

Report to
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, and Students
of
Lancaster Bible College
Lancaster, PA

Prepared following analysis of the institution's
Periodic Review Report

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Evaluation of the Periodic Review Report of Lancaster Bible College

I. Introduction

Lancaster Bible College is a non-denominational, private institution offering undergraduate and graduate degrees. It was founded in 1933 as Lancaster School of the Bible and first accredited by Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSCHE) in 1982. LBC is also accredited by The Association for Biblical Higher Education Commission on Accreditation (ABHE), and holds affiliate status with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). In addition, LBC is approved by the Association of Christian Schools International and is a member of the Evangelical Training Association. The mission of LBC is “to educate Christian students to think and live a biblical worldview, and to proclaim Christ by serving him in the Church and society.”

LBC’s Periodic Review Report (PRR; June 1, 2012) provides a thorough overview of the institution’s progress since its last decennial self-study and team visit (2007) and its subsequent progress letter (2009). The PRR is comprehensive, well-written, and transparent. It is impressively supported by appropriate documentation. The steering committee that oversaw the preparation of the PRR included representation from key campus offices, programs, and personnel (e.g., Institutional Effectiveness, Enrollment Management, Student Services, Advancement, Faculty, Graduate and Adult programs, Distance Learning, and Alumni Relations). Moreover, input and feedback was solicited and received from LBC’s broader constituent base (students, staff, faculty, trustees, corporation members, and alumni) by means of a full draft of the PRR being made available for comment on the LBC’s Institutional Effectiveness webpage.

II. Responses to Recommendations from the Previous Decennial Evaluation

LBC’s responses to the recommendations and suggestions of the 2007 visiting team are fully reported in the PRR. On the basis of this report, it is clear that the administration, staff, and faculty of LBC genuinely welcomed the self-study process as a means of institutional improvement and renewal.

LBC responded to seven formal recommendations of the visiting team. In addition, LBC documented its institutional responses to thirty-nine suggestions from the self-study, eleven of which were made both by the self-study and the visiting team, and twenty-eight that came from the visiting team alone (see Appendix 2-A, “Progress Report for the 2012 PRR”). The PRR carefully recounts LBC’s responses to the seven recommendations and the eleven joint suggestions. The report is clearly written with sufficient analysis so that readers can easily discern actions taken both before and after the 2009 progress letter, as well as work ongoing.

This section briefly summarizes LBC's responses to the seven recommendations of the visiting team. LBC affirmed all seven of the team's recommendations, each of them having been drawn from the areas for institutional improvement that it had already articulated in its self-study. In one form or another, the recommendations were overwhelmingly related to the need for greater clarity or more focused practices of assessment and evaluation.

Institutional Planning and Governance (Standards 2 and 4)

Three recommendations noted in the self-study and endorsed by the visiting team related to overarching processes of institutional planning and governance. In response, the LBC implemented a conflict of interest policy for the Board of Trustees, refined its planning and budgeting procedures so that the president's cabinet has greater hands-on oversight, and launched a new planning database to ensure that student learning outcomes are necessarily and directly linked to the strategic planning process.

Institutional Assessment and Assessment of Student Learning (Standards 7 and 14)

The visiting team offered four recommendations directly related to matters of assessment and evaluation. These four recommendations were clearly at the center of the LBC's self-study and were solidly endorsed and sharpened by the visiting team.

Two recommendations dealt with assessment of the institution as a whole. In response, a new standing Committee for Institutional Effectiveness was formed and Departmental Comprehensive Outcomes Assessment Plans were established for all program units. The readers are impressed with the careful, incremental, and organic nature of these responses. For example, the Committee for Institutional Effectiveness was originally formed in 2007 as the Committee for Institutional Research and Assessment, taking on its current designation in 2011 when it assumed additional responsibilities related to strategic planning. Also, it should be noted that Departmental Outcomes Assessment Plans are updated continuously with a formal review of each plan every two years, and a full program-level evaluation process every six years. Finally, a new position of Faculty Consultant is scheduled to be added in the 2013-2014 academic year. This proposed position will serve in the Office of Teaching Effectiveness to assist faculty in achieving program objectives and student learning outcomes regardless of the degree level or delivery system.

The readers commend LBC for its prompt, thoroughgoing, and sustainable responses to these matters.

The two remaining recommendations dealt with assessment of student learning. The burden of these recommendations was that the institution should incorporate additional assessment instruments and simplified procedures that will systematically document direct evidence of student achievement of institutional and program-level

student learning outcomes. Key elements of the College's response include the following:

- Adoption and implementation of an institution-wide Assessment Plan that includes a six-year cycle of assessment instruments, many of which are nationally-normed
- Adoption and implementation of Departmental Comprehensive Outcomes Assessment Plans
- Adoption and implementation of an Assessment Annotation Form whereby faculty report and analyze the use of course-embedded assessments
- Creation and maintenance of an Institutional Effectiveness website so that assessment materials for each program unit and institutional function are made available to the general public

It is clear that the College has made great strides since its self-study in making assessment and evaluation a regular part of the institutional culture. Additional assessment tools for direct evidence have been incorporated into LBC's continual assessment process, and the particular processes for direct and indirect measures are clearly indicated. The use of the Institutional Effectiveness website provides a high level of motivation and accountability to constituents and stakeholders. Assessment processes, results, and analysis is provided for the full range of assessment activities: Institutional Assessments, Academic Program Assessments, Academic Support Services Assessments, and Student Support Services Assessments. In addition, materials are provided for other key institutional effectiveness responsibilities, including institutional planning, accountability and compliance, and research activities.

*The readers commend LBC for its diligence in responding to the team recommendations of the self-study and **recommend** that the pattern of diligence outlined in the PRR be carefully maintained for the sake of the institution's continued vitality.*

III. Major Challenges and/or Opportunities

The challenges and opportunities noted in LBC's PRR are not unique, but are rather those that face virtually every North American institution of higher education today. They are primarily the challenges of maintaining missional faithfulness, fulfilling vision, and expanding programs—all of which must occur in the midst of difficult economic realities, the changing face of higher education, and the shifting cultural commitments of an institution's constituency base. While these challenges are common across higher education, LBC has adopted a bold plan through which it hopes to navigate them. Moreover, the institution faces the future with a strong track record in its recent past.

At the time of the 2007 self-study, LBC was only one year into its 2006-2011 Strategic Plan. The PRR and supporting materials document an impressive accomplishment of seventy-three percent of LBC's strategic goals for the period, with another sixteen

percent in process and still underway. These achievements strategically overlap LBC's current institutional focus: a comprehensive campaign known as LBC's *Transformational Vision Leading to a Preferred Future*, which includes "Eight Focus Areas of our Preferred Future." The *Preferred Future* document provides a robust vision for the institution and its "Eight Focus Areas" are the heart of the 2012-2015 Strategic Plan. It is important to note that this plan is not intended to be a comprehensive document that encompasses all of LBC's planning functions. Rather, these eight areas are seen as strategic to the advancement of the College and serve as the grid from which the president and cabinet make strategic decisions. Moreover, the eight areas—or opportunities—are tied directly to MSCHE Standards, as follows:

1. Maintain the Core—Traditional Undergraduate Education (Standards 11 and 14)
2. Expand Adult Education through the iLEAD Center (Standards 8, 11, 13 and 14)
3. Fund our Preferred Future (Standard 3)
4. Build Strategic Alliances (Standard 3)
5. Grow Online Programming (Standard 13 and 14)
6. Enhance Financial Strength (Standard 3)
7. Implement a Comprehensive Vertical Structure (Standards 5 and 7)
8. Assimilate Emerging Technologies Across Campus (Standards 3 and 13)

The actual term of the campaign component of the *Preferred Future* initiative is 2009-2012. At its centerpiece are major capital improvements: a new Student Learning Commons, substantial renovations to the library, a 120-bed addition to a dormitory, an addition to the athletic center, and a promenade connecting the chapel to the new student center. The plan also includes aggressive expansion of adult education offerings, distance learning programs, and the development of strategic alliances with theologically-compatible ministry organizations.

Based on the evidence of the PRR, LBC is only at the beginning stages of discerning the *particular* major challenges it faces in the coming years. A modified Delphi study was recently conducted with the president's cabinet in order to gain a sense of their collective wisdom regarding the most pressing challenges facing the institution. They arrived at fourteen different items and ranked them on a Likert-type scale in order of importance. Most of the items were operational or were challenges that are common to most institutions. However, the four items that were ranked at #1, or most important, offer particular insight into the collective mind of LBC's current leadership. These challenges were:

- Securing funding for the *Preferred Future* initiative
- Keeping pace with the changing face of ministry and the church
- Negotiating the shifting landscape of higher education, especially in relation to the growth of adult and non-traditional education, various delivery models, including online, and the increase of under-represented students
- Responding to the downward trend in the number of high school graduates

The readers did not find compelling evidence in the PRR and supporting documents that the challenges identified in the Delphi exercise have yet been fully incorporated into the institutional planning process. However, given the track record of LBC, the readers are confident that this will happen soon.

The readers commend LBC for its work in developing and implementing its Preferred Future document and its counterpart in the 2012-2015 Strategic Plan.

*The readers **recommend** that the challenges identified in the recent modified Delphi exercise be reviewed and intentionally incorporated into the institutional planning process.*

IV. Enrollment and Finance Trends and Projections

LBC's total enrollment showed healthy growth of nearly 21% from 2007 to 2011 (fall head counts) for an approximate average increase of 5% per year. Undergraduate enrollment over the same period increased over 25%, while graduate enrollment showed a slight decrease (.59%). In fall 2011, total undergraduate enrollment surpassed 1000 students for the first time in the institution's history. Given this track record of growth, LBC's projection of an average 3.6% annual growth in undergraduate enrollment for 2011-2015 seems very realistic. Conversely, the projected average increased enrollment of 6.6% per year for graduate programs appears that it may be somewhat aggressive, even when the new Ph.D. program is factored in. The readers realize that there may have been other factors not noted in the PRR that were taken into consideration in making these projections. For example, master's level enrollment dipped nearly 14% in 2011 after fairly consistent growth in previous years. Therefore, given the conservative approach taken elsewhere, the readers concur that LBC's projections are sound and should serve well as a basis for prudent financial planning.

The PRR reports that the College maintained fiscal prudence throughout the period of its most recent strategic plan (2006-2011), having positive operational budgets for each year, with a 40% net growth in assets over the period. Its five-year business plan is based on realistic enrollment projections for each of its major program areas (undergraduate, degree completion, and graduate). Tuition revenue is calculated using a standard discount rate and a tuition increase of 3.5% per year for 2011-2015. Other assumptions include maintenance costs of \$4.25 per square foot for new buildings and the addition of up to 13 new positions (over a seven-year period). Projections also take into consideration the capital expansion projects noted above, which are made possible by the use of a debt service of \$17,500,000 amortized for 25 years and offset by a \$10,000,000 capital campaign, with receipts payable within five to seven years.

V. Assessment Processes and Plans

As noted above (Section II, “Responses to Recommendations from the Previous Decennial Evaluation”), LBC has given a great deal of attention to the matter of assessment. This section will summarize the key components of LBC’s assessment process.

In July 2007, as a direct result of its self-study process, LBC established the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) and appointed a Director of Institutional Research & Assessment (DIRA). In 2011, this position became Associate Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness in recognition of an expanded role in relating to the Cabinet for all matters regarding institutional assessment and planning initiatives. Likewise, the Committee for Institutional Research and Assessment, formed in 2007, became the Committee for Institutional Effectiveness in 2011 when it took on additional responsibilities for institutional planning. The readers of this PRR interpret this evolution as a very positive indicator of the institution’s commitment to make all adjustments necessary to incorporate a culture of assessment into every facet of the institution.

The result has been the development of an impressive array of assessment materials, guided and held together by a comprehensive, formal planning and assessment process (see supporting document, “Planning and Assessment at LBC”). This document itself is the result of the merger of two previously separate documents, joined in such a way that the necessary links between planning and assessment processes are emphasized. The net result is that LBC now employs a thoroughgoing process in which all levels of the institution are assessed at regular intervals (Student; Unit; Program; and Institutional levels). Each level is guided through the use and analysis of both direct and indirect measures. The whole process is ultimately linked to four essential foundational documents that express LBC’s reason for existence: its Mission, Vision, Core Values and Goals, and Core Knowledge and Skills statements.

The major recommendations of the 2007 self-study and team visit related to the matter of assessment. It is clear to the PRR reviewers that the administration, faculty, and staff of LBC took these recommendations very seriously and are to be applauded for their work. The area which needed the most effort in 2007 is now, in 2012, the most complete. LBC’s assessment process is well on its way to becoming a model for others to emulate.

*The reviewers commend LBC for their thorough efforts in relation to Standards 7 and 14, and **recommend** that the overarching process now in place be faithfully maintained and executed in the coming years (as already noted above, page 3).*

VI. Linked Institutional Planning and Budgeting Processes

Closely related to the previous category, the “Planning and Assessment at LBC” document serves as the institution’s template for its strategic planning and budgeting processes. Assessment is tactically woven into the process so that there is a continuous loop of planning based on actual evaluative outcomes. The president and cabinet oversee the planning and implementation process. Planning initiatives are received throughout the academic year from the various departments, program units, and committees of the College. These then are processed through a cabinet member as preliminary proposals. After reviewing for fit in the overall strategic plan and considering potential budget implications, the cabinet member brings the initiative to the full cabinet for consideration and potential action. Planning initiatives that are approved are then monitored and tracked at the departmental/program level as well as at the cabinet level by means of a planning database. Finally, planning documents are readily available to stakeholders and constituents at LBC’s Institutional Effectiveness website.

VII. Conclusion

Lancaster Bible College entered its decennial self-study as an already strong institution. To its credit, it faithfully immersed itself in the self-study process and became stronger as a result. The visiting team drew most of its recommendations from those that LBC had noticed and articulated in its self-study. LBC accepted each recommendation and worked diligently to respond. Today, LBC is an even stronger institution. As with many institutions, the major areas of needed growth centered on assessment activities. LBC responded, modified, and corrected in such a way that its comprehensive planning and assessment plan is now a model for other institutions to emulate.

Recommendations:

- 1. The College should continue the healthy process of institutional assessment outlined in the PRR. (Standards 7 and 14)*
- 2. The College should move forward with the proposed position of Faculty Consultant beginning in 2013-2014 or as soon as possible. (Standard 2)*
- 3. The College should review the challenges identified in the recent modified Delphi exercise and intentionally incorporate them into the institutional planning process. (Standard 2)*