

**Johnson State College Response  
To the Report  
By an Evaluation Team Representing the CIHE/NEASC**

The faculty, staff, administration, trustees, and students of Johnson State College wish to convey our gratitude to the visiting team and, especially, its chair, Dr. Cynthia E. Huggins. We appreciate the recognition of institutional strengths, as noted in the evaluation team's excellent report, and accept the list of concerns that were identified. Indeed, we feel the overall findings—concerns as well as strengths--were amply foreshadowed in the institution's self study.

Johnson State College has not stood still in the approximately four months since the team's campus visit. We would propose using the remainder of this response to discuss in what ways we have progressed in addressing the four institutional concerns, and what our plans are for continued progress.

**Assessment of student learning and program outcomes:** Although, as the team reported, "significant progress" (32) has been made, it has been slow and uneven. Some program strategies remain underdeveloped; a firm feedback loop has yet to be closed; and in general too little attention has been paid to mid- and post-program assessment. In sum, as the report asserts, "a strong culture of assessment" (33) does not yet exist. To speed its development, several steps have occurred since the November visit.

In January, just after Johnson State College reconvened for spring semester, Vice President of the Commission Dr. Carol Anderson came to campus for workshops with department chairs and faculty. Twenty full-time faculty members attended the faculty session. Dr. Anderson's visit paralleled a concrete assessment task given by the interim academic dean to department chairs, due March 10.

Academic department chairs were asked to assume responsibility for developing, with their colleagues, an instrument or measure based on the program's learning outcomes; to identify and, where appropriate, collect the student work product or assignment that will be assessed; and to train those who will be doing the assessment using the instrument. These elements are to be accompanied by a brief narrative describing the overall plan, and the assessment must be performed by semester's end.

The other development was the acceleration, by a full year, of the timetable for implementing a plan to assess student mastery of the essential learning outcomes of the new general education program. Two Essential Learning Outcomes, which are aligned with AAC&U value rubrics, will be assessed this spring. Guided by the Faculty Assembly's General Education Committee,

faculty will collect student work from a sample of relevant courses for submission to the academic dean's office via Dropbox. The work will be blinded and organized for assessment, which will be carried out by a group of faculty and the interim dean after the semester concludes. This group will also develop a plan to inform faculty of data collected and next steps. The next steps will include a schedule for regular meetings among faculty, resulting in pedagogical and curricular improvements. Meanwhile, the chair of the General Education assessment team will conduct exit interviews with a sample of students, and committee members will review and score selected syllabi.

**Data-driven planning and decision making:** Since the November visit, strides have been made to yoke institutional planning more closely to data, and to base appropriate actions upon the results. As reported in the self study, membership in the Education Advisory Board's Forum for Continuing and Online Education included customized research and labor force demand analyses using Burning Glass Technologies. This effort generated a list of high need programs specific to Vermont which, in turn, became the basis for hiring two new faculty members in support of those identified programs. In the area of marketing, the College engaged Curve Trends Marketing to deploy a variety of analytics to gauge the efficacy of marketing campaigns. Based on the results, we now have moved to marketing signature programs rather than entire online offerings.

For the near future Johnson has begun a new relationship with the Education Advisory Board's Student Success Collaborative. For this project we are in the collection stage of a range of data pertaining to student success, which should yield specific strategies to assist us in retaining students and in fostering improved persistence to graduation. These and other data-driven planning efforts are facilitated, as noted in the evaluation team's report (28), by the part-time IR assignment of a math faculty member, who was also a member of the self study steering committee.

**Planning priorities, measurable goals, and timetables:** At its mid-February meeting the Northern Vermont University Transition Team approved and recommended a unified planning model (see Appendix A) as the basis for NVU planning. Among the group's other recommendations were to create an NVU Office of Institutional Research and to maintain IR expertise at the system chancellor's office. The Johnson and Lyndon campuses are in the final stages of a joint process to hire a new provost, who will lead strategic planning efforts beginning Fall 2017. In the meantime, select task forces will continue to meet, following priorities, measurable goals and timetables deemed urgent for the 2016-2017 academic year. Priorities include enrollment and fund-raising.

**Financial and human resources:** Seven hundred seventy thousand dollars has been secured as part of a budget readjustment from the State of Vermont to support the costs of unification. During the current legislative session, H.122 (see Appendix B) is a House bill proposing to increase the annual appropriation for the Vermont State Colleges System by \$4,000,000 to the base budget in fiscal year 2018. If successful, this would represent a 15 percent increase in base funding, with a commitment “to adjust future year appropriations for Vermont State Colleges in relation to changes in the ‘Total General Government’ section of the State budget.” In the Executive branch the Governor’s Executive Budget Summary (see Appendix C) similarly “proposes to increase the VSC base appropriation by \$4,000,000 and grow it annually by inflation through 2021...” (13).

Mindful of the need to secure additional resources, the College has been active in seeking external support. Several grants have been or are to be submitted. These include the Vermont Community Foundation (\$2,100 received); the McClure Foundation (invited to apply for a second year of funding); the Northern Borders Commission (attended a session on grant requirements); and the Davis Education Foundation (\$300,000 to be requested in a March 15 submission). A large, multi-year Title III proposal is planned for submission in April which, if successful, would provide a jump start on funding for many improved strategies to support student retention and persistence.

A number of searches have begun to change the face of Johnson State since the team visit and augment faculty and staff ranks. Three full-time faculty members have been hired, two in Counseling and one in Education. Two part-time head coaches have been added to staff ranks. Positions remain open for new faculty in Criminal Justice and Fine & Performing Arts, and for several staff positions, including Executive Director of Communications & Integrated Marketing, Coordinator of Disability Services, Student Services Consultant (part-time), Maintenance Technician, and NVU Provost. In addition, outside firms have been hired for specific purposes: Ologie/Kwall to carry out the NVU branding and web project, and People Making Good PR to focus on media outreach highlighting the strengths of Johnson and Lyndon.

### **Looking to the future: Unification**

Planning to unify the Johnson and Lyndon campuses of the new Northern Vermont University has continued apace. Johnson’s Dr. Elaine C. Collins will preside over both campuses, and NVU’s chief academic officer will be a new Provost, for whom a search is currently in progress. A Unification Advisory Committee, under the former Vermont State Colleges chancellor Tim Donovan, presented its final report in December 2016 and has given way to an 18-person NVU

Transition Team, composed of members from each campus. The team meets biweekly, alternating between campuses, to identify and discuss the operational arrangements that need to be decided, either now or in the future, to insure continued compliance with NEASC standards for accreditation. Several sub-groups and cross-department groupings are also meeting to address unification challenges and opportunities and the “nuts ‘n bolts” of becoming one university. The conclusions arrived at by these bodies, based in part on members’ discussions with constituents on the campuses, will inform a substantive change proposal for Unification. An advanced draft of that proposal is to be completed by June, for internal vetting and feedback from the campuses and, hopefully, from Commission staff. The final proposal is to be submitted in August, for consideration at the Commission’s September meeting.

We expect many mutual benefits to come from unification, including ways that Johnson’s institutional strengths can benefit Lyndon. We also expect that the association can help Johnson address several of the concerns identified in the report by the evaluation team. Heightened academic contact and collaboration with Lyndon should help Johnson advance its assessment of student learning and program outcomes, as Lyndon earned praise for its general education assessment in the CIHE letter responding to LSC’s interim (fifth year) report. Unification planning has already yielded a powerful, integrated planning model; and the dearth of human resources will be alleviated and addressed in the short term through unification. Finally, according to the Chancellor, the aims of unification are to reduce administrative costs and document efficiency; to spend scarce resources on the student experience; and to be more competitive from a marketing and recruitment perspective. Thus the new arrangement keeps the need to “achieve long-term financial sustainability” (34) squarely in mind, where it needs to remain.