

Executive Summary

This Self-Study Report describes how the mission and goals articulated in the *Penn Compact: From Excellence to Eminence* guide undergraduate education at the University of Pennsylvania. It also describes the processes by which Penn assesses undergraduate education, especially student learning, in its four undergraduate schools and in the other educational programs offered to undergraduates. Taken as a whole, the Self-Study Report demonstrates that Penn meets the Middle States Commission on Higher Education's *Standards of Excellence* as they pertain to undergraduate education.

The Self-Study found that Penn's structure of four undergraduate schools, each with its own curriculum and faculty, provides a rich environment for the undergraduate study of the arts and sciences and professional fields. A combination of school-based advising programs and centrally run support programs enables the creation of both small, targeted programs and larger systems for supporting Penn's undergraduate students. This structure is an effective means of delivering educational experiences to undergraduates. The coordination, planning, and assessment of undergraduate education ensure excellence in programs while encouraging innovation within and across schools and programs. The findings and recommendations of the Self-Study both recognize the strengths of Penn's structure and address the challenges that this decentralized structure may sometimes create.

Because the Self-Study focused on assessing undergraduate education, all of its chapters cover *Standard 7: Institutional Assessment* and *Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning* as they pertain to undergraduate education. In particular, *Chapter 7: Assessment of Student Learning* focuses on *Standard 14*. Other chapters address standards as they relate to undergraduate education as follows:

- *Chapter 2: Access and Equity* covers *Standard 8: Student Admissions and Retention* and *Standard 9: Student Support Services*;
- Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 cover *Standard 11: Educational Offerings*;
- *Chapter 8: Finance and Administration* covers *Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal*.

MSCHE standards that are not addressed in the Self-Study or that pertain to graduate and professional study were covered by a separate document review.

Key Findings

- The structures and programs for undergraduate education at Penn provide students a rich environment for the study of the arts and sciences and professional fields.
 - The planning and assessment of undergraduate education, both at the level of institutional leadership and among the schools and offices that deliver instruction and programs, encourage excellence and innovation.

- In 2008, Penn became the largest university in the United States to institute an all-grant, no-loan financial aid policy. This policy—combined with Penn’s need-blind admissions and need-based financial aid—has had a major impact on the ability of students and families with financial need to benefit from a Penn education without incurring substantial debt.
 - Since 2004, Penn’s financial aid budget has grown by 141 percent, an average of 9.2 percent per year, more than twice the average annual growth in total student charges (Page 16).
 - Tuition increases since 2003 have been lower, on average, than those at other private and public institutions (Figure 8.2).
 - The average net charge for aided first-year undergraduate students in constant (2005) dollars has declined \$1,900, to \$17,539 in FY2014 from \$19,439 in FY2005 (Figure 2.9).
- Supported by its strong financial aid policy and extensive new outreach efforts, Penn has increased the diversity and excellence of its undergraduate student body, while making educational opportunities more accessible to all students regardless of financial need.
 - Penn has made it clear that it holds affordability as an unshakable commitment to support both the excellence and the diversity of its student body (Chapter 2).
 - From 2003 to 2012, enrollment of underrepresented minority students increased to 18 percent from 12 percent, and enrollment of international students increased to 11 percent from 8 percent (Figure 2.1).
 - From 2004 to 2012, the number of Pell Grant recipients increased to 15 percent from 8.7 percent, and the pool of admitted students with high financial need increased significantly (Figure 2.2).
 - Applications from URM students have risen significantly over the past decade, increasing 64.3 percent from 2008 to 2012 (Figure 2.3).
 - Four- and six- year graduation rates and the first-year retention rate are very high for all students, including underrepresented minority students and students with high financial need (Figures 2.12 to 2.17).
- Penn undergraduates are deeply engaged both locally and globally, pursuing opportunities to connect with communities in Philadelphia and around the world.
 - The number of Academically Based Community Service courses has grown dramatically over the past decade, and nearly 18 percent of undergraduates now take at least one ABCS course (Figure 3.1).
 - Almost 95 percent of seniors report participating in at least one organized co-curricular activity, and 43 percent report being engaged in community volunteer activities (Chapter 3).
 - Nearly 25 percent of undergraduates study abroad for a semester or a full year (Figure 4.1).

- Penn's International Internship Program has been very effective at providing students who have need-based financial aid with opportunities to work abroad in the summer, mostly in the developing world (Figures 4.5 and 4.6).
- Penn's founding partnership with the Coursera online learning platform has provided more than 1.5 million people around the world with the opportunity to access Penn's educational resources (Page 56).
- Integrating knowledge and undergraduate research are hallmarks of the undergraduate experience at Penn.
 - Nearly 63 percent of undergraduates complete a minor, dual major, or multiple majors that involve integrating knowledge across schools and disciplines (Figure 5.5).
 - Approximately 70 percent of seniors report engaging in one or more research activities during their undergraduate experience (Figure 6.1).
 - Penn's faculty, including those in the graduate and professional schools, report significant involvement in undergraduate research (Figure 6.7).
- Penn's ongoing institutional assessment and school-based assessments of student learning demonstrate that the University provides exemplary learning experiences for undergraduates.
 - The School of Arts and Sciences has implemented assessments of student learning that conform to the expectations articulated in MSCHE's Standard 14 and offer a model for comparable schools and colleges (Appendix 7.1).
 - The School of Engineering and Applied Science, the School of Nursing, and the Wharton School have implemented assessments of student learning that conform to the expectations articulated in MSCHE's Standard 14 and are reviewed by each school's external accrediting body (Appendices 7.2, 7.3, and 7.4).
- Penn has become a leader in such areas as increasing access to higher education, developing programs that integrate knowledge across disciplines, and advancing new uses of technology to teach and support students.
 - The Penn Integrates Knowledge Professorship Program, launched in 2005 to recruit exceptional faculty members whose research and teaching exemplify the integration of knowledge across disciplines, has added 15 renowned faculty members who hold endowed chairs and are jointly appointed between two schools (Figure 5.6).
 - Penn's leadership in open learning and its commitment to active learning methods have invigorated efforts to enhance teaching and learning across campus, as indicated by the recent award from the Association of American Universities to develop new methods of teaching introductory science and math courses (Chapter 8).
 - Student satisfaction with advising and other services has increased dramatically in the past ten years (Figure 8.1).

Major Recommendations

The Self-Study, which draws on the excellent contributions of the seven working groups, supports a set of strategic considerations and six major recommendations, which are elaborated in each chapter and summarized here.

- 1) Penn's successful outreach in admissions should continue in ways that further increase the diversity and excellence of its applicants, with a particular focus on applications from underrepresented minority students, including LGBT students, and students eligible for Pell grants. In light of Penn's all-grant, no-loan policy, all students who know early in their senior year that they want to enroll at Penn can and should be encouraged to apply for early decision.
- 2) In light of the fact that Penn's endowment can pay for only about 20 percent of its undergraduate financial aid expenses (the rest of which must be paid from Penn's operating budget) and given Penn's on-going commitment to funding the full financial need of all its undergraduates, development initiatives ought to continue to increase the endowment income available to fund financial aid. In addition, efforts should continue to raise endowment targeted to international applicants from low- and middle-income families.
- 3) Penn should strengthen the coordination of its local and national engagement initiatives for undergraduates.
- 4) Penn should continue its emphasis on integrating knowledge and encouraging cross-school study for undergraduates.
- 5) Penn should strengthen the coordination of research opportunities for undergraduates.
- 6) Penn should continue to lead instructional innovation, including developing new methods of active classroom learning and using open learning initiatives to stimulate new forms of teaching and learning on campus.