



*Office of the President*

March 15, 1999

Dr. Ricardo R. Fernandez  
President  
CUNY - Herbert H. Lehman College  
Bedford Park Boulevard West  
Bronx, NY 10468

Dear Dr. Fernandez:

Please find enclosed the final copy of the report of the Middle States Evaluation Team which visited your campus on February 7-10, 1999. I wish to express my appreciation for the hospitality afforded the Team during the visit and the outstanding cooperation we received from faculty, staff, students and the Board of Trustee member. It was without question a very delightful visit and we wish you the best of luck in your continuing effort to achieve excellence at the College.

Sincerely,

  
Earl S. Richardson  
President

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Enclosure

**Report to the  
Faculty, Administrators, Trustees, Staff, and Students  
of  
*Lehman College*  
*City University of New York*  
New York, New York**

**By  
An Evaluation Team Representing the  
Commission on Higher Education  
Of the  
Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools**

**Prepared after  
Study of the Institution's Self-Study Report  
and a  
Visit to the Campus on February 7-10, 1999**

*This report represents the views of the evaluation team as interpreted by the Chair; it goes directly to the institution before being considered by the Commission. It is a confidential document prepared as an educational service for the benefit of the institution. All comments in the report are made in good faith, in an effort to assist Lehman College. This report is based solely on an educational evaluation of the institution, and of the manner in which it appears to be carrying out its educational objectives.*

## **Members of the Evaluation Team**

**Earl S. Richardson, Chair**  
President  
Morgan State University  
Baltimore MD

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Towson University

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**Karen L. Pennington**  
Vice President for Student Development and Campus Life  
Montclair State University

***Working with the Team:***  
Russell Hotzler  
University Dean for Academic Affairs  
City University of New York

## **At the Time of the Visit**

**Date when instruction began: 1968**

**Year of first graduating class: 1969**

**President: Ricardo R. Fernandez**

**Chief Academic Officer: Rosanne Wille**

**Chair of the Board of Trustees: Anne A. Paolucci**

## **Executive Summary**

Lehman is an urban institution with a particularly challenging mission. It is the only public four-year institution serving the entire Borough of the Bronx, New York City. The Bronx, with a population of over 1 million people, is primarily minority, with a significant concentration of immigrants. Its population is largely economically and socially disadvantaged. Hence, the College represents the main source of opportunity for Bronx residents of all ages seeking the education necessary to achieve middle class status in the contemporary economy.

The students that Lehman serves typically do not enter college with the preparation and financial resources of the average college student. The College historically has accepted the challenges posed by such students and has structured its programs to maximize their opportunities for successfully completing a degree. It is fair to say that Lehman, like many other institutions serving disadvantaged populations, performs a critical role in our educational system, the importance of which is often not recognized in academia or by the public beyond the market it serves. Despite the fact that the mission carried out by Lehman requires above-average concentrations of resources, it is in competition for funding with campuses not facing challenges of the same magnitude but with more traditional and prestigious missions and broader political support.

There is no question on the part of the accreditation team that Lehman College suffers from insufficient fiscal support. This is reflected in its high degree of reliance on adjunct faculty, lack of middle management staff, essential student support programs operating with minimal resources, and an uneven distribution of technology across campus.

Despite its inadequate resource base, the College is carrying out many aspects of its mission very effectively. Lehman's faculty is well qualified and highly regarded by the student body. It takes its arts and science tradition seriously and is in the process of updating its general education program to ensure it remains relevant and an integral part of the entire campus program. The library is a very important resource for the campus and able to keep pace with technology. The campus is well maintained and recently-added buildings are excellent facilities. Student service programs are staffed by energetic and effective personnel, although their numbers need to be substantially increased. The campus also has sound plans for adding technology for administrative as well as academic purposes. Finally, Lehman exhibits its commitment to serving the community in which it is located through a variety of public service and outreach activities.

The evaluation team, as does the campus community, believes in the importance of Lehman's traditional mission of serving as broad a segment of the Bronx population as is educationally prudent. Without a campus such as Lehman, the vast majority of

residents of the Bronx seeking a college education would not have an opportunity to complete a four-year degree while at the same time contending with the family and financial responsibilities many face outside of the educational environment. Budget reductions, however, have reduced the number of teaching faculty and reduced essential support programs to a far lower level than is possible to justify. Policy makers have determined that less prepared students should begin college at two-year campuses and that four-year campuses need not offer the remedial work many students from disadvantaged backgrounds need. This is despite the fact that national research shows that for minority students any delay in attendance at four-year campuses following high school graduation greatly reduces the probability that they will complete a bachelor's degree. Public officials also have determined that students should pay for a larger share of their educational costs, a significant handicap for individuals and families already struggling to meet day-to-day living expenses. All of these trends have converged to call into question how long Lehman can continue to carry out its urban mission in a manner that can be considered relevant to the needs of the community it serves.

It is quite possible that in a few years Lehman may by default and without formal recognition be carrying out a different mission than it does at present. If this happens it will be due to external fiscal pressures and policy decisions rather than by preference of the campus or community it serves. The campus would no doubt perform this new mission as well as it carries out its current one. However, the population of the Bronx would have lost a major asset if this became reality. It is this trend that causes concern about Lehman's future. The concern is not about the institution itself but rather about the plight of the community it serves. Without a campus with the resources to meet the needs of disadvantaged individuals in its immediate surroundings, the very large population of the community that Lehman serves will be handicapped in attempting to enter the social and economic mainstream by means of higher education.

The Team recommends that the College Administration petition the Chancellor and the Board of Trustees for a substantial increase in funding to address the major deficiencies highlighted in the team report. These include the high percentage of adjunct faculty, the lack of adequate staffing, the uneven distribution of technology across the campus, and the lack of sufficient operating budgets in several key areas of the College.

Considering the Board of Regents' newly-adopted policy of eliminating remediation, it is recommended also that the College Administration and faculty continue to explore creative ways for continuing access for the special populations traditionally served by Lehman College.

## Introduction

Lehman College is well managed and operated. It efficiently utilizes its facilities and maintains its buildings and grounds well. Its leadership is stable. Lehman understands its mission as the only public four-year institution serving the Bronx, the residents of which for the most part are minority, multi-lingual and multi-cultural, and disadvantaged. It is committed to serving this constituency and its programs are structured to address this mission.

The thrust of the College's self-study was the role of technology in the future growth and development of the campus. The team examined this at length. It appears that the campus has a viable strategy for ensuring the Lehman's students are competitive in the job market but, like so many other things on campus, funding is a formidable obstacle.

Funding has been essentially flat throughout most of the decade, and has had a far broader impact than on the technology area. Campus resource problems have resulted in significant faculty reductions and an increasing reliance on part-time adjunct faculty, too few middle managers and support staff, and elimination or reduction in such essential services as counseling and career guidance. These issues have faculty and students very concerned.

Lehman College offers students a fine education and has been making progress despite difficulties not of its own making. Its mission is an extremely important one in that it provides an opportunity for upward mobility for a community whose prospects for success in the contemporary economy are very limited without the college degree. The three major issues it faces are external to the campus but have a substantial impact on Lehman's operations.

- Funding is the single most important issue affecting the institution. Its operating budget is far from adequate and the faculty and staff merit commendation for maintaining the integrity of campus operations despite a resource base that has shrunk in real terms.
- Centralization of academic decision-making outside of the campus has the faculty concerned about its waning degree of influence in academic matters. Of particular concern is that the policy to reduce or eliminate remedial programs will severely affect the educationally disadvantaged students the campus serves.
- With no real growth in budget allocations from the State over the last nine years, the CUNY Board of Trustees has approved significant increases in tuition. This trend cannot have a positive outcome for educational access in a market in which family incomes are relatively low.

While the team finds Lehman College to be an impressive institution operating under adverse circumstances, it is of the opinion that the major issues it faces need to be addressed expeditiously if it is to effectively carry out its mission over the long term.

## **Mission, Goals and Objectives**

The mission statement of Lehman College is a succinct and useful summary of institutional purpose that needs no further elaboration.

*Lehman College is the only public senior college in the Borough of the Bronx, which has a population of 1.2 million. Lehman offers residents of the Bronx and other boroughs of New York City, as well as the region, a liberal arts education and preparation for careers and advanced study. With a commitment to meeting the education needs of an urban, mostly minority and immigrant population, Lehman affirms the following objectives:*

- *To provide access to a common body of knowledge and opportunities to develop a lifelong love of learning.*
- *To promote excellence in scholarship, teaching, research, and artistic endeavors.*
- *To develop the ability to think analytically and creatively.*
- *To advance the understanding and use of emerging technologies.*
- *To broaden education opportunities through joint programs with other institutions locally, nationally, and internationally.*
- *To promote an understanding of, and respect for, such differences as gender, age, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation, and physical ability.*
- *To serve as a center for the continuing educational and cultural needs for the region through access to the College's facilities and expertise in the academic disciplines, professional fields, and the fine and performing arts.*

## **Organization, Administration, and Governance**

The administrative structure of Lehman College is typical of many moderate-size four-year institutions of higher education. There are four major administrative divisions: academic affairs, student affairs, administration and finance, and institutional advancement. These units are further divided into academic and/or administrative departments. The president serves as the chief executive officer with a provost/senior vice president for academic affairs, a vice president for administration and finance, a dean of students, and a vice president for institutional advancement. Under the provost are the deans of the four academic divisions and the associated departments, the Chief Librarian, the heads of related projects, and a few smaller units.



The overall organizational structure appears to serve the University well, although the lack of adequate numbers of middle managers and support staff is quite evident. The understaffing is most apparent in the area of student services, which, like academic affairs, has been most affected by periods of financial exigency. The President and his management team are well regarded by the college community. Several faculty, students, and staff credited the President in particular, for his vision and commitment to continued growth and development as well as for the stability of the institution. This positive view of the campus leadership extends to the management team as a whole, although the more recently-hired administrators are just establishing themselves.

Integral to the community view of the management team is the decentralized style of governance embraced by the President and Provost and the degree of involvement provided through the various constituency-specific and multi-constituency forums established on the campus. The College Senate, the main legislative body, serves to reinforce the philosophy of participatory governance through the involvement of faculty, students, administrators, and support staff in the decision-making processes. Current efforts to further define the role and responsibilities of individual committees, to provide faculty appropriate influence over academic matters and to increase student participation should continue. The team notes, however, that since the faculty currently controls the vote on all items of business through its majority status, the concern expressed to the team by faculty about the extent of their influence in academic matters may reflect more a frustration with external rather than internal governance matters. Increasingly, decisions once considered the province of faculty are being made by the City University of New York (CUNY) Board of Trustees and/or the System Chancellor. The decisions to eliminate remediation at public four-year campuses as well as earlier decisions on faculty retrenchment have caused great anxiety, low morale, and general uncertainty about the institution's ability to control its destiny. More important, there is great concern about the impact of these types of decisions on the capacity of the institution to perform its mission of serving minority and disadvantaged populations.

Movement toward more centralization in New York City and State agencies is not likely to change in the short term. Instead, college officials continue to explore creative strategies to reconcile the policies and mandates of the CUNY System with the reality of Lehman's responsibilities that result from being the only public four-year institution in the Bronx.

## **The Educational Program**

Lehman's self-study reaffirmed the College's commitment to a liberal education grounded in the arts and sciences for all students, regardless of major. The wisdom of this philosophy grows out of the conviction that written and oral language skills, critical

thinking, and computational literacy are the foundations upon which today's students will be able to build successful careers and interesting lives in the future.

The foundation upon which education at Lehman is built is the general education program, an interesting combination of core courses and the distribution requirements most commonly found at schools Lehman's size. Now, with the Provost's encouragement, a group of faculty has begun to reexamine general education, and in a first test of new principles, they have designed a 12-credit, two-semester sequence of courses with the purpose of strengthening students' writing, research, and scholarship (WRS). As the title suggests, this is implemented through a team-teaching format. The development of the new WRS course, as well as other interdisciplinary programs in which team teaching might be employed, bodes well for the future and not just for students. Faculty as well will learn from their colleagues and serve as models for their students in demonstrating how master learners inquire, investigate, and finally comprehend new material.

The discussion about the future of Lehman's general education requirements has just begun. It is a testament to the faculty's intellectual vitality, their belief in the civility of their colleagues, and the collegiality of their administrators that there are several proposals representing different philosophies that already have surfaced. It is the hope of the team that these discussions will engage ever-larger circles of the faculty and result in a program that guarantees an effective liberal education to the next generation of Lehman students. The team welcomes the fact that ways are being sought to extend as much as possible the benefits of Lehman's general education to its large cohort of transfer students.

Whichever proposal is eventually adopted, the College will need to undertake efforts to ensure that all faculty understand the value, indeed the necessity, of a strong general education for their own programs. Without significant strengths in critical thinking, writing and speaking skills, and quantitative reasoning, as well as an understanding of civic responsibilities and the various strands of our cultural heritage, students will not prosper and advance in their professions, no matter what their major. It is, thus, in the College's interest to take steps to assure that all faculty as well as students understand and work to achieve the aims of general education.

At the forefront of this effort to educate the community in the value of a liberal education is the Office of Academic Standards and Evaluation. While the team endorses the College's plans to rebuild the ranks of full-time faculty through new hires, it sincerely believes that professional academic support staff, especially academic advisors, are essential to acclimate students to the academy. The team urges the College to find ways to augment the professional advising staff as soon as possible. It would also be worthwhile to explore ways of strengthening the connection between faculty involved in major advising and the professional advisors.

The vigor of Lehman's curriculum also is on display in a number of special programs. Programs deserving special commendation include: the Lehman Scholars

Program, which goes so far in its quest to cultivate scholarly excellence in highly prepared students as to comb the transcripts of non-participants for eligible candidates; and the Adult Degree Program, which facilitates the return of mature students to the campus, and whose success is demonstrated by the fact that although the program's participants make up only 15% of the student body, they account for nearly 30 % of Dean's List scholars. In both programs, provisions have been made to allow participants to ground their education in individually designed courses of study rather than in the college-wide general education requirements. The team hopes that the program's administrators and advisors will continue to be vigilant in ensuring that these foundations have an academic rigor and breadth that is at least the equal of the general education requirements.

A new challenge to Lehman's curriculum has arisen with the imposition of new, stricter standards on teacher candidates in the state of New York. Since education students major in their content area or areas, it is necessary that programs other than the education division undertake the curricular changes necessary to assure acceptable, even enviable passing rates on these standardized exams. The team is encouraged to see that the challenge has been taken enthusiastically by the liberal arts and science faculty as an opportunity to improve the academic preparation of the Lehman student, and the team wishes the College much success in its future outcomes.

New Master's programs in professional fields such as nursing and education imply vigor in the graduate program as well and will help the College take advantage of what is arguably the fastest growing segment of higher education today, the adult learner seeking to upgrade her or his professional, post-baccalaureate skills.

While the Team generally is confident in Lehman's ability to provide a stimulating, rigorous, and rewarding curriculum to its students, it does have several concerns. First, the College's increasing reliance on adjunct faculty has the potential to undermine the quality of the general education program in whatever shape it finally takes. The team is aware that many adjunct faculty are excellent and enthusiastic teachers with a demonstrable mastery of their field. However, without special orientation and development efforts, adjunct faculty may not fully understand the aims of general education, either in the core or in the distribution requirements, and the team encourages the College to explore ways to either return more of the teaching in the general education program to the full-time faculty or to find opportunities to more fully initiate adjunct faculty into the goals of general education.

Second, while the self-study contains numerous examples of the kinds of documentation that exists for the assessment of student learning, it believes that the College could present that evidence more effectively to its various constituencies. It also believes that faculty within the majors should be encouraged to examine these assessments on a regular basis to ascertain if there are improvements that can be made.

Finally, there is at least anecdotal evidence that the distance between the well-prepared and the ill-prepared Lehman student is diminishing. Because of improved