

Report to Faculty, Administrators, Trustees, Students  
of

Lehman College  
Bronx, NY 10468

Prepared following analysis of the institution's  
Periodic Review Report

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## **Evaluation of the Periodic Review Report of Lehman College**

### **I. Introduction**

Lehman College, part of the City University of New York (CUNY) system, serves more than 12,000 students and its surrounding Bronx communities “as an intellectual, economic and cultural center” (PRR Mission excerpt, 177). Offering 50 undergraduate and more than 40 graduate majors to its nearly 10,000 undergraduate and approximately 2,000 graduate students, about half of Lehman’s student body overall attends on a part-time basis (PRR, 5).

The Periodic Review Report (PRR) presents a focused overview of institutional progress since the College’s decennial self-study and team visit in 2009, monitoring report in 2011 and subsequent progress letter in 2013. The PRR is precise and well-supported by appropriate documentation. The report also includes evidence of commitment to institutional progress from multiple stakeholders at the College.

### **II. Responses to Recommendations from Previous Evaluations**

This section summarizes the responses that Lehman College has made to six of the visiting team’s recommendations and eleven of its own from the decennial self-study review. The monitoring report required response by 2011 to improvements in institutional assessment (standard 7) and assessment of student learning (standard 14) and upon acceptance, required a progress report on the use of student learning assessment (standard 14) by 2013. The visiting team additionally recommended that the PRR address careful examination of retention and graduation rates (standard 8) and many of the College’s own recommendations from the self-study reinforce these standards as well as improve operations across several intersecting standards: planning (2), resources (3), integrity (6), student services (9), faculty (10), and general education (12).

#### Analysis of Retention and Graduation Rates

In emphasizing that the College “respond to the various causes of low retention,” the visiting team reinforced Lehman College’s own recommendations to monitor the impact of raising admissions standards for first time freshmen and more closely analyzing “stop or transfer out” data. While the PRR includes evidence that the College has conducted several activities clustered around this recommendation, there are only limited, preliminary indications that the College has *responded* “to the various causes.” For example, having raised the admissions criteria 150 SAT points (PRR, 48), the College recorded a decrease in regularly admitted freshman (768 in 2008; 388 in 2013), yet its retention rates during this time have experienced some instability, notably the 2010 drop back to 77% (2013 Fact Book, 37) that is not discussed in the PRR.

Although the 2009 strategic plan report notes a need to “enhance student success, retention, timely progression toward degree completion” (PRR Appendix 8, 4) and that “numerous work groups have been formed” (PRR, 49) including a standing Transfer Council that has generated recommendations (PRR, 51) no additional evidence of *responses* was included in

the PRR. The new Title V program targets Hispanic students, who comprise approximately 9% of the College's enrollment, and the very successful Adult Degree Program (PRR, 49-50) comprises a similar percentage of total enrollment (1,000 of the 12,000 Lehman students currently enrolled).

Student attrition is a nation-wide problem and overcoming obstacles to degree attainment is a major priority for higher education. The problem is particularly vexing vis-à-vis non-traditional populations (not first-time, full-time freshman population). Seventy percent of Lehman's student body are transfer students and 43% of students are part-time students; they are more at-risk than traditional entering college students. Transfer students enter at different stages of their degree programs and Lehman College would have had no influence on their early college experiences or their early college academic development. They do not have the benefit of special first-time student cohort programs or the relationship-building that occurs among first-time, full-time students. It is important to develop data-informed retention programming and support tailored to the transfer and part-time students. To do so will require analysis and assessment of these students including demographic and profile characteristics, environmental characteristics, academic characteristics, etc. to gain a better understanding of the composition of this population. Reports available through the Clearinghouse may be especially helpful in developing these profiles. This will help in Lehman's ability to develop effective programs and touch points to engage these students. It will also help to inform recruiting strategies.

Several initiatives aimed at improving retention and progress toward degree attainment show promise, such as the Sophomore Year Initiative. With regard to others, such as the infusion of career services programming from orientation onward and the *30 Credits a Year* campaign, the PRR presents no early outcomes of these initiatives. And, in 2013, the averages of attempted credits of both, full-time and part-time undergraduates were the lowest in 10 years (12.7 and 5.0, respectively) (2013 Lehman College Fact Book, p. 34). If fully utilized, *DegreeWorks* may be an important tool to maximize course enrollments, retention, and graduation as it can provide each student with a plan of study and enable monitoring of progress and intervention when needed. Its use could also help identify problem courses that could be predictive of successful degree progression.

The College has established formal councils whose preliminary work in identifying the issues (PRR, 52) shows promise for a future "one-stop transfer center" to complement the Virtual Transfer Center, but the PRR notes that these only began in the past year after an otherwise unexplained delay after completion of the Gardner Institute in 2010. In 2011, the Improvement Committee (*Monitoring Report*, April 1, 2011, Appendix D) underscored the importance of the creation of the Transfer Center. As of the time of the PRR, there is a Virtual Transfer Center <http://www.lehman.edu/virtual-transfer-center/index.php>. With the transfer population being the majority population, a more high touch engagement plan is likely needed. While I realized this is a *virtual* approach, there is no contact information on the Virtual Transfer Center site (a listing of the Admissions Office contacts also does not provide a location or contact number for specifically for transfer students <http://www.lehman.edu/about/office-hours.php>) and the PRR provides no documentation or usage statistics relative to the effectiveness of the Virtual Transfer Center. The PRR does

report that capital funding has been approved to construct a physical transfer center in Shuster Hall with construction slated to begin in fall 2014.

In 2009, with regard to Standard 8, the Review Committee suggested “Lehman may wish to focus its efforts on the more predictive measure of high school academic performance coupled with high school college preparatory units attained.” No documentation of efforts to this end have been presented in the PRR. Related strategic planning goal reporting also reflects 33% unmet targets in “student progression, retention and graduation, where progress has been slower than expected” (PRR, 59).

*The readers suggest that Lehman College document evidence of its efforts to respond to the causes of low retention and graduation rates, expanding best practices developed in its Sophomore Year Initiative to additional at-risk populations.*

#### Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

The PRR provides ample, detailed, well-documented evidence of its responses to several interrelated recommendations from the visiting team and from its own self-study. These include hiring an assessment coordinator, evaluating and implementing the Assessment Council’s plans, articulating learning outcomes at the program level, integrating assessment of student learning outcomes into the strategic plan, and allocating sufficient resources to assure success of the student learning outcomes process. The previous monitoring report, progress letter, PRR (21-26 and 54-58), its appendices, web links and references to having successfully responded to these recommendations are compelling evidence that a culture of assessment has been established, making systematic and regular use of student learning outcomes for continuous improvement. A recent expansion of *Taskstream* from Education to the entire College shows promise as a resource that will continue to facilitate internal work among the assessment ambassadors, general faculty and the Assessment and Planning Office. Additionally, the integration of new CUNY system-wide general education outcomes is well underway, and aligned not only to the systematic review required in the follow-up activities, but to a uniquely Lehman, well-established, faculty-led emphasis on general education values at the College. The majority of academic programs have posted both learning outcomes and assessment plans, though gaps are noted on the Assessment and Planning “Majors and Programs” web page (<http://www.lehman.edu/research/assessment/department-plans.php>) that may pertain to ongoing reorganization of academic departments, where theatre goals only are displayed for the “Journalism, Communication and Theatre” department (<http://www.lehman.edu/academics/arts-humanities/jct/learning-goals.php>) for example.

*The readers suggest that Lehman continue its efforts to establish, publish, assess and plan curricular responses to student learning outcomes for all of its academic programs.*

#### Fostering a Culture of Continuous Institutional Improvement

The PRR conveys a robust accounting for additional activities that Lehman College has undertaken to improve its operations, all of which respond to its own recommendations in the self-study. First among these recommendations is developing a strategic plan that emphasizes strengthening academic programs by replacing the retiring full time faculty complement, integrating assessment of student learning outcomes, and the use of more state-of-the art data

analytics to inform decision-making. The strategic plan, *Achieving the Vision*, presented four goals: 1) excellence in teaching, research, and learning; 2) enhanced student success; 3) greater institutional and financial effectiveness; and 4) commitment to engagement and community service.

The PRR contains ample evidence that strategic planning and related improvements stemming from goals, objectives and strategies are well underway, well-understood, and well-documented, notably the LCD and related technologies that support clear and transparent use of data to create information. In addition to laudable progress in implementing retirement/replacement strategies in the midst of constrained financial resources, the PRR also describes efforts to strengthen faculty mentoring, excellence in teaching, and the use of SETL student ratings of instruction (PRR, 33). The activities related to Advising show promise of impacting institutional goals related to student support services, and should be measured for their impact as the Virtual Transfer Center, 30 Credits campaign, dedicated advising days, increased advising staff, increased summer advising hours, and *DegreeWorks* continue to roll out at the College. Additionally, remaining dedicated to the Facilities Master Plan and developing an Academic Master Plan are commendable activities in the PRR.

### **III. Major Challenges and Opportunities**

The PRR notes that the College plans to address a number of significant challenges during the next five years that include closely monitoring enrollment trends that impact a continuously constrained fiscal environment, completing the *CUNY Pathways* general education systemic reform implementation, adapting to a new *CUNYfirst* PeopleSoft enterprise resource planning system, launching an Academic Master Plan and undertaking a new strategic planning cycle by 2017-18. The College acknowledges that the current (2008) strategic planning cycle has guided their progress on institutional goals, citing commendable achievements that intersect with the Master Facilities Plan, with responses to a significant admissions policy adjustment, and with responses to the visiting team's recommendations in both the decennial self-study and the monitoring report.

#### Enrollment Trends

As discussed in Section II, Lehman College made a strategic decision to raise the admissions requirements for incoming freshman, resulting in a 110-point gain on SAT scores with a commensurate 50% decrease in the cohort size between 2008 and 2013. Over the next five-year cycle, the College will continue to monitor retention and, as they become available, 4- and 6-year graduation rates for these smaller, more highly-qualified freshman cohorts. Simultaneously, the College has observed an increasingly larger proportion of incoming transfer students, whose ability to complete degree requirements has previously been complicated by disparate general education requirements both within the CUNY system itself and throughout the larger higher education landscape for those increasing numbers of transfer students who come from non-CUNY schools. The College expresses cautious optimism that the *CUNY Pathways* general education reform will alleviate some of those former complications, but notes specifically that it is "too early to tell" (PRR, 36). This transition to supporting the academic success of a growing transfer population further intensifies a visiting

team recommendation to be addressed in the PRR: analyzing and *responding* to the causes of low retention and graduation rates.

The majority transfer population, along with the large part-time student base (43%; Lehman College Data Book Fall 2013, p. 2), highlights the need for special retention initiatives for these populations. First year to second year retention of Full-time Freshmen was 81.5% and 73% for Transfer Students (Lehman College Data Book Fall 2013, p. 39). For part-time students, the retention rate was 67% in fall 2012 (IPEDS). While the launch of the *30 Credits a Year* advising campaign and the Sophomore Year Initiative (SYI) have promise to engage the full-time population, they are not viable for the part-time students.

*The readers suggest that Lehman College document evidence of its efforts to respond to the causes of low retention and graduation rates, expanding best practices developed in its Sophomore Year Initiative to additional at-risk populations.*

#### CUNY Fully Integrated Resources and Services Tool

The College has prepared for a mandatory PeopleSoft *CUNYfirst* replacement of its legacy systems by assembling a strong team of personnel from the administrative areas most immediately effected to visit the “first wave” or vanguard campuses who have already begun implementation. As part of the second wave, Lehman College has expanded the initial planning team to include additional stakeholders from Bursar, Admissions, Registrar, Financial Aid, and Information Technology (the “BARFIT team) who met weekly to plan for the spring 2012 implementation. In spite of their intensive planning efforts, however, the implementation had a negative impact on students in multiple areas, including financial aid eligibility, erroneous student records updates in *DegreeWorks*, and incorrect immunization requirement holds to waiver-eligible part-time students (PRR, 39-40).

*The readers suggest that Lehman College consider the possibility of adding a visiting/consulting member from a vanguard CUNY campus to their implementation team.*

#### Pathways General Education Framework

In response to a mandatory “unified General Education framework” from the CUNY Central Office of Academic Affairs, Lehman College faculty adapted the more streamlined requirements to its existing three-tiered structure. While remaining faithful to the breadth and depth of its own student learning outcomes, the impact of this alignment will be an overall reduction in the total number of General Education credits required for degree completion, as noted earlier in the cautious optimism about improving time-to-graduation for transfer students in particular.

*The readers recognize Lehman College’s praiseworthy accomplishment in resolving a contentious city-wide reform in a mutually-beneficial way for students and faculty members.*

#### Fiscal Challenges

Much like many of its counterpart higher education providers nationwide, Lehman College faces ongoing post-recession reductions in state allocations, noting in the PRR that its careful planning, ability to tap CUTRA reserves from prior budget year surplus funds and proactive

cost-savings measures offset the cuts with minimal disruption to operations (PRR, 42). In addition, the College has made progress on implementing its strategic goals, notably the decision to continue seeking capital facilities funds aimed at the increasingly highly-sought STEM and healthcare fields.

#### Faculty Complement

Recognizing an imminent wave of retirements among its full time tenured faculty during a strategic planning cycle that emphasized “strengthening academic programs” and a CUNY Master Plan committed to increasing full time faculty (PRR, 46), the College adopted the visiting team’s suggestion to optimize this opportunity. The PRR notes that Lehman College sculpted its recruitment and replacement practices by steadily reducing the number of non-tenure track replacement hires with and increasing number of tenure-track hires. The complement chart illustrates the movement of some incoming tenure-track faculty to tenure-earned status, even as it reflects the loss of tenured faculty members to retirement (PRR, 43). The readers note that the College balanced fiscal constraints against this laudable strategy by implementing a “hiring pause” or replacement delay among staff and administrative vacancies.

#### Foundations of Excellence

As part of its ongoing efforts to prepare for strengthening support to an increasing transfer student population, the College participated in a Gardner FoE initiative aimed specifically at gauging campus perceptions and plans for that population. Reaffirming many of the individual efforts that had concurrently launched independently of the FoE, Lehman College adapted *Pathways* with hopes for streamlining transfer student requirements, implemented *DegreeWorks* for better student self-advisement and degree planning, and formalized a standing Transfer Council (PRR, 44-45).

### **IV. Enrollment and Finance Trends and Projections**

The PRR notes that Lehman College follows the CUNY system of collecting tuition to meet campus targets, depositing that tuition to the central fund, and receiving allocations in keeping with the system formulae. The CUTRA accounts for surplus funds allow for a mechanism to control the fluctuations of year-to-year enrollment changes. In addition, the new Compact provides for consistent tuition increases as a means for raising revenue sufficient to fund campus improvements consistent with the CUNY Master Plan in exchange for each campus agreeing to initiate its own philanthropic or other self-funded strategies (PRR, 46). In this section of the PRR, the College demonstrates that it has fulfilled its compact commitment, with conservatively optimistic plans to steadily increase its philanthropic resources and to offset a recent decline in grants-funded and recovery resources with a plan to further diversify its portfolio of externally-funded contracts.

#### Philanthropic Comprehensive and Capital Campaign

During a challenging post-recession recovery, the College was able to raise approximately \$4.7m in annual giving in 2010, observing a steady increase to \$6.4m in 2013. The College estimates that its success with philanthropic organizations (its largest contributor), alumni, corporations and friends will continue at the same steady rate of growth, reaching \$8.5m by

2015-16 (PRR, 46A). Absent any reference to spending or disbursement policies, this section of the report estimates the successful completion of a capital campaign, \$72m by 2015-16.

Grants and Contracts Revenue

Recognizing a national trend in decreased federal allocations for sponsored programs, Lehman College notes that its total number of awards has remained relatively steady, but that its award size and recovery totals have decreased. The PRR does not reference additional appendices in support of its endeavors “to increase recovery revenue by increasing research awards and by further diversifying our grant portfolio.” The readers suggest that the College plan to provide more comprehensive information about the types of funds and their possible expansion into more advanced STEM and health-related areas based on future facilities capacity in its next decennial self-study.

Capital Budget

The PRR illustrates the five year trends in capital funding sources, declining from \$31m in 2008 to just \$3.5m in 2013. Nonetheless, the five year capital request projections increase from approximately \$30m for 2014 to \$214m in 2015, in keeping with the facilities master plan. The readers caution that several other areas of the College (future enrollment in the STEM fields, future sponsored research opportunities and related philanthropic donors from these fields) are integrally connected to the acquisition of these capital funds.

Enrollment Projections

The readers received Table 4.7 immediately upon request from the institution in July, which provides summary three-year projections that are reasonable and balanced: drop and plateau in graduate FTEs with modest increases in undergraduate FTEs. The exercise of projecting enrollment forward, including anticipated, best- and worst-case scenarios, informs planning and budgeting projections. Absent the detailed contours of the enrollment assumptions, it is difficult to assess their role in attaining related institutional goals. In addition to the STEM facility noted above, if SAT gains made in future classes reaches a plateau or even drops based on anticipated population changes (verifiable using current K12 enrollment information) the impact on faculty hiring and academic programs to enhance or reduce will have more basis in the alignment to enrollment projections. These projections are widely understood to be just that, and generally contain upper- and lower-bound scenarios for planning and discussion purposes.

**Table 4.7: Enrollment Projections Next Three Years**

	FY 13	FY 14	FY15	FY 16
Undergraduate FTE's	6544	6699	6833	6970
Graduate FTE's	1286	1230	1230	1242
Total FTE's	8730	7929	8063	8212
Head Count	11886	11662	11895	12133



Lehman College's total enrollment has decreased .9% 2009-2013 (PRR, pp. 37). Without innovative initiatives for increased enrollments, drawing its population from Bronx residents will be difficult in the short term based population projections. The projected population of school-aged residents in the Bronx is expected to decrease 5.1% (from 289,564 in 2010 to 274,658 in 2020). This trend is projected to reverse for the period 2020 – 2030 with 286,019 projected school-aged population in 2030 (New York City Population Projections by Age/Sex & Borough 2030 Report, [http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/census/projections\\_report.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/census/projections_report.pdf), p. 3). The PRR does highlight planned initiatives to increase enrollment, including cultivating relationships with community colleges and increasing articulation agreements by 10 by 2016 (PRR, p. 49).

## **V. Assessment Processes and Plans**

As noted in Section II, Lehman College has made steady and impressive progress in the areas of both, Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes and Institutional Assessment. In addition to the analysis in Section II, the readers also note that each of the administrative units discussed in Section V of the PRR have documented additional evidence that a culture of assessment has been established throughout the College. In particular, evidence that documents the *use* of assessment results, such as the brief anecdotes from the Library, Counseling Center and Athletics (PRR, 63-64) illustrate that institutional assessment has begun to yield systematic continuous improvement for the institution, where progress on strategic goals reveals a need for additional work in strengthening student support. As academic, administrative and support units continue to systematize their use of Taskstream, the next decennial self-study will provide the College with an opportunity to reap the rewards of its investment in this important best practice in managing evidence. The Assessment Coordinator's blog is also a noteworthy effort to maintain clarity and transparency in continuing to deepen that commitment to a culture of assessment.

The monitoring report and progress letter also contain strong examples of Lehman's having established a culture of assessment with regard to the assessment of student learning. In particular, the adoption of CLA to establish baseline critical thinking and analytical writing levels has potential to inform the ongoing adaptations and assessment of the *Pathways* general education initiative. Given that many specialized/nationally accredited programs such as Education have deepened a culture of assessment in their compliance with regulatory reform and increasingly demanding professional agencies, the additional inclusion of examples from Geology, Biology and Sociology are also noteworthy in the progress letter (6-8). Moreover, the reassigned faculty time and competitive internal funding initiatives for assessment exemplars in the Arts & Humanities are laudable accomplishments for a College that places such high value on the liberal arts (PRR, 57). Finally, the Assessment Council workshops, responsive to the findings of the Assessment Office each year, are an excellent practice to be retained and continued.

## **VI. Linked Institutional Planning and Budgeting Processes**

This section of the PRR contains compelling evidence of how carefully Lehman College has aligned its own Strategic Plan and Facilities Master Plan to the CUNY Master Plan (PRR, 65; Appendix 10).

#### Lehman College Strategic Plan

In response to the 2009 Strategic Council Report, an increasingly rich collection of assessment data and information, and a careful articulation to the CUNY system planning guidelines, Lehman crafted a clear, measureable and compelling 2010-2020 *Achieving the Vision by Building a Stronger Foundation* plan. The College deserves additional praise for designing measurement formulae and mechanisms to balance the weight and interdependencies of various performance indicators on varying and often complementary goals. Periodic reports further deepen a college-wide culture of assessment, accountability and continuous improvement (PRR, 66-67, Appendix 11). As additional strategic plan progress reports are produced towards preparation for the next self-study, the readers strongly encourage the College to disseminate actionable recommendations to departments and programs, and to collect evidence of how these units make *use* of the recommendations to effect change. For example, as noted previously in this report, efforts to improve retention and completion are vital to the College's ongoing strategic direction, and the most challenging aspect of these efforts are the multiple institutional stakeholders who each "hold a piece of the elephant" as the adage goes. As the strategic performance data are disseminated to those units responsible for improving them, the College may wish to consider forming a broadly-representative College-wide retention and completion task force to allow these personnel an opportunity to share their respective "pieces" and in response to clear recommendations from College leadership, plan collaboratively for improvement.

#### Lehman College Operating Budget, CUNY Compact and Capital Budget

As the city and state of New York continue to recover from a devastating economic recession, the alignment of budgets to strategic goals becomes even more vital. The PRR contains evidence of the careful planning and budgeting work that occurs while awaiting allocations information from CUNY (PRR, 67) and the Compact Planning system encourages Lehman to leverage system support against a careful balance of fiscal restraint and independent revenue generating activities. As noted in Section IV of this report, the success of strategic and academic planning priorities, such as raising admission requirements and hiring full time faculty in preparation for STEM facilities construction, also intensify the importance of Lehman putting forth a sustained and well-coordinated effort in balancing the various layers of City and State funding/bonding agencies.

The public web page contains a transparent list of committee members and terms, though only one link to meeting minutes from 2006 (<http://www.lehman.edu/college-senate/budget-and-long-range-planning.php>).

*The readers suggest that illustrative Tables 6.2 and 6.3 from the PRR be shared with more members of the College community and updated each year, perhaps via a link to an intranet or employee portal for increasingly transparent communications among multiple College stakeholders.*

## VII. Conclusion

Lehman College concludes the PRR by observing in part that “Lehman’s strategic plan, *Achieving the Vision*, drives the College at all levels...[and] that assessment of student learning outcomes is an embedded and engaging process that guides Schools, departments and programs” (72). The readers concur with both observations, and note the commendable progress that the institution has made on standards 7 and 14 since the time of the last decennial visit. Having accomplished compliance in such strong fashion, refocusing attention on the recommendation in this report is far more likely to lead to evidence of success in the next self-study and continuous improvement at Lehman College.

1. *The readers suggest that Lehman College document evidence of its efforts to respond to the causes of low retention and graduation rates, expanding best practices developed in its Sophomore Year Initiative to additional at-risk populations.*