

Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students

of

COLLEGE OF THE ATLANTIC
Bar Harbor, Maine

by

An Evaluation Team representing the
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
of the
New England Association of Schools and Colleges

Prepared after study of the institution's
self-study report and a visit to
the campus September 30-October 3, 2007

The members of the team:

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This report represents the views of the evaluation committee as interpreted by the chairperson. Its content is based on the committee's evaluation of the institution with respect to the Commission's criteria for accreditation. It is a confidential document in which all comments are made in good faith. The report is prepared both as an educational service to the institution and to assist the Commission in making a decision about the institution's accreditation status.

Introduction

The 2007 evaluation of College of the Atlantic (COA) is a comprehensive evaluation, following the College's fifth year report in August 2002, submitted to and accepted by the Commission. The visiting team read the College of the Atlantic self-study and the numerous supporting materials provided, finding them comprehensive, introspective and candid. The College team that led the self-study charted the goal of there being "no surprises" for the visiting team to find and largely succeeded in that approach. COA welcomed the visiting committee and members of the College community were accessible, open and participatory.

While at College of the Atlantic, the visiting committee met with over 35 administrators, including the president, all senior managers and faculty members who serve in management roles. Committee members met with students formally and informally and with faculty members in leadership roles, the personnel committee, finance staff, the academic affairs committee, and others. We conducted three open meetings with College constituencies, attended by 40 students, 20 staff members, and 17 faculty members. About half of the participants said they were familiar with or had read the self-study.

Members of the visiting committee also met with four trustees, including the Chairman and three others in leadership positions, who expressed their attachment to the College's mission and their faith in the new president, David Hales.

One team member visited the College's Beech Farm, and determined that, although an asset to the institution, it did not fit the definition of an off-campus instructional location, in that far less than 50% of the educational program is offered there. A visit to the islands with research stations was not feasible.

1. Mission and Purposes

College of the Atlantic (COA) was chartered in 1969 and began operation in 1972. In 35 years of offering its program, COA has not lost its vision, idealism or dedication to community and to changing a troubled world for the better. The College founders and participants designed a set of purposes and a curriculum that differentiates COA from all other colleges. Even as the College grew, it stayed centered on the students, stretching them intellectually and experientially. College of the Atlantic inhabits a beautiful place, one that is totally consistent and intertwined with its focus on human ecology.

The mission statement in the self-study reads:

College of the Atlantic enriches the liberal arts tradition through a distinctive educational philosophy – human ecology. A human ecological perspective integrates knowledge from all academic disciplines and from personal experience to investigate – and ultimately improve – the relationships between human beings and our social and natural communities. The human ecological perspective guides all aspects of education, research, activism, and interactions among the college's students, faculty, staff, alumni,

and trustees. The College of the Atlantic community encourages, prepares and expects students to gain the expertise, breadth, values, and practical experience necessary to achieve individual fulfillment and to help solve the problems that challenge communities everywhere.”

The visiting committee found a consistent understanding of the stated vision, mission and purposes. All constituencies with whom we met could articulate the core ideas and did so with conviction. The mission defines the distinctive character of the College and portrays its strong tradition as well as its goals for the future.

It is less useful as a concise statement that helps the uninitiated understand the College and as a basis on which student expectations for learning are developed and evaluated.

Those with whom we talked at COA told us that the College wants to stay in the forefront as many colleges “go green” and tout their environmental missions. COA wants to be more widely and publically acknowledged for the leadership it clearly provides. While not problematic, the mission statement should be revisited to support and better define COA’s distinctive qualities and leadership, and thus help the College in its goals of attracting students, setting expectations for learning, and communicating more powerfully to those who would support the College.

Institutional Effectiveness: COA has a unique mission, which is well understood by all College constituencies. It has the opportunity to bring this mission into sharper focus for a wider audience.

2. Planning and Evaluation

Planning: Members of the College of the Atlantic community expressed an earnest desire to plan for the future, indicated by the frequent mention of new planning initiatives stated throughout the self-study. COA is poised to realize increased national and international prominence as a result of its unique educational mission and ongoing commitment to human ecology, environmentalism and sustainability. One could say that the world has finally caught up with COA. The College community recognizes this pivotal point in COA’s history, coinciding with new leadership and strong Board support. The visiting committee read and heard about numerous plans and reports at different stages of development. Indeed, the self-study prompted a number of investigations into areas that need thought, strategies and fiscal plans. Planning -- to position the College for the future -- is an imperative for COA.

During the ten-year timeframe between re-accreditations, two strategic plans governed the College, one approved by the Board in 1997 and the most recent in June 2005. The 2005 strategic plan took into consideration internal documents produced in earlier years such as the 2002 Title III Proposal and 2003 campus plan. Following an inclusive and collaborative process, the strategic plan developed six overarching goals. There are several limitations to this plan, including a lack of measurable indicators of success, absence of a timetable for implementation and associated costs. There is also no

evidence that data scanning the environment in which COA works was used in formulating the plan; external data is a critical component to positioning the College and involves an analysis of its internal strengths and weaknesses in light of external opportunities and challenges, leading to the identification of planning strategies. Several College leaders realized the limitations of the plan, commenting to a member of the visiting committee that the 2005 document was not a true strategic plan.

Within the self-study, progress on the 2005 plan is reported as a series of initiatives organized by functional areas of the College – academic, admissions and retention, facilities, and administration and financial management. Initiatives arrayed in such a fashion do not correspond directly to the stated goals in the plan and thus one is left with an assurance that much work is being done, but uncertainty about its impact upon stated goals in the plan. The College realizes that this more organizationally segmented approach needs to be replaced with a more comprehensive framework. The self-study describes numerous planning processes, all necessary; still the College will benefit from the experience of thinking and working from the framework of a strategic plan, with a common set of goals. The need to adjust to a different planning model is not unique to COA. It is only more recently that higher educational institutions have had to approach planning more strategically, due to emerging competitive pressures and the need for better accountability.

At the direction of the President, the limitations of the current strategic plan will be addressed by another planning process, the academic program review. This emphasis will lead the College's planning effort along a path whereby the core educational mission is at the forefront. Heretofore, a regular system of periodic academic program review has not been in place at COA. Owing to the unique nature of COA's curriculum -- there is only one academic program, with many options for study, leading to the one degree in Human Ecology -- the upcoming planning process will be a significant undertaking with the potential to produce strategically focused directions for the College's future. Anticipated outcomes of the upcoming academic program review include revisions to the curriculum and a document explaining how COA's curriculum relates to the greater environment; this document will be meant for both internal and external audiences. The review process will be faculty-led, span a one to two year period and have a \$250,000 budget. Outcomes of the academic program review will have implications for co-curricular planning and all other support services at the College.

A sub-committee addressing the "four seasons" concept will be a component of this review process. COA has long known that it could capitalize on its location and attraction to summer visitors with seasonal programming. The College piloted a marine mammology course and a program for high school students in summer 2007. The April 2007 report from the Committee on Financial Sustainability to the Board of Trustees recommended "an additional summer term by 2009" that would add 25 FTE, increasing to 50 in 2012. The plan for this expansion needs clearer objectives, addressing additional workload on faculty and staff and how operating for four seasons would affect the student body.

As further planning ensues, a limited and prioritized number of objectives will assist transitioning from the current model, where fiscal imperatives guide decision-making. The Priorities Document identified the major fund raising needs but did not rank the priorities, which amount to well over \$2 million dollars. Understandably, the current financial situation of the College requires that decisive action be taken to balance the operating budget and increase revenues, including net tuition revenue: hence the financial sustainability plan, recommended by a College committee, and recently approved by the Trustees. The sustainability plan is multifaceted and includes components that, if not thoroughly examined, might risk the educational mission of the College. For example, decisions about size, the profile of the student body, and expansion of course offerings during the summer season require thorough review by the faculty and that is supposed to happen as part of the academic program review.

Documents indicate that in the past preliminary concepts or proposals have been implemented before all financial and operational requirements were known. It is important, therefore, that business plans tied to the strategic goals, are developed on a regular basis.

Functional planning and reporting is clearly present at COA, with evidence provided by the annual reports regularly completed by administrative and academic areas in June 2007 and the submitted to the President and Trustees. The reports demonstrate a retrospective review of accomplishments and prospective identification of goals for the upcoming year by area of function. The annual reports provide progress reports and updates from the perspective of the major functional areas of the College and demonstrate a regular cycle of short term, operational planning. The use of data to track progress is present in varying degrees with a greater emphasis seen in reports produced during recent years. As reported in the self-study, functional planning at the College lacks a comprehensive and integrative approach in assessing institutional progress. Annual reporting, however, is the most systematic planning process at the College that communicates results and accomplishments. Annual reports also become the basis for formal publications, such as in the COA magazine, where key accomplishments are communicated to an even wider audience.

Several architectural firms have assisted the College in addressing their campus planning needs. Recent documents and site drawings identify needs for landscaping, sustainability, new construction and deferred maintenance and are providing a realistic guide for decision-making. (Refer to Standard Eight Physical and Technological Resources) An emergency response plan also exists and the strengths and weaknesses of this document will be discussed in Standard Six (Students).

The self-study indicates that the President has initiated a significant number of new planning directives. The community is eager to assist the President, now entering his second year, in realizing his vision for the College. Communication from the President about his vision for the College and rationale for current planning directives would be helpful at this stage as well as consistent with the inclusive governance model that pervades the campus culture.

Evaluation: Within the self-study report, systematic evaluation of institutional effectiveness is identified as a weakness that the College is prepared to address. Recent steps taken by the College demonstrate a commitment to improving evaluation activities. The College has established an institutional research function and allocated FY08 budget funds for “external consultants, reviewers and/or national benchmark services”. The full use of the modest \$5,000 allocated to support institutional assessment and effectiveness is strongly encouraged. Evaluation of student learning, however, is done in many ways and provides strong evidence for the College.

The institutional research function is the half-time responsibility of the Director of Information Technology (IT) who has an in-depth understanding of database management and data retrieval for the various areas of the College. The feasibility of the IT Director sustaining this dual role may need to be examined, particularly in light of the growing need for data reporting (both internally and externally). Limitations of this arrangement are already evident. Precisely at the same time as the academic program review commences, a much-needed computer upgrade to the College’s system will demand the full attention of the IT director from January to July 2008.

The College regularly engages consultants whose reports provide an outside perspective and analysis of varied issues. There is the belief expressed by some College members that these reports are not used to any great degree. The Hubbard Report, submitted in February 2007, provides a thorough analysis of donor prospects and contains implications for future campaign plans. Use of the findings of this report can greatly assist staff recently hired in the College advancement area.

Some assessments at the institutional and programmatic levels are occurring but findings are not being disseminated for subsequent use in planning, problem-solving and decision-making. There is no demonstrable evidence that after data and information are gathered, they are then analyzed and reported. Numerical patterns and trends were not always presented in the self-study report, and at times the exhibits had different data to what was reported in the report, e.g. percentage of enrolled international students.

The National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) is a highly regarded form of institutional assessment, which COA has administered for the most recent three consecutive years. The NSSE is one means to assess the stated educational goal on community engagement, but contrary to self-study attributions, NSSE might not be the appropriate assessment method for the other learning outcome areas (critical thinking, communication etc). Another benefit of participation in NSSE is the comparative data received from other participating schools. The College’s participation in this widely acclaimed assessment effort yielded some remarkable findings since COA students score higher on all five dimensions of the survey than selected peers (n=6), Carnegie peers (n=111), and all NSSE participating schools (n=585). There was no evidence that any internal comparative analyses and reporting of the NSSE findings were done. COA can broadcast such high results more broadly to tout its educational model and outcomes.

Six educational goals for the COA curriculum are identified in the College catalog: creativity, critical thinking, community engagement, communication, integrative thinking and interdisciplinarity. The Academic Dean and faculty acknowledge that more work is needed to assess the six goals. There are numerous examples of individual student learning assessment occurring at COA. Writing assessment is well defined, supported by the faculty; results are used and the process is regularly examined for its level of effectiveness. Some changes to the writing assessment process include utilizing a common rubric and adding a sophomore year assessment. Another example of student learning assessment is the narrative transcript review completed by faculty for each course a student completes. Course assessments are substantive and address student learning in a highly student-centered manner. Explicit reference to the relevant educational goal(s) within individualized student learning assessments would reinforce the six educational goals. Such individualized learning assessment is a unique feature of a COA education and deserves commendation. The extent to which individual student learning assessment is being done at COA was understated in the self-study.

Institutional Effectiveness: So far at COA, there is no comprehensive review system either for institutional planning or evaluation activities. A systematic, integrated and coordinated approach to College of the Atlantic's planning processes still needs to be developed and mechanisms put into place to determine their effectiveness. There is currently an inconsistency in the frequency that planning and evaluation, at the institutional level, occur at the College. Frequent planning activities need to be streamlined and better coordinated. Evaluation on the other hand is done much less frequently and needs to increase in frequency. Since institutional evaluation is still in an early state, an opportunity exists to develop a realistic assessment schedule that promotes knowledge about College priorities. Once developed, review of its effectiveness should follow.

Faculty are encouraged to address ways to determine whether their students are gaining competencies in the six educational goals. Once assessed, periodic review of these findings and the utility of the assessment methods will greatly assist both faculty and students.

3. Organization and Governance

The College of the Atlantic prides itself on an inclusive and collaborative governance model referred to as 'the operating model'. As stated in the 2007-2008 Student Handbook "participatory rather than representative democracy is currently both the philosophic ideal and the practical model for COA." There are three partners comprising the operating model: 1) the trustees, 2) president and administrators, and 3) the all college meeting (ACM) and ACM's standing committees. Included within the standing committees of the ACM are constituent group meetings for students and faculty.

The ACM, modeled loosely on the New England Town Meeting, meets weekly during the school year and has varied purposes, including policy making, consultation,

community building, education and communication. Attendance averages 40-60 persons at each meeting (out of a college community of about 430 members) and year-end summaries of ACM meetings document the breadth of topics. It was noted that students typically represent the largest constituent group in attendance. There is certainly an important educational value that this operating model provides for COA students. Faculty, staff and students consistently expressed their belief in this form of governance as essential to COA's educational mission and egalitarian culture.

Periodic review of COA's operating model takes place, with the most recent review completed in 2006. Some outcomes from the recent review included updating the charters for COA and all standing committees, and revising procedures to achieve improved communications and increased budget transparency. The ACM approves the charters and if the president does not veto them, they are considered approved. The workings of the ACM and its standing committees are understood by all constituencies and rarely is there a time that a policy passed by the ACM is overruled by the President. COA continues to espouse an organizational system in which standing committees address all matters of importance to the College, including managerial ones. Concern about the roles of the President and the Board of Trustees in relation to ACM were raised in a 2003 governance study (the Governance Initiative Liaison Committee Report.) In the visit, community members again raised the lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities among the three governing partners. The presence of a new President, eagerly working with the unique culture of COA, may present an opportune time for this to be done.

As documented in earlier NEASC reports, the Trustees have been overly involved in the management of the College. The Trustees explained that involvement at a managerial level was primarily due to financial exigencies and gaps in leadership that were present. This situation has since changed. Both the financial situation and leadership capacities have improved and no longer require the Board to function on an operational level. The Trustees expressed confidence in the new President and his recently assembled senior leadership team, known as the "Dean's Team." Trustees desire to play a more strategic role, focusing on institutional planning and policy. Trustee committee chairpersons anticipate receiving more direction from the President and Deans in determining committee agendas. The President and members of the Dean's Team are therefore encouraged to work closely with Board members to educate and inform them of important College matters requiring their consultation and/or deliberation within their trustee roles. It might be useful to re-visit the Board of Trustee committee charters and update them to ensure that managerial responsibilities are not included; this is especially needed for the Academic Policy Committee. Also, the Board plans to reduce its size – from 30 to 24-26 as stated in the self-study or to 22, as projected by the trustees who met with the committee. For further efficiency, the number of Board committees should also be examined and reduced. Currently the Board has nine standing committees plus three additional ad hoc committees.

The Board of Trustees is composed of dedicated and generous individuals devoted to the mission of COA. Recently, the Board embarked upon a regular process of self-review

and board development. Although the Board size will be reduced, new members are expected to be appointed in the ensuing years. Board members expressed the hope for increased ethnic and racial diversity as well as adding to the breadth of expertise to the Board's membership. They noted the increase to 11 in the number of women serving. The Board recently discharged an important responsibility, that of hiring the fifth President of COA. The Board's selection followed a comprehensive search process that involved the entire College community. Since the President's arrival the Board has established an annual cycle for presidential review.

Academic and Administrative Deans comprise the Dean's Team and the President appropriately delegates responsibility to their respective areas. Academic Deans continue to teach and view this as an important dimension to their effectiveness. The combined responsibilities represent a significant workload and some workload guidelines should be considered for these positions.

Institutional Effectiveness: COA has a strong culture of self-governance and participation of all constituencies in College affairs. There is an ongoing discussion and evaluation of governance that continues at College of the Atlantic. The discussions up to this time have occurred within the respective governing group, the All College Meeting, the Deans Team, or Board of Trustees. It is an opportune time for inter-group discussion and evaluation. The President can play a pivotal role in guiding these conversations and ensuring that the governing bodies are allied with one another.

4. The Academic Program

The College of the Atlantic's (COA) distinctive undergraduate academic program is consistent with its mission and leads to a single degree, the Bachelor's of Arts in Human Ecology. The College clearly specifies and publishes degree objectives and requirements for this highly flexible program, which include the knowledge, intellectual skills, and depth of understanding to be acquired upon completion of the degree. The curriculum is overseen effectively by the faculty and academic administration, principally through the Academic Affairs Committee.

COA's commitment to institution-wide participation in all matters, academic and otherwise, provides a strong cultural as well as structural basis for academic program oversight and innovation. The All College Meeting (ACM) provides access to all campus constituencies to be heard and comment on any significant matter to come before COA, including curricular matters. The Academic Affairs Committee provides the primary oversight for curricular changes, course scheduling and monitoring of programmatic quality, and is made up of representatives from faculty, academic administration, the registrar, administrative services, career services, and students.

The single major at COA has clearly articulated goals, a structured progression of academic development, and multiple opportunities for student assessment and feedback. The program structure and expectations for students are clearly and consistently

presented in College publications, the catalog and on the website. There appear to be adequate, if limited, resources to support institutional programs and allow for innovation and change.

The individualized nature of the Human Ecology major provides for significant flexibility in the design of curricula by students. The quality of individual student programs is maintained by a high degree of faculty advising and curricular review. Protocols, approvals and review processes for internships, tutorials, final (senior) projects, and related academic options, are well established and overseen by the Academic Affairs Committee. The designation of academic “focus areas,” in which COA has particular strengths, also helps students to identify possible curricular paths.

COA provides a diversity of off-campus opportunities through its own programming and a number of consortium or cooperative agreements with other institutions and agencies. These opportunities include membership with other colleges in the ECO-League (permitting student exchanges), international programs taught by COA faculty, and ownership of two off-shore islands and an organic farm. Additional ethnic diversification of the student body has recently been provided through the Davis Scholars Program that brings foreign students to campus.

The narrative evaluations of most students’ academic work provide a significant source of information about programmatic success and is a valuable assessment tool. Although the narratives vary in length and depth, the cumulative impact is to provide a comprehensive, detailed record of a student’s achievements and development over their time at COA.

The high student rankings in the NSSE (at or near the top national 10%) provide strong, external validation of the degree of student engagement at COA, further supporting the success of faculty in delivering a academic experience that not only serves the students well but clearly matches the institution’s stated mission. Additional supporting data are provided in the high quality of the senior Final Projects and successful placement in careers and grad schools after graduation.

The COA curriculum consists of courses, that each receive equivalent credit (one course = one credit). Each student must pass 36 one credit experiences to graduate. Ten to eleven of these are “general education” and include one course each in human ecology, history, quantitative reasoning; two courses each in “resource areas” of environmental sciences, arts and design, and human studies; and one writing class or two writing-focused classes. In addition, all students must complete a writing portfolio, an internship, human ecology essay, community service and a final project. The remainder of the curriculum is student-designed, in consultation with academic advisor(s). The general education requirements appear to be well-integrated into the overall curriculum and appear well-adapted to the interdisciplinary focus of COA.

Although there is general satisfaction with the curriculum as a whole, faculty and others recognize that this may be an opportune time for the comprehensive review, which will

be initiated in 2008. Questions of interest include: How might retention be improved (see Standard 6)? What type of student is a “best fit” for COA? How does COA respond to the changing higher education landscape? How will faculty control their work load? Some faculty are uncertain about the impact of a proposed “four season” curriculum that would significantly expand summer programming.

Graduate Program: COA has a small graduate program culminated in a Masters of Philosophy in Human Ecology. Enrollment is limited to ten students, spread over two years. Requirements include nine courses specifically selected for the student’s focus and a thesis. There are no separate graduate courses, and students select their nine required courses from among the available intermediate or upper level undergraduate courses (typically taken in the first year). Up to a maximum of three transfer credits may be accepted. An investigative research thesis is required. Grad students are expected to maintain a B grade in these classes and are typically required to complete additional course requirements beyond those of the undergrads.

Prospective graduate students appear to be closely matched, by the Associate Dean for Advanced Studies, with at least two appropriate faculty sponsors before being admitted to the program. Faculty sponsors are typically selected from among the full-time undergraduate faculty and later will become part of a larger thesis advisory team. Although limited in amount, institutional financial support includes discounted tuition and teaching assistantships (after one semester). Program requirements are clearly described in COA publications. Thesis quality and academic oversight by the advisors and thesis committees appear appropriate for graduate level work. Although there is some disagreement among faculty about the appropriateness of a graduate program at COA, the institutional commitment to the program was reaffirmed in 2005. There is no formal plan to grow the program or to adjust faculty workload, a significant issue at COA, to supervise graduate students.

COA offers teacher certification through the state of Maine in Elementary Education, and Secondary Education in Life Science, Social Studies, and English Language Arts. This program was successfully reaccredited in 2006.

Integrity in the Award of Academic Credit: Although the faculty continue to discuss the detailed meaning of a degree in Human Ecology, the curricular standards and oversight processes, primarily through the Academic Affairs Committee (AAC) and the Academic Dean’s office, appear to be effective in assuring a high quality curriculum that is consistent with the COA mission.

Course descriptions are available in the catalog and online and present a realistic listing of curricular offerings. A recent policy change to eliminate any course not taught in three years serves to maintain the currency of this list. The course schedule is available online, although registration is still a paper process, with plans for piloting electronic registration in 2008. Students register one semester at a time. There are some student concerns about the slow feedback on registration status and slow turnaround time for narrative evaluations.

Students complete course evaluations for every completed course, in addition to a required mid-term oral evaluation with the course instructor. Students also have the opportunity to provide a self-evaluation as part of the faculty member's evaluation for a course; both become part of the student's academic record.

Grading standards are clearly stated in the College catalog, and course syllabi are expected to clearly articulate learning goals and evaluative criteria, although these were not always evident in example syllabi. Syllabi generally provide evidence of college-level standards and expectations, and course narrative evaluations document meeting of those standards.

COA accepts for transfer up to 18 credits in a variety of examination or experience categories. Acceptance of such credits is determined by the Registrar in consultation with appropriate faculty or the Academic Dean. COA does not offer online courses.

Standards for Satisfactory Academic Progress are clearly stated in the COA catalog, with clear policies for failure to meet the standards, which are administered by the Academic Probation Officer. Academic dishonesty cases, which are rare, are administered by the Academic Dean.

Assessment of Student Learning: Assessment of student learning occurs primarily through the faculty narrative evaluations required of all courses (letter grades are optional), review of the writing portfolio, evaluations of internships and the final project, and the human ecology essay. Because of the single academic program, these evaluations apply to all students, across the institution. Forms and formats for these evaluations are largely standardized, and a writing rubric was recently developed for consistent evaluation by different faculty.

There is some concern about the low student compliance with the relatively new writing portfolio requirement, begun in Fall 2004; compliance was 34% for students entering their third year in Fall 2007. The recognition of its importance and the subsequent development of a new writing evaluation process is one example of faculty response to a perceived problem. As stated in the self-study, the College "recognizes the need to increase general understanding of the portfolio requirement among both students and advisors." (P. 28)

The variety of approaches to student learning are evident in the course syllabi, the diversity of learning opportunities available and required (e.g., community service, internships), and the range of student-selected courses and final projects. These multiple options are consistent with the interdisciplinary, engaged approach articulated in the COA learning goals, and result in a variety of feedback to students. The frequency and detail of narrative feedback and close working relationships with faculty appear to facilitate and support a flexible yet rigorous curriculum. Such feedback to students also provides a detailed, if complex, data base for assessing the success of COA and its Human Ecology program.

The success of the COA curriculum is also supported by external evaluations, such as the education certification, NSSE, the successful placement of graduates, and the ability of COA to secure outside grants from a variety of public and private funders to support both research and programming.

The last self-study and more recent alumni conversations and surveys, as noted in the self-study, showed some disagreement among alumni about maintaining Human Ecology as the sole COA program. The 2007 self-study reaffirms this focus, stating that fixed majors would not contribute to the student-designed curriculum. The commitment of faculty to begin a comprehensive review of the curriculum in 2008 is both a reflection of strength of the program as well as recognition of the value of systematic assessment.

Institutional Effectiveness: The College of the Atlantic assessment of the quality, integrity and effectiveness of its academic programs appears well-suited to its distinctive mission and culture of institution-wide engagement of all College constituencies. The evaluation system has yet to be tied to the six educational goals. The personal commitment of these constituencies, the depth of the evaluative feedback to students, and continuing willingness to address perceived weaknesses, provide a strong basis for maintaining and improving the academic program at COA.

5. Faculty

The College of the Atlantic (COA) employs 30 full-time and part-time (1/2, 2/3, 3/4) faculty on contracts of 3-5 years. Three lecturers also have 2-3 year appointments. Part-time faculty are appointed as Visiting (have taught 2 or fewer courses at COA) or as Adjunct faculty (taught more than two courses) and are hired on a per-course basis. All full-time faculty have terminal degrees while most part-time faculty have Masters or higher degrees. There are no faculty ranks and no tenure. Guidelines for the appointment and renewal of faculty are clearly described in the Faculty Personnel Manual.

The number, qualifications and diversity of COA faculty appear appropriate for the interdisciplinary environmental focus of the Human Ecology major. The student: faculty ratio is approximately 10:1, and has remained relatively constant over recent years. Full-time faculty have approximately 8-10 advisees with a range of 7-27), although there may be considerable variation among individual faculty members. Student surveys, particularly NSSE, indicate that most are happy with their advisor performance, with some few exceptions.

The normal faculty teaching load is six courses per year (two each over three terms), although five per year is much more common, due to the administrative duties of most of faculty (i.e., committees). Although committee service is largely voluntary, there is an almost universal expectation and willingness among faculty to assume the necessary responsibilities. In fact, Faculty who teach five courses per year are required to serve on a

committee, usually a major committee, and this is the norm. Faculty may also have significant other responsibilities for advising, internships, independent studies or senior projects, for which they do not receive additional compensation. A recent review of faculty workload indicated considerable variation in the distribution of these responsibilities among faculty, but no specific recommendations for resolving apparent inequities have yet been made.

Although there are a few undergraduate and graduate teaching assistants who work with specific faculty, these students typically do not have significant responsibilities for providing instruction.

The faculty appointment process clearly outlined in the Academic Affairs Charter includes the broad engagement of campus community members, and has been demonstrably successful in recruiting and retaining qualified faculty who are committed to the unique COA curriculum.

Faculty compensation is a concern. Since 1995 the COA Board of Trustees has endorsed a goal for faculty salaries to reach the national average for all baccalaureate institutions: an ambitious goal that is not yet within reach due to COA's financial constraints. Current full-time salaries range from \$40,000 to \$75,000, with a mean of approximately \$59,000 (vs. a national baccalaureate mean of \$61,951 in 2006-7). The Board has committed to establishing a \$5M compensation fund (\$1,000,000 has been raised) to raise faculty salaries. Despite this, the College has been largely able to fill its vacant faculty positions with qualified faculty, although rapidly rising housing costs in the Bar Harbor areas are a significant concern and will be a factor in recruitment.

Faculty also regularly participate in on-campus workshops on pedagogy and assessment. A total of \$8,500 per year is available for faculty development support for a variety of activities. Additional funds are available for international travel, and some endowed chairs provide professional development support. Funds also are available, by application, from the academic dean and a new presidential fund for conference attendance, equipment, special travel or other professional development activities. Faculty members seem to make good use of these resources. Some faculty do significant original research work and several have secured outside grant funding.

Faculty become eligible for a one-term sabbatical at full pay after nine terms (three years) of teaching. Faculty also have the option to accrue sabbatical time by postponing an initial sabbatical so that it the sabbatical period can be extended beyond one term at a later date.

Faculty evaluation criteria are outlined in the Faculty Personnel Manual. Dossiers submitted for reappointment of faculty include syllabi, student evaluations, a self-assessment, recommendations from colleagues, and detailed explanations of how the candidate meets the expectations of teaching, advising, college service, scholarly activity and academic service beyond the immediate college community. Faculty reviews are overseen by the Faculty Personnel Committee (FPC), which is a subcommittee of the

COA Personnel Committee. A Review Committee of faculty, including a FPC representative, and at least one student, is appointed for each candidate for review and their recommendation is presented to the FPC. As a result of some faculty concerns about the consistency of FPC actions, elections are now being used to determine membership (vs. volunteers) and a training packet for new members has been developed. Some faculty questioned the purpose of the review, along with the time commitment necessary to conduct thorough reviews.

Instruction methods, as evidenced by course syllabi, are diverse, varied and often interdisciplinary, in keeping with the Human Ecology curriculum and mission of COA. Innovative approaches to instruction are encouraged and supported by the institution. The required narrative evaluation of students in all courses provides detailed feedback on student performance. Students can opt to receive grades when they register for courses. The cumulative student transcripts provide a comprehensive record of student accomplishments over their time at COA as well as the evidentiary base for curricular effectiveness. Additional strong assessment evidence is found in the required student internship reports, Final Project reports and the Human Ecology Essay.

The consistent high ratings by students of engagement measures in the NSSE survey also suggest evidence of successful student advising, although there is currently no systematic system for assessing the advising of individual faculty members outside of the regular faculty review. The structure and goals of the COA curriculum are clearly described in publications and a variety of evidence indicates the curriculum is well executed.

COA is primarily an undergraduate teaching institution where instruction, student advising and institution service are highly valued, and this is reflected in its faculty evaluation standards. While faculty research and scholarship are encouraged and supported, particularly through the small graduate program, such work is not a primary measure for faculty success at COA.

Institutional Effectiveness: A variety of evidence indicates that COA faculty are demonstrably successful in maintaining and delivering their distinctive Human Ecology program and engaging the students they serve. The current willingness of the faculty to begin a comprehensive review of that program, and a record of prior adjustments, indicate a capacity for their own professional and curricular advancement as well as a renewed commitment to the mission of COA.

6. Students

Admissions: One of the major concerns reported in last reaccreditation visit at the College of the Atlantic (COA) was the dual reporting structure of admission counselors and student service staff members. This issue has been addressed by COA with the separation of the leadership in student life and admissions, with separate staff reporting in each area. The college has also promoted both the director of student life and director of admissions to deanships and they now serve as part of the senior administrative team at

the College. The new structure has allowed for greater concentration and focused attention in each of these key areas of the College. Furthermore, in keeping with the spirit of community inclusiveness and shared governance structures within the College, all undergraduate applications are evaluated, and decisions on acceptance are made by the admissions committee, consisting of the dean of admission (chair), the admissions counselors, the associate dean of student life, two- three faculty members and up to three students.

This fall COA enrolled 104 new students; and increase of eight new students from fall 2006. This includes 13 students, including two US citizens, from the Davis United World Scholars Program grant. Total enrollment for the fall term is at 328 FTE's, a modest growth from FY 06/07 where enrollment was 320 FTE. The issue of enrollment growth and "what is the right size" for the COA are currently under discussion, and opinions on size and strategy for growth significantly varies greatly amongst the College's multiple constituencies.

COA's current size and location, which together represent a significant plus for the College, are coupled with being a niche school offering a singular degree with tremendous flexibility for individualized course of study. These perceived strengths can also present some challenges in recruiting students. This awareness has led to innovative marketing and recruitment strategies coordinated by the Admissions Office to attract the "right students" to the College. Notable, and highly successful, is COA's Presidential Scholars' Fly-In program that, literally, provides prospective students, based on their written submission to participate in program, airfare and lodging as well as a four-day in-depth visit to the College. During the FY 06/07 recruiting season, 29 students from around the country participated and 14 enrolled for the fall term.

Approximately 70% of COA students receive need-based aid, and COA is one of less than 300 U.S. colleges and universities that meet more than 98% of total need. Overall, 85% of students receive financial assistance, with an overall discount rate of 35%. COA conducted an independent investigation of its financial aid practice and is to be commended for the steps recently taken to ensure that its financial aid packaging is purposeful, transparent and readily available to its students and families.

As noted in the self-study and through meeting with members of the community, an on-going challenge for COA will be net tuition. COA is aware of the need to continue its monitoring of data on sensitivity levels for price, discounting, and financial aid. It is too early to tell if the strategy employed in 2006 of limiting the size of aid packages to the most "lowly ranked" students in the admission process will have an impact.

COA has diversified its student body through its relationship with the Davis United World Scholars Program. The presence and impact of different cultures is notable on campus. COA is truly internationalized and this is one of its current strengths. However, the longevity of this program is unknown, and its cessation would dramatically affect the composition of the student body as well as have a negative impact on the College's finances. Currently, 2% of COA's student population consists of domestic students of

color. The College understands what a challenge it is to achieve greater racial and ethnic diversity beyond what is provided by international students, especially given its location.

Retention and Graduation: COA's current six-year graduation rate is 59%. Retention from first to second year for the class entering in 2006-7 (the class of 2011) was 84%. Multiple initiatives focused on retaining student first year have proven successful. The College reports that attrition is happening primarily between the 2nd into 3rd year of study. For example, COA shared that in FY 06-07 retention for the class of 2009 was just 65%. Students and staff attribute this phenomenon to finances, a student's desire for a professional degree, and/or loss of connection and motivation to complete one's studies. COA does not have a plan, currently, to address retention issues for student from the 2nd to 3rd year of study.

However, to address overall retention and graduation issues, the College received a Maine Educational Loan Marketing Corporation (MELMAC) grant in 2004, and has begun to implement some of the strategies outlined in the grant. The focus of these new initiatives is to reengage students not only into their course of study, but with the College community as a whole. As implementation is still in its infancy, it remains too soon to tell if the programs will be successful. Careful study, both qualitative and quantitative, will help the College measure success as well as to refine the plan.

Student Services: The recent restructuring of student life to an independent department, under the umbrella of the Academic Dean, is a critical move in enhancing the students' co-curricular experience. The department is in transition as well in the midst of a paradigm shift from a strict service-based model to a contemporary model of a co-curricular, learning-based approach. This transition will take time, but the department is clearly on the right pathway to realization.

COA's Student Life department, although thinly-staffed and modestly funded, provides student with the all the standard services expected for a College of its size.

Health and counseling services are offered through contracts with outside agencies. COA does not have intercollegiate athletic programs; however, students remain active through self-directed fitness opportunities such as hiking, kayaking, and use of the local YMCA, for which each student has a free membership.

New students are welcomed to COA through its outdoor orientation program (OOPs), in which the student must choose to participate. This fall, 65% of new students participated in this program. All students participate in a campus-based program that is pedagogically consistent with the classroom experience, i.e., small discussion groups, focused learning, other low-risk experiential learning opportunities.

Two construction projects underway will dramatically change the student life experience at COA. The first is the renovation/conversion of a facility originally designated to be demolished into a student center. This facility will provide enhanced space for health and counseling services, gathering space for students, and a consolidation of the student life

staff that is currently isolated in different buildings throughout campus. The second project is the construction of a 51-bed residence village. In its design and multiple environmental efficiencies, this building will serve an example of COA's commitment to sustainability. At present, approximately 35% (mostly first-year students) of COA's students reside on campus; the remaining must secure rental properties in the Bar Harbor community. The construction of the new residence village means that the number of returning students living on campus will increase from 15% to 30%. There has been no indication that additional staffing, outside of resident assistants, will be added to the student life department, to manage the growth.

Institutional Effectiveness: Several new and innovative initiatives in both student life and admissions are either in their early stages of design or implementation. Strategies to allocate student aid that maintains a commitment to affordable education while encouraging the matriculation of highly qualified are attended to regularly.

At the present time, COA does not have a comprehensive approach to assessing the effectiveness of student services. Participation in NSSE is a step in the right direction, but is limited. The College has a good Crisis Management Plan for addressing large-scale, catastrophic events, but no written plans to address events of a different scale such as an outbreak of meningitis, or the death of a student. These events, while not as dramatic as a natural or man-made disaster, still can have a profound effect on the campus community. The need for a Pandemic Flu plan was noted in the self-study and a plan is due in 2008.

Finally, the College is depending on its strong relationship with the Davis United World Scholars Program to achieve its international focus as well as more racial and ethnic diversity. It needs a plan to respond should that support cease.

7. Library and Other Information Resources

The Thorndike Library is conveniently located in the center of the campus occupying the entire second floor of Kaelber Hall and available to students seven days a week. The spacious reading room, with scenic views and an expansive balcony, provide quality study space. The ambiance of the reading room is in direct contrast to the two overcrowded adjacent areas where offices, circulation desk, computers, audio-visual equipment and other supplies and services are located. An examination of the use of this space as part of campus planning is suggested.

The library holdings, including electronic data bases and journals, are sufficient for student and faculty use, largely due to the cooperative arrangement with Maine digital library and interlibrary loans. Faculty requests for books are reviewed with the librarian and purchased when funds are available. One area of the book collection needs improvement since there are substantially fewer holdings for the humanities and social sciences than for other disciplines.

Two new services were recently added to the Library - archives and media services. An archival data management system is in the early stages of development and materials are stored in boxes in an overcrowded section of the library. As COA approaches its fortieth anniversary, the proper management and retrieval of historical records (of all types) will become increasingly important. The temperature and air quality of the area where the archives are currently located should be examined to ensure that important historical documents are preserved.

Media services is an active and growing area as more classrooms become equipped with media and related technologies. The collaborative work between the Library and Information Technology has increased significantly. The two areas work well together and despite the challenges of space, location and limited funds provide excellent services to the College community.

Records indicate that use of the library is high. The appropriate ratio of professional librarians may need to be reviewed. The library and its staff are pivotal to the individualized nature of the COA curriculum. This standard requires that some level of student assessment is performed that “demonstrates students use information resources and technology as an integral part of their education, attaining levels of proficiency appropriate theirfield of study”. (7.8) The Director of the Library is aware of this requirement and anticipates that an assessment plan will be forthcoming as a component of the academic program review process.

During an especially frugal period for COA, it is understandable that the library’s budget experienced reductions. It is the visiting committee’s understanding that there is a restricted endowment fund for the library, but that earnings from that endowment allocated to the library have been static. In light of recent overall endowment earnings, a closer examination of the library’s endowment earnings might provide another avenue for needed library funds.

The level and quality of the Information Technology services is very good. Even amidst budgetary constraints funding continues for needed upgrades and infrastructure improvements. A significant upgrade to the College’s enterprise system will occur this year. In addition to faculty and staff benefiting from this upgrade, students will have online capabilities to register for courses and view their grades and bills. Professional development activities are vitally important for this area and funds to support the staff in this area should be explored.

Institutional Effectiveness: Both the Library and Information Technology areas regularly review the needs of the College in order to provide adequate service. Additionally the Directors are acutely aware of the specific operational needs of the departments.

8. *Physical and Technological Resources*

The College of the Atlantic's ideal location on the Maine's Mt. Desert Island is consistent with its educational goals to provide opportunity for participatory learning, ecological knowledge and community service. As also noted in the *College of the Atlantic: A Campus Plan*, the College's location in Bar Harbor Maine supports its mission by allowing many of the College's academic programs and projects to work in formal and informal partnerships with town, state and federal agencies and conservation organizations throughout Maine and beyond.

The 35 acres-plus campus has 2,000 feet of shoreline and is easily accessible to the main highway and Acadia National Park. The College resides on the site of six former summer estates. Classrooms, student activities, academic and administrative offices and related functions are housed in 20 main buildings and several other secondary structures.

Significant progress has been made in facilities planning. In 2002 there was a Campus Master Plan developed in service of the College's institutional mission. The stated purpose of the plan was to help meet the increasing challenges of facilities maintenance; address current and future facility needs; integrate the campus in accordance with academic aims; yield a format for rational capital budgeting and to create a long-range campus-wide vision to guide future development and facility management.

Planning Principles articulated in the report were to:

1. Sustain the educational mission of the College of the Atlantic.
2. Promote interaction and integration of College constituencies and activities.
3. Support an interactive approach to learning and teaching.
4. Develop the campus as a learning laboratory.

In the last self study the College stated that the existing classroom space was inadequate and since the 1997 report, the College has made a number of acquisitions and renovations to its existing facilities with the goal of expanding the campus grounds and buildings. These improvements include: the addition of the Davis International Center and carriage house, which was renovated for faculty offices, classrooms and meeting rooms; Ryles, which has provided some student housing and a student recreation room and will be renovated as the Deering Common student center; and the Witchcliff Estate, property adjacent to the existing campus, which was acquired and converted to five offices and two classrooms. In addition, the old buildings and grounds headquarters was renovated and converted to two art studios and two offices.

As a result of these changes, classes are now offered in 28 different locations throughout the campus, six of which are new since the last site visit. The classrooms are appropriately equipped and adequate in capacity. The College ensures that the facilities are constructed and maintained in accordance with health and safety regulations and have taken appropriate ecological and environmental concerns into account. In its use of building materials, modes of heating and lighting and cleaning products, facilities managers demonstrate that the College is true to its ecological mission, taking substantive

measures to ensure operations that are environmentally sound and sustainable. The College employs a sustainability coordinator to coordinate these values throughout the institution.

In summary, facilities and grounds acquisition and expansion have been significant over the past ten years, well planned and within the context of the educational needs of the College and in support of the commitment to sustainability.

The director of campus planning, buildings and public safety directs space planning and acquisitions, budgets, capital planning, and construction projects, and directs the maintenance of the institution's facilities with a professional staff of ten employees. Their functions cover custodial care, grounds and building maintenance, and security. In addition, 30-40 work-study students support the professional staff and three to five seasonal employees are hired for the summer.

The director carries out his duties with a strong sense of the College's mission and a healthy grasp of management's need to balance funding priorities between educational initiatives and facilities maintenance requirements. The director has completed a Deferred Maintenance Study, outlining a need of \$4.5 million, which is used as the basis from which the College's administration is able to prioritize vital repairs and schedule those initiatives through its budgetary and fundraising planning models. These issues were included in the budget process starting in 2007-08 and are being considered in the distribution of proceeds of a new bond issue application that is currently underway.

If student enrollment is to grow, the College recognizes the need to expand the dining facility, classrooms and office space. Immediate facilities projections include additional new student housing by fall 2008 and significant improvement to the campus landscape by summer 2008.

In addition to the physical plant upgrades outlined, many technological enhancements have been made since 1997. Major technological upgrades include increasing high-speed internet access campus-wide, ensuring internet access to all classrooms, installing a firewall, adding video-conferencing capacity, implementing a CAMS student record relational data base system, extending a wireless network throughout the campus and significantly upgrading the entire phone system.

The College received a grant in June 2007 to upgrade the CAMS system to allow the introduction of web-based technology for on-line accessibility for faculty, staff and students and have plans to institute online registration by fall, 2008. Further, this added capability will allow staff to use report writing tools and to create data driven analysis for strategic enrollment planning.

Institutional Effectiveness: Facilities and IT professional staff are highly effective in clearly defining priorities within limited budgetary resources and in reviewing, expanding, enhancing and maintaining the physical plant and technological resources in support of the educational mission of the College.

9. Financial Resources

As noted in the 1998 accreditation letter, College of the Atlantic made extraordinary improvements in the financial condition of the College during the preceding period and was commended at that time for its increased financial stability, particularly in the area of increases in fees and tuition, gifts, grants and increases to the endowment. The results led to modest surpluses to the Operating Unrestricted Net Asset fund (Operating Fund), thus further building up the ability to respond to unexpected circumstances.

A summary of the College's audited balance sheet and operating budget over the ten-year period ending 2007 indicated that net assets grew from \$12.2 million to \$27.7 million. The endowment grew from \$5.1 million to \$17.5 million and the plant increased from \$6.4 million to \$10.8 million. Tuition and fees over the period grew from \$4 million to nearly \$8 million, with the corresponding net tuition growing at an annualized rate of 8.5%.

Thus in the ensuing 10 years ending in 2007, the College of the Atlantic continued to see growth in the enrollment yielding increased net tuition revenue, increases in grants and greater participation in unrestricted and restricted giving. The 10-year analysis of revenue and expenses ending June 30, 2007, showed continued increases in revenue and also reflected matching increases in expenses, with most years resulting in small surpluses until 2005.

These results were due in part to strong efforts by management to recover costs through grants and fundraising, efforts that yielded a significant increase in the endowment, and in more recent years, the receipt of grant funding for program, space expansion, technology infrastructure and expansion of the administrative system. In addition, the College was diligent in allocating available resources toward its educational mission, resulting in greater increases in educational and student services, space improvements and the hire of vitally needed staff and faculty. Other cost increases were seen in areas such as fringe benefits and fuel costs, areas not under the control of the institution.

A major setback for the Operating Fund balance occurred during the period 2000-2002 that was related to a draw down of cash related to a construction project. Unexpected cost overruns on the construction of the George B. Dorr Museum of Natural History combined with a short-fall in expected capital fundraising created a cash reduction of \$2,000,000 against the Operating fund. The ensuing years ending with 2005 did not see a recovery of the resulting deficit in the Unrestricted Net Assets and at the end of 2007 it remains at approximately \$900,000.

In 2005, the Board recognized that it was strategically important to strengthen two major sources of revenue for the operating budget, raising the student body to 300 FTE and enhancing the support for the annual fund. It was at this point the College saw the management of its finances as being in a state of transition. The next three budget cycles 2006 to 2008, saw increased "capacity building" expenditures to strengthen the investments in the admissions department, the development department, the College

website and various publications designed to expand awareness of the College. They then launched a corresponding “capacity building” development campaign to cover these additional expenditures. The Trustees also approved a special draw over a three-year period from the return on the endowment, adding 2-3% to the normal authorized annual 5% endowment fund spending to support the operating fund.

The current transitional period is also characterized by changes in several key leadership positions, including the president, director of development, director of admissions and previously, the chief financial officer. New capacity is strengthening the financial management, admissions and development efforts of the College.

On the revenue side, in addition to modest enrollment increases, net tuition increases and projected increases in the annual fund yield surpluses are planned that will reduce the level of the special endowment draw down each year ending in 2009.

In summary, the current budget forecasts that within the three years ending June 30, 2009 the draw from the endowment will return to its traditional 5% level, and that the strengthening of key revenue sources will ensure solid balanced budget and financial stability to achieve the College’s educational objectives and further its institutional improvements.

The College is currently planning to secure \$6 million in tax-exempt bond financing to support the capital expenses for additional student housing (\$4M), the renovation of Dearing Common (\$1M), major deferred maintenance issues (\$500K) and investments in energy conservation measures such as insulation and boiler replacements (\$500K) as authorized by the COA Trustees on July 28, 2007.

Some difficulties that COA could face in the above scenario include: deferred maintenance on aging facilities, turnover of staff requiring training and recruitment costs, lost opportunities or delayed implementation of needed new initiatives caused by staff vacancies, or other unexpected developments that can negatively affect revenue or increase expenses.

The farm and two research stations are significant assets and also require more fiscal planning to determine how they will contribute to the College’s future.

The budget model developed for the next three year period, (the first such multi-year financial plan) has contingencies embedded, which if not used could see a recovery of \$1.4M of the operating deficit, bringing the College to a modest operating net asset surplus of \$500,000. Beyond the contingencies built into the operating budgets that perhaps could relieve the shortage of Operating Reserves, there is little fallback for the College to recover from such financial setbacks. Management of the College has shown a tenacity and agility in managing to unexpected events. Even so, the budget models that rely on significant increases in development activity, both unrestricted and endowed, combined with growth in net tuition, are close to the margin and threaten the use of the

contingencies, further delaying the building of the operating reserves needed to fully stabilize the financial position of the College.

A thorough review of the audited financial statements for the Fiscal Year ended June 30 2005 and 2006 revealed that the long-term donor investments are classified as permanently restricted. In speaking with the financial staff at the College it was determined that a some of these investments are possibly misclassified and could properly be classified as unrestricted, or quasi-restricted to Board spending discretion. The staff is in the process of a thorough analysis of these funds to determine if a reclassification is in order. If after legal and accounting review it were found to be the case, the reclassification may increase the stability of the financial position of the College.

Institutional Effectiveness: With upgraded finance team in place the College has expanded and refined its financial reporting analysis in support of the many initiatives underway. Dashboard statistics drawn from financial records are systematically developed and distributed widely. The College closes its books monthly, analyzes transactions and reports to ensure accuracy and consistency in classifications. COA is actively using all tools at its disposal, including three-year budgeting, to overcome its deficit and create more financial stability. One goal must be to build an operating reserve against the not unusual ups and downs of a small institution that occur when enrollment, grants and fund raising fluctuate or the College has emergency needs.

10. Public Disclosure

COA uses its website as the primary portal to inform the public and other constituencies about itself. The College also regularly publishes and makes available for distribution, updated view books, course catalogs, student handbooks, and admissions applications brochures, and a financial aid brochure with in-depth information for those who need it. The information is clearly and attractively presented and allows students and prospective students to make informed decisions about their education.

The catalog, published annually, presents information on admissions and attendance, transfer credit, information relative to fees, transfer credits, refunds policies, withdrawal policies, academic programs policies, procedures and degree requirements, and expected educational outcomes. The College includes in its current publication only those courses that have been taught within the last three years. Rules about student conduct are presented in the Student Handbook. The catalog describes the institution consistent with its mission, but it was noted that the mission statement text slightly departs from the text presented on other forms of published information, including the website.

While the annual report and the view book tell the reader what publications are available on request, the website is silent about obtaining such information as the most recent audited financial statement or summary thereof. In addition, the College has not

published on the website or in other referenced publications the expected amount of student debt upon graduation.

All printed publications, as well as the website, are attractive in design, are of high quality, and present an accurate and consistent image that underscores the mission and vision of the College.

Another source of information for prospective students and their families to gain additional insight into the College's academic and social offerings comes from the campus tour and interview. Students are strongly encouraged to visit campus, attend classes and meet with faculty. Most tours are led by a current student and some prospective students also meet with alumni.

The College is aware that it must expand the dissemination of its story to the outside world. The College is often on the cutting edge of sustainability and environmental movements for college campuses but it does have a broad enough media footprint to broadcast its message and accomplishments. Among the College of the Atlantic's planning goals is to increase the College's visibility locally, regionally and internationally (in support of much-needed additional marketing efforts undertaken by admissions, development and the president's office.) Initial steps to improve branding and market visibility are currently underway.

Institutional Effectiveness: The College has been diligent in following up on the accuracy and effectiveness of its publications. Using student surveys and the publications committee as a filter for community feedback, the College ensures accurate and relevant information to all its constituencies. The attractive written materials, brochures, publications and website clearly and cohesively articulate the mission and the vision of the College of the Atlantic.

11. Integrity

COA undertook its self-study with an impressive level of depth, honesty and openness. COA manages its affairs in the true spirit of this standard and continually seeks ways to act in a responsible and ethical manner with all its constituencies and in its operation of the College. An unquestionable level of respect, reverence, buy-in, and commitment to the principles of democratic governance established by the founders of COA, by students, faculty, and staff is infused throughout the self-study, as well as experienced throughout the site visit.

By its own admission, COA is challenged with increasing domestic diversity within its staff and student body. However, despite this demographic challenge, the College continues to seek opportunities to provide its students with exposure to different cultures, and to provide educational and/or experiential learning opportunities that expand the students' world views.

Evidenced in the self-study, the NEASC process prompted revisions, additions, discussions, and reflection on current practices, policies and procedures. As such, policy manuals, handbooks, and operating procedures have been updated and are in compliance with the standards set forth by NEASC, and local, State and Federal governmental agencies. The Personnel Committee appears to be active and functioning well within its range of responsibilities. While the College has made all the necessary adjustments to meet what is required, there was no indication of a systematic and/or periodic review in place for personnel policies. Furthermore, rather than having one individual managing all personnel related items, the responsibilities are diffused throughout the campus.

The College's mission and the student handbook outline clear expectations for students. Students are asked to partner with the College in an academic life that values others' points of view, respects the environment, provides emotional and physical safety for all members of the community, and adheres to the standards of academic honesty and personal integrity. Students who benefit from these values will indeed "achieve individual fulfillment and to help solve problems that challenge communities everywhere."

COA further demonstrates compliance to this standard in its commitment to shared governance through its standing committees and inclusive participatory process in decision-making. The fact that COA commits one day per week, specifically designed for discussions of matters relating to the operation of the College, is unique. Though the governance model is sometimes cited as cumbersome in gaining consensus, the belief is that the final decisions made make for a stronger community. The All College Meeting (ACM) gives all members of the COA community, regardless of their standing at the College, the opportunity to learn, advocate, and participate in enhancing their own community.

The truest testament to the integrity existing within COA comes from its students who clearly stated that the College never misrepresented itself in its admission process and that the College repeatedly delivers on the promises made in providing them a solid educational experience. Students' interactions with administrative offices and faculty at the College have been exceptionally positive and they are treated with respect as well as afforded a high level of confidentiality and privacy in dealing with personal matters.

Institutional Effectiveness: COA, by design and mission, exemplifies the spirit and intent of this standard. In practice, the members of COA continue to embrace the guiding philosophies of the founders and view its mode of operation as what makes COA unique and special. Community members are seeking clarity from its leadership to where the College will move next. Additionally, while the College has made all the necessary adjustments to meet what is required, there is no indication of a systematic and/or periodic review in place for policy manuals or operating practices.

Institutional Effectiveness Summary:

College of the Atlantic has developed numerous ways to assess its academic program, based on its teaching-intensive model, highly participatory students, and its human ecology focus. The faculty evaluations of student learning in courses, faculty evaluations, internship reports, writing portfolios, senior studies and other methods provide a depth of information about student progress. The use of NSSE and the high rate of students admitted to graduate school also demonstrate COA's effectiveness. These methods need to be more clearly tied to the six articulated educational goals. The Library and IT regularly review their services and manage priorities. College publications and web site are accurate and up-to-date; students clearly understand what to expect at COA.

Although the College culture promotes continual examination of programs, practices and plans, COA has developed fewer methods to design a regular planning process and ways to evaluate whether goals have been met. Program and management plans need to be accompanied by realistic financial plans. A number of financial stability ideas have yet to become part of a strategic plan that the administration and Trustees could then monitor. Some practices that seem inherent, such as the distribution of personnel responsibilities and the high expectations of work load for faculty and staff, would benefit from review and evaluation. Full-time faculty do not have tenure, yet it is rare not to see a contract renewed. There was discontent expressed with the five-year review process; its purpose could be reexamined and more closely tied to professional development objectives and support.

The powers of the administration, faculty, All College Meeting and the Board of Trustees act as a kind of check and balance system that keep COA constituencies communicating with each other. Some of the power is perceived and operates as a moral suasion, giving voice to those who want to participate. Although members of the community called for more clarity, close scrutiny of the governance model that serves the community well is not a high priority compared to other needs in planning and financial stability. The College shows integrity in its self-scrutiny and the openness of its procedures.

Summary

Strengths

College of the Atlantic has a strong, distinctive mission. The Board of Trustees is devoted to the mission and supports it strongly. The information about the College represents its purposes and programs clearly and well.

COA has many ways of assessing student learning that fit its student-centered and teaching-intensive model. Management of student affairs has improved and retention is beginning to be addressed.

There are numerous planning processes described in the self-study and a number of consultant reports to guide initiatives.

COA benefits from strong leadership and from dedicated faculty and staff who are imbued with mission and approach their work as “more than a job.”

Library and IT services enhance the functioning of the College.

Capital improvements are being made consistent with the College’s focus on environmental principles.

The College is now developing three-year budgets and aggressive fund raising strategies; it has invested in institutional capacity-building.

The College has a strong record in fund raising and attracting grants. Trustees are well informed and active in financial oversight; financial management is astute and adept.

Challenges

The Board still needs to define its governance and policy roles as contrasted with management’s operational responsibility, especially with the presence of a new president in whom trustees have expressed trust.

A major challenge for the College is to develop an overall institutional plan that brings together its many initiatives and provides a financial plan to support them, to establish priorities and time-lines for the various objectives, and ways to measure effectiveness. Retention planning should extend to the transition between the second and third year.

College constituencies expressed a desire for clearer and more consistent communication about the College’s many directions that are underway at this time, especially the “four seasons” idea. There remains some uncertainty about how the governance structure is working and about the flow of communication through the community.

The College leadership is aware of the need for improved salaries and professional development. Some more realistic salary goals and a time-line for achieving them would be motivating to both faculty and staff.

In the physical plant, there is still a large backlog of maintenance that needs to be addressed.

The operating deficit poses risks, especially if there is an unforeseen circumstance. COA needs to improve its financial reporting in some respects and to move to build a surplus in the net assets operating fund or to establish an unrestricted operating reserve fund.