Progress Letter to Middle States Commission
FIT
March 31, 2009

This letter is a follow-up to FIT’s five-year Periodic Review Report submitted to Middle States in June 2007. After reaffirming the College’s accreditation, Middle States requested a progress letter documenting ‘the development and implementation of an organized and sustainable assessment process with evidence that results are being used to improve teaching, learning and institutional effectiveness (Standards 7 and 14).’

Since June 2007, FIT has moved significantly forward in achieving its goal of assessing institutional effectiveness and student learning (Standards 7 and 14). This has also been facilitated by the hiring in March 2008 of a new Assistant Dean in the Office of Curriculum and Instruction whose major responsibility is to coordinate FIT’s assessment activities.

Assessment of Institutional Effectiveness (Standard 7)

FIT’s Strategic Plan, 20:20 FIT at 75, continues to serve as a major tool for assessing programs and services college-wide. The reviewers’ report in 2007 indicated that FIT has done an excellent job of identifying strategic goals, tasks, costs and accountabilities. The assessment of these goals has now become routine and takes place once a year by the President’s Deputy for Strategic Initiatives and the Vice Presidents and Deans. This annual, in-depth review assesses the extent to which each goal has been achieved, whether activities are on track or whether adjustments need to be made. Budget decisions are also made with respect to the specific goal and activity. (See Appendix 1: FIT Strategic Operational Plan).

In addition to this ongoing planning and assessment process, FIT has developed a number of institutional assessment processes and protocols supplementing those of the strategic plan and providing a structured and sustained approach to institutional assessment. These processes focus largely on three strategic planning goals—on Student Centeredness, Strategic Recruitment, and Administrative Support for the Plan—and are described below.

Quality Assurance and Improvement Program (QAIP). A major development in institutional assessment at FIT has been the creation of a Quality Assurance and Improvement Program (QAIP) for all of FIT’s non-academic college offices and services. The intent of this program is to promote organizational effectiveness and quality service throughout the College by a comprehensive and in-depth review of all of these programs and services. Appendix 2 describes the QAIP in detail and includes the following: (1) Guidelines and Format for the review; (2) Common Assessment Methodologies; (3) an Inventory of the operations of the area under review; and (4) Business Process Documentation with Responsible Individuals; and (5) Review Schedule.
The QAIP is the cornerstone of FIT’s assessment of institutional effectiveness and provides a coherent structure through which the College implements the 5th goal of its Strategic Plan—Administrative Support for the Plan. Planning for the review of these administrative services began in AY ‘07-‘08, with implementation in January 2009 focusing on the Bursar operation as the pilot. The Bursar’s Office has already begun its work, completing its goals and objectives, a flow chart of its operations, and a description and process narrative of its billing process (see Appendix 2D).

For each review, a Self Study Committee has been formed and a timetable for tasks developed. In addition, a college-wide Quality Assurance Committee has been formed consisting of four individuals, three of whom are senior management individuals from outside the particular area under study. This committee will review the findings from each of the particular areas undergoing review.

In Fall 2009, five programs are targeted for review, with a similar schedule planned for each subsequent year. This process is tied to the budget, with the President and relevant VP reviewing and prioritizing the QAIP recommendations and allocating budgetary resources. While there is little direct evidence or results to report on the first review to date, we expect that this structured process will yield findings leading to program improvements, ultimately benefiting students, as well as efficiencies in the delivery of services.

**Recruitment and Marketing Assessment: The Stamats Report.** In 2006, FIT engaged in a comprehensive, in-depth recruitment and market research study conducted by Stamats as part of the college’s 4th goal of the Strategic Plan: Engage in Strategic Recruitment. This research included extensive surveys of prospective and current students, parents, and industry partners, as well as an audit of the college’s current recruitment activities. The overall study was completed in December 2007 and consists of ten separate reports with findings. (See Appendix 3 for the Stamats Summary Report and a listing of the titles of the nine other reports).

The findings and results of the Stamats research led to the identification of ten structural recommendations for the college in the areas of admissions, recruitment, the website, and publications. (Appendix 3). FIT has put into place a number of actions in response to these recommendations, each of which is described briefly below.

**Recruitment.** A major development has been a refocusing and prioritizing of the enrollment management function at the College. With the retirement of the existing Vice President for Student Affairs, a search is underway for the newly-titled position of Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success, with the assistance of the search firm, Scott Healy & Associates. This new vice president will develop, implement and manage an organized process and strategies for recruitment, enrollment and student retention, along with the traditional student services, such as residential life, counseling, financial aid, and registrar. Currently, an interim administrator with extensive experience
in admissions and recruitment is assisting the College in implementing the recommendations of the Stamats study until the new VP is selected.

Among the follow-up actions in recruitment and enrollment are the following:

- A Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Oversight Committee was created and charged with ensuring that the resulting strategies are consistent with FIT’s Strategic Goals and have appropriate key performance indicators for assessing and monitoring their effectiveness.
- Three new subcommittees were formed to provide input to the SEM: Admissions, Policies, Processes and Procedures; Marketing, Recruitment and Technology; and Student Retention and Success. Each sub-committee is charged with submitting recommendations and plans to the SEM for review and approval.

The new SEM Committee will recommend enrollment policies and establish priorities and objectives for additional research, enrollment planning, student retention or evaluations of enrollment success and student satisfaction. Included among the specific objectives are the following:

1. **Student Retention and Success**: Develop strategies for student success and retention.
2. **Enrollment**: Assess enrollment needs, issues and capacity for enrollment growth globally or by academic programs; address issues related to student enrollment.
4. **Student Quality and Diversity**: Assist in improving the academic quality of matriculates and the enrollment diversity consistent with institutional mission, academic programs and campus life.
5. **Institutional Pricing and Financial Aid**: Assess the impact of institutional pricing and financial aid packaging on student recruitment and retention.
6. **Key Performance Indicators**: Develop KPIs for recruitment and retention purposes.
7. **Enrollment Goals**: Establish enrollment goals and objectives in harmony with the College.

**Marketing**: Considerable data on the perceptions of various constituencies toward FIT was collected and analyzed by Stamats and used by the College to refine its marketing and recruitment activities. As a result, FIT developed more concise and creative marketing efforts, including the following:

- The development of five core strategic messages for use in all communications
- Significant revisions in content for college guidebooks
- A complete overhaul of the college’s viewbook
- Incorporation of strategic language in the new website, scheduled to launch spring 2009
- A series of institutional workshops with chairs and directors to develop department-specific language in support of recruitment activity
New Website. Also following up on the Stamats Report, FIT contracted with web consultant, MStoner, LLC, to develop a new website for the college. They spent three days on campus on a fact-finding mission and conducted several focus groups and surveys to ensure that the new site will support the goals of strategic recruitment, student-centeredness, and creative hub. (See Appendix 3). These activities included:

- Publication of an extensive white paper with full web strategy
- Competitive landscape review of other college websites
- Two rounds of usability testing (one completed, one to come)
- Distribution of three possible website designs in survey format to prospective students (approximately 200 respondents) and the FIT community (approximately 900 respondents).

In support of the strategic plan, FIT’s will roll out a new website in Spring 2009 that is more focused on effective communication with the prospective student and will better convey the college’s creative activity and support the needs of our current students.

Assessment of Advertising for Continuing Education. In Fall 2007, Blur Advertising conducted an assessment of the ad campaign for FIT’s Continuing Education offerings consisting of an online survey of 150 respondents and six in-person focus groups of current and prospective students. The research indicated that, while the current campaign was effective, its creative messages could be stronger. As a result, the campaign content and images were refined in the 2008 spring and summer campaigns. Since that time, call center activity increased 74%, web hits rose 61%, and direct mail responses increased 167%.

Assessment of the Human Resource Function at FIT. To facilitate the achievement of goal 5 of the Strategic Plan, Establish a Process for Administrative Support of the Plan, FIT engaged the services of an outside, independent consultant to conduct an assessment of the human resources function at the college. The intent of the study was to better understand what needed to be in place so that the Office of Human Resources (OHR) could: (1) play a strategic role in organizational change; and (2) deliver high quality human resource customer services to all FIT academic and administrative units. (See Appendix 4: Assessment of Human Resource Function at FIT).

The assessment included: a review of the FIT 2020 Strategic Plan, an examination of key human resource documents and of the HR information system (Banner) that supports the HR function; staff interviews and observations; and interviews with customers and stakeholders (FIT faculty and staff).

The study identified four major areas for improvements-- Leadership, HR Practices, Customer Needs, and Policies and Responsibilities. Many of the recommendations have already been implemented, including the following:
• A new Vice President for Human Resource Management and Labor Relations was hired in July 2008 with extensive experience in human resources and higher education;

• The Office of HR has been restructured, with three HR Generalists—all with Master’s degrees in Human Resources or related fields—hired to serve as “account reps” to the various academic and administrative departments; and the part-time Director of Employee Relations was moved to full-time;

• A 20-week, 4-hour per week training experience was set up to enable existing staff to upgrade their skills and sit for the Society for Human Resource Management certification exam this summer.

• An interim strategic plan for HR covering academic year 2008-2009 and the first half of 2009-2010 was developed. The identification of core HR metrics has also begun and will be more fully implemented in 2009-2010 in conjunction with the 5-year strategic plan, which will be completed by the beginning of the 2009-2010 academic year.

• The College has reached agreement with its union to redo the classification and compensation system, including the development of career ladders, the development of appropriate job descriptions, and providing for promotional opportunities.

In the past, FIT’s Human Resource Office was viewed as a transaction-based operation focusing on largely on the processing of paperwork in order to get new employees onto the payroll in a timely manner. The more modern practice that FIT has embraced is HR as a strategic partner in achieving the organization’s mission and goals. Since approximately 70% of the College’s budget is spent on personnel costs—both faculty and staff—the effective utilization of that staff has an impact on the delivery of services to students—whether in the classroom or in ancillary services, such as career counseling or financial aid. The changes in direction and service delivery of the HR function at FIT are being designed and implemented to enable it to play a strategic role in supporting FIT’s mission and goals, leading to the improvement of institutional effectiveness.

**Vacancy Review Process.** In May, 2008, the President announced the creation of a Vacancy Review Committee to examine requests to fill all vacancies (other than classroom positions) and make recommendations to the President. (See Appendix 5: Vacancy Review Process). The Committee meets monthly and is composed of the VP for Finance and Administration, the VP for Human Resources and Labor Relations, and the Executive Assistant to the President. The purpose of this review is to ensure that any hiring decisions that are made are consistent with FIT’s strategic direction, that there is a focus on productivity savings, and that changes in job functions have been considered. Since its inception the Vacancy Review Committee has reviewed a total of 50 positions to date.

**Assessment of the College Environment through NSSE.** For the first time, FIT assessed the perceptions of students on the National Survey of Student Engagement
(NSSE) in Spring 2008. FIT also made the decision to participate in the survey earmarked for four-year colleges rather than that for community colleges (BESSE). The NSSE assists the College in moving forward on all five goals of the Strategic Plan, especially Goal 3: Creating a Culture of Student-Centeredness. A total of 1,162 FIT freshmen and 1,001 seniors were sampled, with a response rate of 31% and 28%, respectively. Nearly all of the respondents completed the online version of the survey. Generally, FIT's benchmark performance compares more favorably to our peer groups among freshmen than seniors. FIT performed equivalently or slightly favorably on “Active and Collaborative Learning” and “Enriching Educational Experiences,” but less favorably on “Supportive Campus Environment,” where it was slightly to moderately below our peer groups.

These broad results were presented to the President's Cabinet and the Deans' Council in Fall 2008 for review and discussion. They are now being analyzed by school so they can be more meaningfully interpreted and an action plan developed for each school as well as college-wide. This plan will involve the participation of the vice presidents, the deans, directors, department chairs, and faculty. Focus groups of students will also be convened. This work will be ongoing, and FIT now has a baseline of results that can be compared to later findings on NSSE, which will continue to be surveyed on a three-year cycle.

To address specific areas of advisement and registration—two areas requiring further attention—the College has made a concerted effort to improve the academic advising experience, streamline technology in registration and to make both areas more student-centered. Included in this effort are advisor assignments in the school of Business and Technology and Art and Design, and the involvement of Liberal Arts in General Education Advisement. An updated Advisor Manual is being edited by Student Affairs and will be provided to all advisors. In addition, training sessions on the role of the academic advisor and the DARS audit process have also been offered to departmental and school advisors.

Online improvements include the use of override codes to minimize the need for students to visit offices for in-person transactions; online block registration; imaged documents, which either arrive on the web or are scanned upon arrival, thus providing a more efficient flow of data whenever necessary; and online transactions, with grade, attendance and certification rosters now entirely on-line. Faculty also have access to class and grade information from any computer at any time, and the Registrar is able to provide reports almost instantly; and online registration for both new and continuing students, eliminating the need for arena registration in the gym. Online registration is also now available for part-time students.

Assessment of Student Learning (Standard 14)

FIT’s assessment of student learning outcomes, both in general education and in the major, reflects a sustained and structured approach to implementing the College’s
strategic plan, in particular, goal one-- Strengthening the Academic Core. Each of these assessments is described below.

**Assessment of General Education.** FIT's assessment initiative in general education, which began in 2002, is more fully described in FIT's *Periodic Review Report* of June 2007. Ten knowledge and skills areas and two competency areas are assessed each year on a three-year cycle (see Appendix 6: FIT General Education Schedule). All of these areas have now been assessed at least twice, with the exception of mathematics, which will be assessed for the second time in 2009-2010. The College is now in its third cycle of reviews.

The FIT general education process ensures the dissemination of results and the evaluation of the assessment process through faculty participation. FIT's Ad Hoc Assessment Committee of the Faculty Senate reviews the assessment results and the faculty recommendations for curricular/teaching changes based on these documented results. One year after the assessment, each Faculty Coordinator provides a status report to the Committee on the actions taken in response to the recommendations.

In March 2009, FIT submitted a "Triennial Update" to SUNY describing closing-the-loop practices. (See Appendix 6: General Education). This document provided a detailed analysis of how FIT has used assessment results to improve its general education program. Many changes in curriculum and teaching have been implemented as a result of FIT's assessment activity in general education. Appendix 6 contains a chart of these follow-up actions, as well as a listing of budgetary support for assessment activities.

**Program Reviews.** FIT's program review process was also described in the College's *Periodic Review Report* to Middle States in June 2007. This process includes the development of a self study according to specific guidelines and a 2-day visit by two consultants. Since June 2007, all FIT programs except two have completed their first cycle of reviews, and the second cycle has begun (see Appendix 7: FIT Program Review). In addition, graduate-level programs are now included in this cycle of reviews. More emphasis is also paid to the direct assessments of student learning that are part of the program review process, and to the subsequent follow-up actions to ensure that findings are used to strengthen the teaching and learning process.

FIT's review process is guided by SUNY and Middle States guidelines and includes: an exit interview with the consultants, a follow-up meeting in the fall semester to discuss, review and prioritize consultants' recommendations; the development of a departmental action plan; and a follow-up 12-18 months later to assess the status of the recommendations in the action plan.

This process is faculty-led with support from each school dean, and the offices of Curriculum and Instruction, and Institutional Research. Closing-the-loop has been a major focus of these reviews, and based upon the consultants' recommendations and school and college priorities, a variety of teaching and curricular revisions have been implemented. Appendix 7 provides a sample of these recommendations and follow-up
actions taken as a result of the program review process. The College is also working to strengthen the assessment process and solicits feedback through regular meetings with program review chairs.

**Budget Process and Assessment.** FIT's 2007 *Periodic Review Report* included a timetable for the College's annual budget development process. This calendar remains essentially the same, except for some minor changes to enable the process to be more responsive to the College's financial needs. Recommendations resulting from FIT's assessment activities also follow this timetable. Once they have been reviewed by the Vice President and the President, priorities are established and a budget developed. The President then allocates funds for these activities from FIT's New Initiatives Funding for the following year. In the case of the assessment of the HR Function, for example, a total of $750,000 was earmarked for this major undertaking, including a new Vice President, a restructuring of the HR Office, and the implementation of the recommendations from the assessment. This ensures that the results of the assessments feed into budgetary decisions and the allocation of resources.

**Conclusion.** As the College assesses the goals of the Strategic Plan and moves forward to build out the Plan over the next five years, the President has identified two areas for continued attention and focus by the college—Goal 2: Commit to a Culture of Student Centeredness, and Goal 3: Strengthen FIT as a Creative Hub. While many developments have taken place in these areas, their assessments reveal that they are not as far along as they could be in achieving their objectives. As a result, the President will put aside some additional resources in next year's budget (AY10) to address them, thus continuing to tie budgetary resources to the assessment of the strategic goals of the Plan.