Executive Summary

Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), a part of the State University of New York (SUNY), is a college of art and design, business and technology in the heart of New York City. Its mission is to prepare students for professional excellence in design, fashion, and business by providing the premier educational experience that fosters creativity, career focus, and a global perspective. This specialized mission and the College’s offerings make it unique within SUNY and the nation.

FIT’s accreditation process has provided an opportunity for the College community to reflect on many important changes and accomplishments and to identify future strategies and recommendations. A College-wide strategic planning process begun in 2004-2005 resulted in the identification of five broad goals that continue to serve as a framework for the College’s programs, initiatives, and resource allocation. While enrollment has remained stable at approximately 10,000 students, the College also remains competitive in admissions, especially in its high-demand programs such as Fashion Design and Fashion Merchandising Management. New program development has been significant, the integration of technology into the curriculum extensive, and online learning an increasingly popular delivery mode. Many new faculty with high-level industry experience and workplace connections have been recruited. Internationally, FIT’s global reach has expanded, with many additional overseas experiences available to students.

The College has focused on creating a more student-centered environment by restructuring the Student Services Division and enhancing student support services and physical spaces. At the same time, FIT has moved forward with its Master Plan, by adding a new residence hall, student dining hall, conference center, state-of-the-art technology labs and studios, physical plant upgrades and landscaping, and planning for a new nine-floor academic building called “C².”

Significant advances have been made in moving toward a culture of assessment in both academic and administrative areas, where programs are assessed, and results reviewed and used for institutional improvement.

The College has been transformed in many ways since 2002 and is positioned to meet the complex challenges of the future, which include major operational changes in the industries served by FIT, in the ways students learn and process information, and in the pedagogies most effective to enable students to become competitive in the global marketplace.

All of these accomplishments have been supported and facilitated by a dedicated Board of Trustees, and a restructured Fashion Institute of Technology Foundation and Development and Alumni Relations Division.

The following summarizes the findings and recommendations in the eight chapters in the Self-Study.
Major Findings and Recommendations

Chapter 1

STANDARD 1: MISSION AND GOALS
STANDARD 6: INTEGRITY

Chapter 1 presents FIT’s mission and illustrates how it serves as the framework for carrying out its goals, programs, and services. It highlights the College’s continuing commitment to its specialized mission in fashion, design, and business and the extent to which the core themes of creativity, a career focus, and globalization are addressed. FIT’s mission was reaffirmed through a memorandum of understanding with SUNY in January 2007. The chapter demonstrates compliance with the fundamental elements and how FIT’s mission and goals are infused into the schools and degree programs. Recommendations include creating a formalized schedule for periodic review of FIT’s mission and goals and further development of FIT as a creative hub. While recognizing the continuing relevance of its ten-year-old mission, the College recommends establishing a process for periodic review of the mission in light of the changes that have taken place within the College since its last mission review.

The chapter also addresses Standard 6, and presents information throughout the report demonstrating compliance.

Chapter 2

STANDARD 2: PLANNING, RESOURCE ALLOCATION, AND INSTITUTIONAL RENEWAL
STANDARD 3: INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

Chapter 2 describes the planning process undertaken in developing FIT’s Strategic Plan, 2020: FIT at 75, and its five broad goals – strengthening the academic core, committing to a culture of student centeredness, strengthening FIT as a creative hub, engaging in strategic recruitment, and establishing a process for administrative support of the plan. Key elements of the College’s strategic operational plan are also identified, which include objectives, activities, measures, metrics, timetables, and locus of responsibility. The chapter provides examples of unit-based planning from the Gladys Marcus Library and The Museum at FIT consistent with the Strategic Plan, and it indicates how the planning process relates to the allocation of resources and College-wide improvements. In this chapter, the College recommends that each department develop a plan to support the College’s Strategic Plan.

This chapter also demonstrates how the College’s varied resources – faculty and staff, technology, budget, and space – are effective in meeting its goals and objectives. Three main sources of revenue – city, state, and tuition – are described, as well as the newly restructured FIT Foundation. In addition, FIT’s ongoing initiatives to construct a new academic building (C²) and its extensive space renovation and facilities upgrades are highlighted. Recommendations include utilizing the results of the College’s 2010 space study to reallocate existing space, and revising and updating the Master Plan in accordance with the findings of the study. FIT’s technological advancements are highlighted as well, which include expanded connectivity, enriched labs and software, and ongoing technology training through the Technology Development Team (TDT).
The chapter also illustrates how the College uses data to ensure that appropriate decisions are made in the allocation of space and resources. Effective decisions in human resource allocation are also facilitated through a vacancy review process, begun in 2008, and the protection of college assets through the Internal Audit Office, created in 2007.

Chapter 3

STANDARD 4: LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE
STANDARD 5: ADMINISTRATION

Chapter 3 describes how FIT’s administration, faculty, and students participate in shared governance. The College is effectively governed by a newly expanded 16-member Board of Trustees. FIT employees are members of the United College Employees of FIT, which is the union that negotiates with the College administration for terms and conditions of employment. Faculty participate in the shared governance of the College through the Faculty Senate, which is comprised of 16 committees. Students are engaged in campus governance through the FIT Student Association (FITSA). The FITSA President also serves ex officio on the Board of Trustees and meets regularly with the President.

The administration of the College is led by Dr. Joyce F. Brown, who joined FIT in 1998 and who oversees a nine-member Cabinet comprised of seven vice presidents, the General Counsel, and the Deputy to the President. These members are assessed yearly. An eight-member Deans Council reports to the Vice President for Academic Affairs. Also described are two new councils formed by the President, one on diversity and the other on sustainability. In addition, the chapter examines the College’s current efforts to improve communication across all operational units. Recommendations include expanding communications and increasing collaboration among units.

Chapter 4

STANDARD 8: STUDENT ADMISSIONS AND RETENTION
STANDARD 9: STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Chapter 4 demonstrates FIT’s commitment to student success and two key goals of the Strategic Plan: “Commit to a culture of student-centeredness” and “Engage in strategic recruitment.” It describes the restructuring of the new Enrollment Management and Student Success Division, which merged the existing offices in Student Affairs and Institutional Research. This reshaped division is focused on improving strategic recruitment and student centeredness. The chapter notes FIT’s continued focus on maintaining a high one-year retention rate of 87 percent and a historically strong three-year graduation rate of 63 percent. The chapter describes the actions taken by the College to commit to strategic recruitment and its response to a comprehensive recruitment and marketing report and the execution of many of its recommendations. Also included are many changes in key student support areas and other initiatives to improve student life on campus. The chapter also recommends that the College follow through on its plans for a centralized Advisement Center. Other planned student-centered initiatives include an expanded International Programs Center and a new Customer Relationship Management system to automate and track interactions with prospective applicants. The chapter highlights positive improvements in the Student Opinion Survey and the National Survey of Student Engagement survey findings from 2006 to 2010 and recommends that these results be more widely shared and communicated on campus.
Chapter 5

STANDARD 10: FACULTY

This chapter focuses on the increase in full-time faculty lines, and discusses the processes used for recruitment and hiring as well as the professional development opportunities for the College’s 1,016 full- and part-time classroom faculty and 82 specialized full- and part-time non-classroom faculty. It describes faculty industry and academic expertise, commitment to students, passion for teaching and learning, focus on remaining current in their field, and consistency in initiating appropriate curricular development to support learning in an ever-changing industry. Details are provided on the Faculty of the Future initiative, launched by President Brown, which outlines how the five core competencies of globalism, instructional design, learning enrichment, professionalism, and technology, are used to recruit and hire all new faculty. Also described is FIT’s Center for Excellence in Teaching and its faculty development programs.

Recommendations include continuing to increase the number of full-time faculty, evaluating the structure of the School of the Graduate Studies, and examining several policies directly related to faculty, such as post-tenure review.

Chapter 6

STANDARD 11: EDUCATIONAL OFFERINGS

Chapter 6 describes FIT’s diverse and unique academic offerings, which reflect the College’s specialized mission in fashion, design, and business. It demonstrates how programs remain current through industry connections and advisory boards, and meet appropriate standards of rigor and coherence. The chapter illustrates the distinctive nature of many of FIT’s associate, bachelor’s, and master’s programs, which emphasize creativity and a career focus. Enriched learning resources are also highlighted, including credit-bearing internships, industry critics, the special collections of The Museum at FIT and the Gladys Marcus Library, FIT’s Digital Image Library, and study-abroad experiences. Also described is the incorporation of capstone courses, which reflect experiential learning and a synthesis of theory and practice through real-world projects. Final oral presentations, finished garments, marketing plans, artwork, design plans, videos, and portfolios all typify these student projects. Technology is also pervasive in the curriculum through the ANGEL course management system, generic and discipline-based software, online and blended courses, and FIT’s extensive network of computer labs.

FIT’s new program development is described, with six undergraduate degree programs, four master’s programs, and one online degree program developed over the last decade—all tied to the specialized industries served by the College. Examples include new bachelor’s programs in Technical Design, Entrepreneurship, and Accessories Design; master’s degree programs in Global Fashion Management, Sustainable Interior Environments, and Exhibition Design; and an MFA in Illustration.

Recommendations include providing students with more opportunities for choosing elective courses and for interdisciplinary collaborations, strengthening students’ information literacy skills, and reviewing transfer policies in the major to ensure they result in a fair, effective, and efficient transfer process for students.
Chapter 7

STANDARD 12: GENERAL EDUCATION
STANDARD 13: RELATED EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Chapter 7 provides an overview of FIT’s program of general education, composed of ten areas and two competencies, according to SUNY guidelines. It illustrates how a diversity of perspectives is incorporated into the College’s liberal arts offerings, and how New York State and Middle States minimum credit guidelines and required general education competencies, including critical thinking, are met. Also described is the assessment process in general education, which is currently in its third cycle, as well as examples of measures used to evaluate student learning. The chapter includes a recommendation that the College re-examine its liberal arts requirements in light of a recent revision in SUNY’s general education policy.

The chapter also reviews the College’s related educational activities, including basic skills, credit certificates, noncredit offerings, international programs, and distance education. It demonstrates the growth of distance education courses and describes the College’s array of international offerings, including study abroad, summer and winter overseas courses, residential programs in Florence and Milan, and initiatives with international partner institutions. The chapter recommends that the College assess program outcomes to ensure retention, review certificate programs and the process used to track students, increase support for online learning, and strengthen the College’s international outreach.

Chapter 8

STANDARD 7: INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT
STANDARD 14: ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

Chapter 8 describes the College’s institutional assessment processes, including assessment of the goals of the Strategic Plan, the review of administrative units through a program review process begun in 2008, and the use of other means for assessing institutional outcomes. Highlighted here is the College’s new Planning, Assessment, and Compliance Office, established in Spring 2011. The chapter also references numerous improvements in student services, using findings from student surveys.

The chapter also illustrates progress made in “assessment of student learning in general education” and “assessment of learning outcomes in the majors” since 2002. Assessment of general education, currently in its third cycle, focuses on ten areas and two competencies through a series of diverse measures. Assessment in the major, in its second cycle, incorporates self-studies, external consultant reports, and the assessment of student learning outcomes. Follow-up action plans with recommendations and timetables for each program are developed and subsequently reviewed for their status. The chapter also provides evidence of how the assessment findings have been used to improve assessment measures, curriculum, pedagogy, learning resources, and more.

Recommendations include developing a plan to communicate assessment results to the campus community on a regular basis and establishing a more formal process for assessing the assessment process.
Certification Statement:
Compliance with Federal Title IV Requirements
(For SUNY Community Colleges Effective July 1, 2011)

An institution seeking initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation must affirm by completing this certification statement that it meets or continues to meet established federal requirements relating to Title IV program participation, including relevant requirements under the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 such as those on distance education, transfer of credit, and the assignment of credit hours.

This signed statement should be attached to the executive summary of the institution’s self-study or periodic review report.

If it is not possible to certify compliance with all such requirements, the institution must attach specific details in a separate memorandum.

Fashion Institute of Technology

(Name of Institution)

is seeking (Check one): ___Initial Accreditation  X ___Reaffirmation of Accreditation

The undersigned hereby certifies that the institution meets all established federal requirements relating to Title IV program participation, including relevant requirements under the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 such as those on distance education, transfer of credit, or the assignment of credit hours.

X Exceptions are noted in the attached memorandum (Check if applicable)
*See page 87 of Middle States Self Study re: Distance Education

(Campus President)
Dr. Joyce F. Brown

(Date)

(Chair, Campus Board of Trustees)
Edwin A. Goodman

(Date)
Certification Statement:
Compliance with MSCHE Requirements of Affiliation and Related Entities Policy
(For SUNY Community Colleges Effective October 1, 2009)

An institution seeking initial accreditation or reaffirmation of accreditation must affirm that it meets or continues to meet established MSCHE requirements of affiliation and “Related Entities” policy.

This signed statement should be attached to the executive summary of the institution's self-study report.

Fashion Institute of Technology
(Name of Institution)

The State University of New York represents that this institution operates within the program of the SUNY System. The undersigned hereby certify that SUNY recognizes the Commission’s compliance requirements for this institution and will uphold State University’s policies pertaining to MSCHE standards and requirements of affiliation.

(Campus President)  
(Date)

(Chair, Campus Board of Trustees)  
(Date)

(Chair, SUNY Board of Trustees)  
(Date)
December 1, 2011

Mary Ellen Petrisko, Ph.D.
Vice President
Middle States Commission on Higher Education
3624 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104-2680

Dear Dr. Petrisko:

Trustee Warren-Merrick is Chair of our Academic Affairs Committee, which oversees all academic matters for SUNY. The Chairman of our Board recuses himself from all matters relating to FIT, because of a potential conflict of interest (his wife is President of FIT).

Please contact me at 518-320-1645 if you have any questions on this matter.

Sincerely,

William F. Howard
Senior Vice Chancellor, General Counsel
And Secretary of the University