information to relevant offices and constituencies. More generally, the office is taking a role in encouraging conversations, especially within the senior administration, about institutional priorities and data needs so that data collection, analysis, and reporting can be most focused on the issues that are central to the work of the College.

One particular area of emphasis has been on assessment for the purposes of increasing institutional effectiveness, especially the assessment of student learning. These efforts are discussed in greater detail in Standards 4 (Academic Program) and 6 (Students), but they focus on assessing the development of undergraduate student writing (an undergraduate college requirement); assessing undergraduate senior work in relation to the learning goals identified for a faculty-approved, but not yet implemented, senior work requirement; assessment of learning among majors in academic departments and programs; and other forms of learning assessment at our graduate programs. We have also worked to gather and report data related to other areas of undergraduates’ experiences, including the Commons and the provision of career services at Middlebury. Supporting these efforts, we were accepted to participate in the current study being conducted by the Wabash Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts, the purpose of which is to support institutions in using data to not only evaluate their efforts in critical areas but also to implement institutional change. Middlebury College has also signed on as a member of the Presidents’ Alliance for Excellence in Student Learning and Accountability. As such, we have
made “a commitment to build on [our] previous work to assess, report on, and improve student learning” (www.newleadershipalliance.org).

Middlebury’s PAIR office provides support for all of the College’s programs, including, since 2007, the Monterey Institute. At that time, the Institute began working with the office at Middlebury to develop a consistent approach to collecting and analyzing data that relate to our two main revenue drivers, admissions and institutional advancement. Other Institute data initiatives include the development of a New Student Questionnaire in order to collect applicant data that could assist in developing recruiting strategies. Monterey Institute alumni are surveyed one year and five years after graduation in order to assess career outcomes for our graduates. In February of 2011, Middlebury institutional research staff and Institute staff working in admissions, student services, and alumni affairs met to create a centralized assessment calendar that will include both existing surveys, and new mid-course and exit surveys. The Monterey Institute uses a variety of approaches to assessing learning outcomes, from capstone projects to portfolios, and these are documented in the chapter on academic programs. Assessment of non-academic departments and functions at the Institute has historically been highly decentralized and irregular.

Undergraduate college academic departments and selected other offices and programs undergo external reviews on a fairly regular schedule. Each year one to three departments are chosen to conduct a self study; a team of external reviewers visit campus and meet with members of the department, students, administrators, and other relevant members of the community. In recent years, efforts have been made to formalize the process by which departments respond to the external review and ensure administrative follow-through on any issues requiring continued attention. Clearly articulated procedures are outlined and communicated to all parties participating in the review. The department under review then completes a written response to the review, and the academic administration meets with department colleagues to discuss the response and identify areas for follow up. External review reports and department and program responses are considered by the Educational Affairs Committee when considering department and program requests for additional or renewed staffing. In recent years, some offices and other programs (e.g., Career Services) have also been reviewed using a similar model of consulting with external evaluators to provide feedback and suggestions for improvement.

Middlebury’s Language Schools and Schools Abroad are also reviewed regularly. Language Schools often have an external review conducted shortly after a new director is appointed, and as with undergraduate departments, conduct a self study prior to the review. In addition, the Doctorate in Modern Languages degree was reviewed by an outside committee during summer 2007, and several changes were made the program as a consequence of this review. Each School Abroad is also reviewed annually by two faculty members from its faculty advisory board; these faculty are provided guidelines regarding evaluation procedures by the office of International Programs and Off-Campus study. Schools Abroad frequently receive regular evaluative visits from faculty and staff at other U.S. institutions, who are considering sending their students to Schools Abroad or who want to evaluate the academic and other experiences that their students have. There are no formal reports from these evaluations by non-Middlebury colleagues, as Middlebury does not initiate these reviews, but the College does often receive valuable feedback from these colleagues. While the Bread Loaf School of English has not had a formal external
review, the directors review the program’s policies, practices, and publications each summer, to revise, update, and augment academic procedures where needed.

Appraisal
The Office of Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research has made important gains in recent years in helping to facilitate the development of a culture of data-driven decision-making at Middlebury College. A number of strategic initiatives, including the recent work of the Faculty Compensation Committee, assessment of the provision of career services to Middlebury undergraduates, and coordination and support for efforts to assess student learning have all been facilitated by the office. This progress is recent, however, and additional time will be needed for the practices and procedures of individuals and groups on campus to consistently take into account the need to consult and coordinate with the office regarding data collection and assessment efforts. One way to accomplish this will be for the dean of planning and assessment to play a greater role in working with the President’s Staff and appropriate campus constituencies to establish and communicate institutional priorities, especially with respect to the collection and reporting of data. It will also be important to continue to develop the capacity for institutional research and analysis within and across all Middlebury’s programs. The institutional research support being provided to the Monterey Institute by the office in Vermont is a good step in this direction.

The increased weight given in recent years to questions of accountability and assessment in higher education means that it is increasingly important that Middlebury College continues to take an active role in working with colleagues at liberal arts institutions to demonstrate the value of the education we provide to our students. Our participation in the New England Consortium on Assessment and Student Learning (NECASL) and in the Wabash Study are examples of this kind of collaboration, and we find that we benefit from the sharing of best practices around institutional research and assessment and hope to contribute meaningfully to the national conversation about these issues. We also recognize the value of transparency in the sharing of our institutional assessments with the public. We plan to develop more thorough and more easily accessible information about our institutional assessment efforts and make that information available in a central location on the College’s website.

More specifically, in addition to the completion of the specific data initiatives already underway (e.g., assessment of student learning – Standard 4, assessment of career services and the Commons – Standard 6), we need to begin a discussion of how and when we can create a data warehouse that would make important and frequently used data more accessible to individuals across the College, including all of the College’s programs. Building on recommendations resulting from an alumni information analysis conducted by a committee of the Board of Trustees, the regular collection of alumni data that serves a variety of institutional purposes will be a particular focus in the coming years, and these data are one important example of the kind of information that can be used broadly across the institution. Currently, for example, we have too little information available about the alumni of the Language Schools, C.V. Starr–Middlebury Schools Abroad, and the Bread Loaf School of English; more and better data will be enormously helpful in answering questions about the value of a Middlebury education and communicating with the broader Middlebury community.
Projections

- Middlebury College will meet its commitments regarding transparency through public reporting made as part of our participation in the President’s Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability, and will continue to collaborate with other institutions and organizations, including the Wabash Center of Inquiry and NECASL, regarding assessment issues.
- The College will undertake an initiative to collect better data regarding the alumni for all our programs, beginning with the distribution of an alumni survey in fall 2011. The Office of Planning and Assessment will work to consolidate and communicate alumni information across programs and offices at the College.

Institutional Effectiveness

Recent changes at Middlebury College, most notably the merger with the Monterey Institute, have highlighted the need for more purposeful planning across all the programs of the institution. We will build on the successes of our strategic planning process and the efforts surrounding the affiliation and merger with the Institute to better coordinate and integrate, where appropriate, the work of all of Middlebury’s programs. Initiatives to prioritize and focus our data collection and reporting on areas of strategic interest, some of which are already underway, will enhance these planning efforts and will serve to increase institutional effectiveness.