

**Report to
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students
of
Trinity Washington University
Washington, DC 20017**

**Prepared following analysis of the institution's
Periodic Review Report**

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I. Introduction

Trinity Washington University was founded as Trinity College in 1897 by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur as one of the nation's first Catholic undergraduate colleges for women. In 2004, Trinity officially attained "university" status, "offering a broad range of educational programs that prepare students across the lifespan for the intellectual, ethical and spiritual dimensions of contemporary work, civic and family life" (Mission Statement).

Trinity continues its historic commitment to women's education in its undergraduate women's college (College of Arts and Sciences) and "by advancing principles of equity, justice and honor in the education of women and men in all other programs" (Mission Statement) which are offered through the School of Education, the School of Professional Studies, and the newly established (fall 2010) School of Nursing and Health Professions.

Trinity first attained Middle States Association accreditation in 1921 and has maintained it since that time.

The current Periodic Review Report, *Assessing Trinity 2010* provides a comprehensive overview of the institution's continuing progress since Trinity's last decennial self-study and team visit in 2005-2006. Additionally, because Trinity has very intentionally aligned its self-study and assessment cycles with its strategic planning cycle, the PRR is intended to provide "extensive analysis and background documentation on Trinity's continuing progress, and ... [to] form the backdrop for the revision of the strategic plan, which will, in turn be the backbone for the 2015-2016 self-study" (PRR Executive Summary).

Trinity's 2011 PRR draws on the ongoing work of faculty, management, and administrative staff in the areas of planning and assessment; the final document was reviewed by the senior management team, faculty and board members.

In order to present the very large amount of information (data, assessment reports, and other supporting materials), Trinity has created a "Virtual Document Room" (VDR) on their website that contains all of the materials related to the this Periodic Review Report. The reviewers found this resource to be well-organized, easy to use, and of significant value in allowing them to adequately evaluate the impressive progress Trinity Washington University continues to make toward its strategic goals.

II. Responses to Recommendations from the Previous Decennial Evaluation

Trinity's PRR indicates that while the 2005-2006 decennial self-study contained a number of internal recommendations with which the visiting team concurred, the team's report contained no "formal" recommendations. Furthermore, Trinity had no follow-up reporting requirements as a result of that last self-study. As a result, *Assessing Trinity 2010* makes no use of the opportunity

this standard section of a periodic review report provides an institution to emphasize the importance of the campus-based component of self-study and to create continuity from one institutional assessment exercise to the next.

Instead, the PRR states “Trinity’s planning and assessment processes described in this report encompass virtually all of the internal recommendations that Trinity made to itself at that time” (PRR 1). However, readers are left to wonder about the status of those internal recommendations that are not encompassed by the “planning and assessment processes described” in the PRR, such as the revision of the Faculty Handbook.

Because of their nature, full Self-Studies and Periodic Review Reports can be occasions for an institutional community to take stock of where they have been, where they are, and where they intend to go. There are, of course, other venues for this kind of activity, but we suggest, especially at an institution that has made such an impressive commitment to aligning and using accreditation activities as a part of ongoing planning and assessment, that Trinity explore ways to take full advantage of the opportunities presented by this component of the accreditation process.

III. Major Challenges and/or Opportunities

Assessing Trinity 2010: Periodic Review Report provides a comprehensive summary of the “paradigm shift” that was and is so central to Trinity’s renaissance and cogently makes the case for the contemporary Trinity Washington University’s alignment of foundational mission and values with modern expectations for “best practices” in higher education.

The PRR highlights Trinity’s achievements during the period from 2006 to 2011, including an impressive enrollment growth of 42% across the entire institution. Perhaps even more noteworthy is the 82% increase in the enrollment in the College of Arts and Sciences, with a significant portion of the additional enrollments associated with Trinity’s new program in nursing.

Other highlights include achieving specialized accreditation for Trinity’s nursing (CCNE) and education (NCATE) programs, establishing an off-site location at THEARC in southeast Washington, planning and fund raising efforts tied to the proposed new Academic Center, and stabilizing Trinity’s finances as demonstrated by several years of operating surpluses.

The PRR recognizes both external and internal “challenges” to Trinity’s continuing growth over the next five years. The external challenges focus on the increasing regulatory burdens, declining federal and local support for higher education, and the uncertain economy that are of concern to virtually all institutions of higher education. Internally, Trinity’s challenges focus on the consequences of its recent success in enrollment in the areas of human (faculty and staff) and physical (and aging and increasing inadequate set of campus facilities) resources.

The proposed new Trinity Academic Center is presented as both the most immediate challenge and opportunity. The first new academic building planned for the campus since 1963, once constructed, the Academic Center will provide modern classroom and laboratory space, faculty office space, a 400-seat auditorium, and other student-focused spaces. The addition of this new space will also allow for the eventual renovation of Trinity's older buildings.

The institution has clearly spent much time and energy on all facets of its plans for this new Academic Center and it has a realistic understanding of the financial considerations of the project and what will need to occur for the project to move forward.

IV. Enrollment and Finance Trends and Projections

Assessing Trinity 2010: Periodic Review Report presents an impressive collection of data on enrollments by school over the period from 2006 to 2011. Even more impressive is the extensive analysis of this data and the identification of the strengths and opportunities for improvement to which this data points. Trinity clearly appreciates the importance that retention must have in any successful enrollment management operation and is willing to drill down through the numbers to identify the different causes and drivers of retention/attrition and to suggest focused, targeted strategies to address those issues.

The quality of the collection and analysis of the 2006-2011 enrollment data establishes a higher degree of credibility for the enrollment forecasts for 2011-2015. Trinity's strategic enrollment target is 3000 by the fall of 2015. This would be an extraordinary 85% increase over the ten-year period from 2005 to 2015. Trinity's success in largely achieving its intermediary enrollment goals during the past five-year period, in addition to its institutional appreciation of the enrollment dynamics, suggests that it is certainly within the reason for the institutional to continue to base its financial models on these enrollment assumptions.

That is all the more important because of central importance that student-generated revenue has and will continue to play in Trinity's overall financial picture.

The financial analysis and financial planning material in the PRR is as comprehensive and detailed as the enrollment material. The report itself presents a top-level five-year financial model, with the full financial forecast model and enrollment model available for additional review.

The assumptions upon which the five-year prospective financial model are based are realistic both in terms of Trinity's past performance and its assessment of its financial challenges and opportunities going forward. For example, projected Annual Fund giving levels have been held below the FY10 actual in recognition of the impact that the projected capital campaign may have on these gifts.

The plans and assumptions presented relative to financing the proposed Trinity Academic Center are also both realistic and appropriate given the institution's capacities to carry debt and to secure capital gifts.

Based on the material presented in this section of the PRR, it appears that Trinity Washington University is in compliance with both Standard 3 and Requirement 8.

V. Assessment Processes and Plans

Trinity's commitment to aligning assessment and planning to both operational and strategic perspectives has resulted in a comprehensive and complex array of assessment plans, templates, documents, and reports. Clearly, a culture of assessment has been established at Trinity Washington University.

The institution should be commended on the breadth and depth of its institutional and student learning assessment efforts. At both levels, the institution has clearly articulated goals, strategies for achieving those goals, and has developed local mechanisms to assess the extent to which those goals are achieved. Furthermore, the results of these assessments are regularly used to improve services and programs and inform planning and resource allocation decisions.

Assessing Trinity 2010 contains many examples of how assessment works at Trinity and, taken as a whole, Trinity's assessment processes appear to be "useful, cost effective, reasonably accurate and truthful, carefully planned, and organized, systematic, and sustained" (*Assessing Student Learning and Institutional Effectiveness*).

Based on the material presented in this section of the PRR, Trinity is clearly in compliance with Standard 7 and Standard 14.

However, readers of the PRR who are not part of the Trinity community and who do not have the benefit being immersed in Trinity's culture of assessment may have some difficulty in appreciating the scope and coherence of these efforts. If, in fact, Trinity Washington aspires to become a leader in the arena of assessment, the reviewers suggest that some time and energy be devoted to developing a somewhat more "user-friendly" way to present both the shape and substance of Trinity's assessment efforts.

This collegial suggestion seems to be in line with one implicit in the material for Strategic Goal 9 contained in the 2010 Strategic Plan Review presented to the Board of Trustees in February of 2011. There the presentation calls for the institution to "Create a more deliberate mechanism for taking the metrics already developed to a level that will permit their publication to various audiences..."

VI. Linked Institutional Planning and Budgeting Processes

Trinity's long-standing commitment to linking self-study and assessment to strategic planning finds another manifestation in the institution's annual and strategic budgeting processes. In fact, the annual budgeting process is organized so that it is, in fact, a strategic budgeting process. As the PRR points out, "The annual budget cycle expects all department heads to express resource needs in relation to strategic goals and tactics."

Assessing Trinity 2010 points to several examples of use of planning and assessment results in the budget process including the creation of the institution's First Year Experience and General Education programs that are estimated to have cost approximately \$1 million. Funds for these programs came from a combination of re-allocated resources and new revenue from growing enrollments.

Although this section of the PRR is relatively brief, much of the rest of the document provides clear and compelling evidence that at Trinity, planning, assessment, and budgeting are closely linked processes.

Based on the material presented in this section and elsewhere in the PRR, Trinity Washington University is clearly in compliance with Standard 2 and Requirement 7.

VII. Conclusion

During the period since the last decennial Self-Study, Trinity Washington University has continued to display the determination and discipline necessary to achieve its strategic vision as a "comprehensive university offering a broad range of educational programs that prepare students across the lifespan for the intellectual, ethical and spiritual dimensions of contemporary work, civic and family life."

Assessing Trinity 2010: Periodic Review Report presents an impressive picture of an institution that recognizes and honors its close connections to the vision of its founders even as it has embraced the realities of the 21st century. Among those realities is a mature awareness of the crucial importance of planning, assessment and accountability, not merely in terms of compliance, but because these are necessary elements of institutional success in an increasingly challenging environment.