

**Report to the  
Faculty, Administration, Students and Trustees of the  
*Fashion Institute of Technology***

by the Evaluation Team representing the  
***Middle States Commission on Higher Education***

Prepared through study of the institution's self-study report and visit to the campus on  
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# **I. Context and Nature of the Visit**

## **a. Institutional Overview**

The Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) was founded in 1944 by industry leaders in the heart of New York City. The Institute became the second community college of the State University of New York (SUNY) in 1951, focused on art and design, business and technology. The college received Middle States accreditation in 1957. As a community college with city and state support, as well as county chargebacks, FIT provides affordable access to more than 10,000 students each year.

The college is unique in its offering of degree programs in 30 areas of study and through 46 programs at the associate, baccalaureate and graduate levels, as approved by the College's Board of Trustees, SUNY and the New York State Department of Education. The art and design programs are accredited by the National Association of Schools and Art Design (NASAD), and its Interior Design program is accredited by the Council of Interior Design and Accreditation (CIDA). FIT also has its own board of Trustees that provides oversight and makes policy, as well as a FIT Foundation responsible for development and constituted by industry professionals and executives.

The student body consists of a diverse mix of 69% local and in-state students, 24% out-of-state students and 7% international students. The faculty numbers about 1,000 and is composed of one-quarter full-time faculty lines and three-quarters adjunct faculty drawn from the industry leaders and experienced professionals. Liberal Arts faculty serve to round out the general education of students studying in the specialized disciplines. On the order of 75 "non-classroom" faculty provide key academic support services. FIT is organized into five schools: Art and Design, Business and Technology, Continuing and Professional Studies, Graduate Studies and Liberal Arts.

FIT's largest programs are Fashion Merchandising Management, Fashion Design, Advertising and Marketing Communications and Communication Design. Narrower-focused programs include Toy Design, Home Products Development and Packaging Design, while mid-size programs address the art-based disciplines of Illustration and Photography and business-related aspects of International Trade and Marketing. Six new undergraduate programs, four graduate programs and an online degree program have been implemented over the past decade, including the new bachelor's degree 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.

The College offers a variety of study abroad options and overseas courses as well as residential programs in Florence and Milan. The School of Continuing and Professional Studies additionally serves more than 13,500 enrollees, including precollege youth, small-business owners, entrepreneurs and industry executives, in its many evening and weekend, credit and non-credit, certificate and training programs.

The campus physical plant includes ten buildings in a full city block comprised of the student center, business and liberal arts center, art and design, and conference center, among other facilities. FIT provides accommodation for 2,300 students (about a quarter of the total headcount enrollment) in four residence halls. The Gladys Marcus Library, Digital Image Library and The Museum at FIT serve both the college and community, featuring collections of resources, costumes and textiles, as well as programs and exhibitions, focused on fashion that attract hundreds of thousands of visitors annually.

b. Scope of Institution

Degrees awarded by the Fashion Institute of Technology are the Associate in Applied Science (AAS), Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA), Bachelor of Science (BS), Master of Arts (MA), Master of Professional Studies (MPA), and most recently, the Master of Fine Arts (MFA). FIT students who complete the associate degree have the option of applying to the bachelor's level. About 60% of the students exercise this option, such that baccalaureate candidates comprise about 40% of the 2010 graduating class.

c. Self-Study Process and Participation

Initiated in fall of 2009, twenty-five members of the FIT community participated in the self-study process, including a cross-section of the faculty, department chairs, deans, vice presidents, directors and students. Dympna Bowles, dean for curriculum and instruction, and Robert Vassalotti, professor of Fashion Merchandising Management, co-chaired the effort. A comprehensive model was selected, and eight working groups were formed of approximately ten individuals each to organize and develop the chapters of the Self-Study Report.

The groups prepared draft working-reports to be submitted to a Steering Committee in late 2010. A first draft was prepared and presented to the Steering Committee in February 2011. A second draft, incorporating recommendations from evaluation of the first draft, was produced in May 2011 and shared with the President's Cabinet. Third and fourth drafts were developed and ultimately shared with the College community and Board of Trustees, and another draft submitted for review and comment by the Middle States visiting-team chair in late November 2011.

## **II. Affirmation of Continued Compliance with Eligibility Requirements**

Based on a review of the self-study, interviews, and institutional documents, the team affirms that the institution continues to meet eligibility requirements and is in compliance with Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) Affiliation and Related Entities Policy (for SUNY Community Colleges effective October 1, 2009).

## **III. Compliance with Federal Requirements; State Regulatory or Other Accrediting Agency Requirements**

Based on review of the self-study, certification by the institution, other institutional documents and/or interviews, the team affirms that the institution meets all established 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 assignment of credit hours.

According to its bylaws, section I.B., FIT is “operated and maintained as a community college under the program of the State University of New York (SUNY)” and is therefore subject to the Education Law of the State of New York and additionally to provisions of its sponsorship by the Department of Education of the City of New York. Although the contract is currently expired, the College anticipates renewal of the collective bargaining agreement with the United College Employees of Fashion Institute of Technology (UCE of FIT). By law, the conditions of the expired contract remain in effect until a new contract is negotiated and ratified.

#### **IV. Evaluation Overview**

*The following provides a summary of noteworthy activities and accomplishments of The Fashion Institute of Technology, as well as institutional aspects worthy of commendation, as identified by the Evaluation Team.*

The FIT president and her team have the enthusiastic support of the FIT Board and are to be commended for their successful leadership of FIT.

FIT's Strategic Plan is used at every level of administration and teaching to provide a clear and consistent resource for the evolution of the College.

The camaraderie and level of passion for their work is evident when speaking with the College's various constituents.

The institution presents compelling evidence that it gives attention to and operates with integrity, transparency and openness.

The creation of *FIT@Night* is an innovative approach to community building, meeting the social needs of students.

The evolution of the Behavioral Assessment Team into a FIT Care Team provides a highly proactive intervention for students in distress.

To have students fully engaged and responsible for the contents and publication of the student handbook is both unique and commendable.

The recognition of FIT with The President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll for 2011 and 2012 speaks to the dedication and commitment of its students.

There is a strong and unified approach to improving the design and delivery of the educational programs at FIT.

New Liberal Arts minors have been supported by faculty members and provide additional ways for students to gain credentials that help them find employment.

Nineteen new programs have been implemented since the last Middle States visit in 2002, and four additional offerings are presently under development.

FIT has a wide variety of non-credit courses, pre-college and weekend and evening programs that allows its specialized programs to be more easily accessible to the community.

Students report that they are challenged to think critically in completing assignments, which combined with the work of a Critical Thinking Initiative Committee, has led to improvement of the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) test scores from below the national mean for four-year institutions in 2006 to above the mean in 2011.

Over the past decade, FIT's reviews of assessment results in general education and in several degree programs have stimulated numerous initiatives to improve teaching and learning, and the college is moving progressively toward the creation of a college-wide "culture of assessment."

## V. Compliance with Accreditation Standards

### Standards 1 and 6: Mission, Goals and Integrity

*The institution's mission clearly defines its purpose within the context of higher education and indicates who the institution serves and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's stated goals, consistent with the aspirations and expectations of higher education, clearly specify how the institution will fulfill its mission. The mission and goals are developed and recognized by the institution with the participation of its members and its governing body and are used to develop and shape its programs and practices and to evaluate its effectiveness.*

*In the conduct of its programs and activities involving the public and the constituencies it serves, the institution demonstrates adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies, providing support for academic and intellectual freedom.*

Based on the Self-Study Report, other relevant documents and interviews, the Evaluation Team makes the following conclusion:

**The institution meets these standards.**

FIT presents its Mission Statement and Supporting Goals as follows:

“The Fashion Institute of Technology prepares students for professional excellence in design, fashion, and business by providing the premier educational experience that fosters creativity, career focus, and a global perspective.

To fulfill its mission:

- FIT develops students' aesthetic, intellectual, analytical, and technological abilities through programs that integrate theory and practice;
- FIT offers students a rigorous and innovative curriculum taught by faculty with outstanding academic and industry experience;
- FIT is committed to a broad-based education in the liberal arts;
- FIT exposes students to their chosen professions through internships, guest lectures, industry-sponsored projects, and other opportunities for experiential learning;
- FIT promotes student growth and self-development through student support services, programs, and activities;
- FIT provides students with a multifaceted educational experience, which incorporates the vast resources of New York City;
- FIT, an urban institution of the State University of New York, provides an education of exceptional quality and affordability.”

This succinctly defined mission statement gives clear strategic direction to the college community. Achieving the seven specific and concrete goals that flow from the mission generates evidence that FIT is fulfilling its institutional purpose. To be sure that the mission accurately reflects contemporary realities, as well as the mandates of the governing SUNY system, college planners assessed FIT's mission and goals statement in 2001 leading to a major revision, and again in 2005 in response to SUNY's directives. The Evaluation Team understands that another review is currently underway. It is clear that the mission is well-communicated and embraced by the college community.

The College provides ample evidence that it is operating in an ethical manner and adheres to published policies and accepted practices. Chapter 1 of the Self-Study Report provides an extensive listing of "fundamental elements" that represent indicators of compliance. The College has practices and procedures to ensure fair and ethical treatment of faculty, students and other members of the College community, responsible conduct, and good stewardship of College resources.

Conversations with the Vice President for Human Resource Management and Labor Relations, the Affirmative Action Officer/Acting Director of Compliance, the Executive Assistant to the President, Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Services and the Dean of Students reinforced the material presented in the Self-Study Report. Policies and practices relating to personnel provide for grievances conformance to contractual agreements, assure due process, and give evidence that they are both prudent and practical. The Vice President for Human Resource Management and Labor Relations has established a good working relationship with the union leadership and others. The College has an Affirmative Action Officer reporting to the President for all affirmative action issues, who ensures compliance with Affirmative Action Guidelines. While there are a number of complaints annually, there have been only five to six real cases over the past few years and they have been resolved.

College activities related to integrity are broadly inclusive. A Diversity Council of 26 members organizes events, including a diversity week, to highlight efforts aimed at developing greater diversity, and efforts are actively made to ensure that all hiring is done from a diverse pool of applicants. The College is responsive to environmental concerns and has a Sustainability Council of 23 members that explores ways to reduce energy consumption through improved buildings, classrooms, studios, offices and living spaces. A Policy Committee has been charged with vetting and updating policies across the College, including developing new written policies as needed in such areas as social media. There is a published code of conduct for students and a policy against harassment and discrimination. Access to student records conforms to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and other applicable laws.

Interviews with individuals made it clear that the College commitment to integrity permeates the institution and is fully endorsed by the President and the Board.

## **Standards 2 and 3: Planning, Resource Allocation, Institutional Renewal and Institutional Resources**

*An institution conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals, develops objectives to achieve them, and utilizes the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal. Implementation and subsequent evaluation of the success of the strategic plan and resource allocation support the development and change necessary to improve and to maintain institutional quality.*

*The human, financial, technical, physical facilities and other resources necessary to achieve an institution's mission and goals are available and accessible. In the context of the institution's mission, the effective and efficient uses of the institution's resources are analyzed as part of ongoing outcomes assessment.*

Based on the Self-Study Report, review of additional material while on site and meetings with College personnel and students, the Evaluation Team makes the following conclusion:

### **The institution meets these standards.**

The Self-Study Report discusses the planning efforts at the College and notes the efforts made in 2004-2005 that were a starting point for its current strategic plan. *FIT at 75, Bringing the Future into Focus* is now the “central guidance system” for the College. Departmental committees were formed to identify activities, timetables and responsible persons to help ensure that the College moves forward towards its five main goals. The College provided updated reports on the status of the Strategic Plan which show its progress is generally on target with the metrics.

As evidence of the linkage between planning and budgets, the College cites the growth of 66 additional faculty lines consistent with its goal to strengthen the academic core. The capital budget has also supported significant improvements including a new residence hall, dining facility, bookstore, conference center, landscaping improvements and a major renovation of a former dining hall to create 14 state-of-the-art classrooms and studios. Discussions with staff and review of the campus facilities indicate that significant attention is paid to maintenance. The College reports several major improvements to the capacity of its HVAC system with the replacement of equipment funded through a tripartite agreement with New York City's Department of City-wide Administrative Services, the New York Power Authority and the College. The College reports that it has identified much of the funding for a 97,000 square foot academic building “C2” but needs to work with the city to secure the remainder. The College reports it has about 1.2 million gross square feet of academic and office space. In addition, there are 600,000 square feet of residential facilities for a total of 1.8 million gross square feet.

The College reports an annual budget process which is intended to cover departmental operating requirements as well as mandatory needs, rehabilitation and renovation projects and new initiatives. The process includes a review of a four-year financial plan.

The Self-Study review of revenue sources includes several related activities. This “all-funds” approach is very helpful in that all the resources of the College are examined and should be noted as a “best practice.” These are treated as component units of FIT income and are reported in their

audited financial statements in separate columns on the statements.

An active, independent Foundation serves as the fund raising arm of the College. FIT is in the initial stages of preparation of a ten-year \$200 million campaign. The funds will be used to support scholarships and facilities or infrastructure needs, among other goals. A relatively new Executive Director of the Foundation at FIT is actively engaged in fund raising efforts as the silent phase of the proposed capital campaign continues. The College reports that it is working on improved alumni relations and the coordination of alumni activities.

The Self-Study Report also briefly discusses related activities including two housing corporations. These were established some years ago and provide needed services to the College community.

The College reports that its 1995 Facilities Master Plan was updated and approved by the Trustees in 2005. In addition, FIT participated in a recent SUNY-wide review of facilities' condition and initiated a review of the use of its facilities. These efforts are a critical part of the planning and budgeting process. For example, the College reclaimed underutilized space to provide a state-of-the-art fitness center for students, thereby increasing space utility while helping to meet the goal of student-centeredness.

The Self-Study Report provides an analysis of the resources available to support programs and enable FIT to fulfill its mission. The College outlined the range of resources – financial, human, facilities, and technical –in terms of what was now available, improvements made, and areas of need.

As with most publicly supported institutions, FIT has seen a decline in state funding. However, New York City and student revenues have increased. In addition, the College has strengthened its Development and Alumni Relations division to assist in resource development and has also created an office of Government Relations to help secure additional funding for capital projects. Further, the College enrollment management plan is to not only maintain current enrollment, but to attract students from other parts of the state and elsewhere.

To help ensure that sufficient human resources are available, the College reports it has taken several steps, including a review of its compensation program, continued examination of potential use of outsourcing of certain functions and a review of all requests to fill vacant positions.

The financial position of FIT is strong at this time. The audits of financial statements for the last several years show increases to net assets. The unrestricted net assets as of June 30, 2011, were \$24.5 million. The College 2012 Budget and Financial Plan Briefing proposes increases in new positions in FY2012 to FY2015. The Briefing notes that the College intends to fill 19 faculty vacancies and, in addition, plans to add about 20 positions to improve student advisement services.

In an updated draft of the FY 2013 budget plan, the College proposes to utilize unrestricted net assets to balance the budget. It can be noted that some of the planned expenditures represent one-time outlays, such as for minor physical renovations. As such, the College would limit its future access to one-time resources to meet on-going expenses. The College is urged to consider what an appropriate level of unrestricted net assets should be as it plans to draw down on those resources so as to ensure a sufficient “rainy day” fund, on the one hand, and the prudent use of one-time money to fund its strategic initiatives, on the other.

Another item for consideration in financial planning is the impact that GASB 45 (Recording of Post-Retirement Liabilities) will have on financial statements. FIT is the employer of record and has recorded the liabilities for GASB 45 in its audited financial statements. The impact of recording the post retirement liabilities will be to reduce the unrestricted net assets although, like depreciation, it is a non-cash transaction.

*Recommendation*

**FIT should review its budget projections with the goal of establishing and reaching an appropriate level for the net unrestricted assets, addressing one-time needs, strategic initiatives and the impact of GASB 45 (Recording of Post-Retirement Liabilities) on its financial statements.**

*Suggestion*

**As noted in its Self-Study Report, the College should continue to pursue the development of diverse revenue streams and actively engage in capital campaign planning.**

## **Standards 4 and 5: Leadership, Governance and Administration**

*The institution's system of governance clearly defines the roles of institutional constituencies in policy development and decision-making. The governance structure includes an active governing body with sufficient autonomy to assure institutional integrity and to fulfill its responsibilities of policy and resource development, consistent with the mission of the institution.*

*The institution's administrative structure and services facilitate learning and research/scholarship, foster quality improvement, and support the institution's organization and governance.*

Based on the Self-Study Report, Faculty Handbook, organization bylaws and related interviews, the Evaluation Team makes the following conclusion:

### **The institution meets these standards.**

Given its origins and complicated funding support, it is not surprising that the oversight for FIT is complex. The institution is directly governed by a Board of Trustees appointed by the city and state and, as FIT is part of the State University of New York (SUNY), it is also overseen by the SUNY Board of Trustees. Both boards have written, defined terms, responsibilities and processes. The FIT Board has recently increased its membership from ten to sixteen, allowing for expansion of its committee structure and enhanced support for the institution. The by-laws provided to the Evaluation Team were dated 1997 and did not reflect the new member composition and committees; however, they were to be presented to the Board for ratification at its May 2012 meeting.

#### ***Suggestion***

**The FIT Board of Trustees should complete and adopt revisions to its bylaws to reflect current practice and operations. (The College has since reported that this occurred on May 2, 2012.)**

The current president of FIT is a very qualified and effective administrator who has assembled a strong leadership team. She has the enthusiastic support of the FIT Board and is commended for her long-term and productive leadership of the institution. However, there has been no regular, ongoing review of the president by the Board. It was explained that there is an assessment of the President conducted by an ad-hoc committee of the Board every five years. The last review included a self-assessment and interviews with representatives from internal and external constituencies.

#### ***Suggestion***

**Given its oversight role and specific responsibility, the FIT Board should develop and carry out regular and systematic reviews of the president. The College should implement its expressed plan to place the responsibility for this assessment under the aegis of the trusteeship committee, and to institutionalize the timetable, evaluation process and areas to be explored.**

*For the record, the Evaluation Team notes the letter included in the Self-Study Report from the SUNY Office of the General Counsel. The letter identifies Trustee H. Carl McCall, chair of the SUNY Board, as the spouse of the FIT president, and further stipulates that, in relation to matters pertaining to FIT, the chairman recuses himself in order to avoid potential conflict of interest.*

The institution has an internal administrative/governance structure with a faculty senate co-existing alongside a faculty/staff union, the United College Employees (UCE) . The Faculty Senate has bylaws that define the means with which faculty participate in various aspects of shared governance, selection or review of faculty and the promotion and tenure process. These were most recently updated as of January 31, 2012. The Faculty Senate procedural reviews and processes appear to sometimes be complemented or superseded by those stipulated in the UCE contract. However, from all evidence gathered during the onsite visit, it was evident that the leaders of the two organizations have a good working relationship and respect each other's authority and purview.

The advance materials provided to the Evaluation Team included a Faculty Handbook for a "Faculty Association of the Fashion Institute of Technology" dating from 1995. However, the document room contained a revised edition referring to the current "Faculty Senate" and dated April 4, 2011, that has not yet been adopted.

***Suggestion***

**The Faculty Senate should move to immediately and formally adopt its revised Faculty Handbook.**

The FIT faculty/staff union is part of a larger NYC- and NYS-wide labor council, further adding institutional complexity and constraint. The current union contract with FIT has expired and negotiations on a new contract cannot occur until approval of the financial pattern is received from NYC, the FIT local sponsor.

The organizational charts provided to the Evaluation Team reveal vacancies in a number of key administrative positions. However, from conversations during the visit, at least some of these vacancies are rationalized by the intent to reassess the administrative structure. In other cases the charts simply need to be updated. The open positions include:

Dean, School of Continuing Education and Professional Studies  
Manager of Business Development, School of Continuing and Professional Studies  
Director of Institutional Research (*search is reported to be currently underway*)  
Director of Major Gifts (*position is planned to be filled in AY2012-13*)  
Contracts Coordinator, Information Technology  
Special Assistant to Vice President of Human Resources (*since reported to have been filled*)

***Suggestion***

**An early resolution of these vacancies is recommended to ensure that key functions such as curriculum development, institutional research, and resources management are addressed and whose absence could slow the progress of the College.**

## **Standards 8 and 9: Student Admissions, Retention and Support Services**

*The institution seeks to admit students whose interests, goals, and abilities are congruent with its mission and seeks to retain them through the pursuit of the students' educational goals.*

*The institution provides student support services reasonably necessary to enable each student to achieve the institution's goals for students.*

Based on a review of the Self-Study, other institutional documents, and interviews with students, faculty, staff, and others, the Evaluation Team makes the following conclusion:

### **The institution meets these standards.**

The Fashion Institute of Technology has a very diverse student body with as much as 48 percent being persons of color or of international origin.

The College reports several laudable indicators of successful student retention:

A first year retention rate of on the order of 85 percent for incoming full-time AAS students.

A graduation rate of 63 percent for AAS students entering in 2004, up from 56 percent in 2002.

Graduation and retention of bachelor's degree students that closely mirror those of the associate's degree students and compare favorably with public 4-year institutions in the region.

FIT's AAS students receive priority for the bachelor's degree programs, though they must re-apply for admission to the bachelor's program.

Middle States Standard 8 stipulates that there should be "admissions policies and criteria available to assist the prospective student in making informed decisions" and to "provide support that reflects the institution of the mission." To support this goal the college restructured the Division of Student Affairs into the Division of Enrollment Management and Student Success, incorporating Institutional Research as a constituent function. This reorganization was driven by the intention to focus on data-driven strategic recruitment coupled with enhanced student support services. The approach has been in place for just a few years, and the results of relationship building among high school guidance counselors and others will take some time to bear fruit, but initial reactions seem to be positive.

Middle States Standard 8 suggests that institutions provide "accurate and comprehensive information about programs." To support this goal, the college has extended its first year orientation program to include a semester-long series of targeted events designed to assist students in their transition and to develop skills for success at the college and in later life. The Office of Admissions has made excellent progress assisting applicants to understand policies, program requirements and other important information through its Undergraduate Catalog, which

is printed every two years and is posted on its website. The institution also posts policies in the Student Handbook. FIT has developed approaches to insure that tuition and fees are well known and updated with imaginative watermarking to keep the current version recognizable. Administrators and staff meet regularly with appropriate constituents and stakeholders to keep all informed and to seek necessary input.

The College has a rigorous portfolio-based application process. There is a fairly large percentage of non-completers, but several steps have been taken to encourage more applicants to complete the process. Among them, the admissions office has implemented *Ask Fit*, a 24/7 online tool to provide answers to very frequently asked questions. Since rolling out the program in December 2011, over 8,000 questions have been posed to the system. These efforts to increase completion of admissions applications have borne fruit at the undergraduate level, with the increase in completers at 14 percent. The yield on these completed applications is 68 percent for undergraduate prospects and 75 percent for graduate applicants; both very high rates for yield.

The graduate and undergraduate admissions offices use separate systems to process applications. Admission to the School of Graduate Studies is handled through a system called, CollegeNet, while undergraduate prospects apply through the SUNY application system.

### ***Suggestion***

**It may be beneficial for FIT to explore with SUNY the feasibility of utilizing a single system for receipt of and processing of graduate and undergraduate admissions applications which could yield operational efficiencies.**

Refocusing the efforts of the Office of Admissions on strategic recruitment as opposed to solely application processing is a positive approach to maintain the position FIT has in the admissions marketplace, especially as the pool of potential college-going high school students in the New York area shrinks. The College has also embarked on revamping its messaging to bring consistent branding to all communications and advertising, with a goal of increasing the number of quality applicants who understand the programs that FIT has to offer.

The College has evaluated its program delivery to adults in the New York City area and revised its approaches in recruitment and admissions to capture a larger share of this market.

The College provides appropriate extra and co-curricular services to support students through the office of the Assistant Vice President/Dean of Students. The Dean of Students chairs the CARE team, as is the case in most institutions, and oversees the Campus Code of Conduct. The College splits the adjudication of violations into behavioral and academic. The Office of Academic Affairs handles academic integrity violations while the Dean of Students handles behavioral violations. The Campus Code of Conduct is now available online and contains the appropriate appeals processes. The institution takes care to protect records and to insure appropriate adherence to FERPA and discipline-based codes of ethics, such as the National Association of Social Workers, the American Psychological Association, and the Federal regulation 42 CFR.

Students expressed some frustration with not knowing how to access help with their concerns. A visit to the Campus Code of Conduct website does not offer an obvious way to access such assistance. The parent website, Campus Life, is a fairly standard description of services and policies; however, a clear and easy way for students to find information on how and from whom to obtain assistance with their problems or concerns is still elusive. A related issue is the quality

of customer service students experience when they do find their way to offices seeking help with their problems.

### *Suggestion*

**FIT should examine how students are expected to access assistance with grievances, complaints and concerns. One approach might be to extend the functionality of *AskFIT*, the software tool used by the Office of Admissions to assist prospective students with finding answers. This approach could provide an avenue for students without unduly taxing staff resources.**

The college has begun a series of programming efforts designed to meet the social needs of its student body. The introduction of *FIT@Night* on Wednesday evenings is a wonderful effort to provide programming to meet student interests and build a sense of pride and involvement with the College. The Office of Student Life has worked with dining services to utilize dining space for student events such as *FIT@Night*, and the investment seems to be paying off. Student demand will dictate whether or not it is extended, but the fact that over 500 students attend movie nights in the dining hall indicates a high level of student interest. It may be difficult to program in competition with all that happens in Manhattan, but such programming gives students a chance to network and bond as a student body and to see the campus as their own. This approach to creative student life is commendable.

The campus is severely limited in terms of space availability, which is particularly true for student activities and recreation. The college has been innovative in exploiting under-utilized or outdated facilities to address this need, such as the transformation of locker rooms into a modern fitness center.

The institution has undertaken a re-structuring of the student affairs area into one which will focus on the whole student. The evolution of the “Behavioral Assessment Team” into the “FIT Care Team” provides a more comprehensive and effective support for and analysis of the problems of students in distress. The Evaluation Team sees this as a best practice.

Student involvement in developing a student handbook is a fairly usual scenario. However, the approach taken by FIT to actually have a student organization develop and produce the student handbook is fairly unique and is commendable for the opportunity it gives to students to practice their creative and design skills.

The inclusion of FIT on The President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll for 2011 and 2012 is highly commendable and speaks to the dedication and commitment of the students attending FIT.

Student satisfaction survey results, as noted in the Self-Study Report, could be better known across the institution, and the commitment to student satisfaction should be a priority for both “non-classroom” and teaching staff. Student satisfaction and sense of respect will contribute to the level of student loyalty and commitment to the institution long after graduation.

Satisfaction is high in many areas, but a group that has expressed significant dissatisfaction is international students. The fact that the institution is aware of this is an important first step along with the planned comprehensive service program which should be implemented as quickly as possible. One of the other areas with low ratings is academic advising, also cited in the 2002 Middle States Report. The continuing low student ratings of the academic and professional

advisement processes are something that the Evaluation Team, like the College itself, is concerned about and understands will be addressed through the establishment of a centralized Student Advisement Center.

*Recommendation*

**The College should develop appropriate metrics, process, and schedule for evaluating the effectiveness of the planned Student Advisement Center.**

## Standard 10: Faculty

*The institution's instructional, research, and service programs are devised, developed, monitored, and supported by qualified professionals.*

Based on the Self-Study Report and selected documents, publications and interviews the Evaluation Team makes the following conclusion:

### **The institution meets this standard.**

Most of FIT's faculty come directly from industry. The question of preparedness for teaching is critical. Orientation programs are in place for new faculty and prior to tenure, faculty are evaluated every term. New faculty in a number of departments are given mentors so that they can be supported through their initial learning phases. The Center for Excellence in Teaching (CET) offers learning programs, seminars, and teaching sessions in many areas including technology, syllabus development and teaching styles. Teaching faculty also frequently move into administrative roles, and the provision of training and preparedness for this migration is less clear.

Adjunct faculty constitute on the order of three-quarters of the total faculty. While it is reported that these faculty members are well oriented, included in the functions within the college and a critical component of the education, the Self-Study Report notes that adjuncts are often hired at the last moment before the start of a semester. The College does provide great incentive for adjunct faculty to participate in College activities and grants a Certificate of Continuous Employment to worthy candidates which guarantees a consistent teaching opportunity over time.

### ***Suggestions***

**Criteria for appointment, supervision and review of teaching effectiveness for part-time, adjunct and other faculty should be carefully examined and monitored.**

Recruitment of faculty is a concern and steps are being taken to ensure diversity and range. As an aid in this direction, standards for faculty hiring have been established and the *Faculty of the Future* initiative has created a description of the skills and traits required of each new hire. According to the Self-Study Report, "Improvements could be made under the fundamental element of: criteria for appointment, supervision and review of teaching effectiveness for part-time, adjunct and other faculty consistent with those for full time faculty."

The Evaluation Team also notes that the data show FIT to have a relatively senior faculty with long service to the institution. More than 40% of FIT's full-time faculty and almost 45% of CCE's have been with the College for more than 20 years. Less than 3% of the CCE's have from 0-4 years of service and just over 11% of the full-time faculty are in that same category.

### ***Suggestion***

**Given the extended service of many of its faculty, the College needs to give particular attention through opportunity for professional development and other means to ensuring ongoing currency in FIT's dynamic industry.**

Attention is being given to new graduate programs that have come about somewhat organically, and standards for faculty engaged in graduate teaching or hired for the programs have not been established. Questions related to the expected level of research and the educational credentials required of faculty in the graduate program remain to be determined, but must conform to state commissioner's regulations. A strategic plan for the emerging graduate programming will be developed upon the arrival of the new Dean of Graduate Studies and it is envisioned as having a strong linkage to the *Creative Hub* mentioned prominently in the Colleges strategic goals.

FIT is seeking additional support for faculty in the development of their areas of research. A clear definition of what constitutes research is not yet developed and this is crucial as a focus as the Graduate Programs continue to grow. The Evaluation Team has been assured that this will be undertaken when the new dean arrives.

### ***Recommendation***

**The hiring policies, credentials and service expectations in terms of teaching, research and other responsibilities of graduate faculty need to be articulated.**

Tension exists when it comes to the issue of class size as NASAD accreditation recommendations include a suggestion for smaller course sections in the studio courses. Students and faculty cite classroom size as a further limitation in terms of section size. Visits to the studio spaces reveal that students are working in cramped environments and instructors are sometimes using two studios at once in order to accommodate the number of students they are teaching and trying to divide their time between them.

### ***Suggestion***

**The issue of class size should be considered based on NASAD accreditation recommendations and observations of overcrowded studio spaces.**

## **Standard 11: Educational Offerings**

*The institution's educational offerings display academic content, rigor, and coherence appropriate to its higher education mission. The institution identifies student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings.*

Based on the Self-Study Report and selected documents, publications and interviews the Evaluation Team makes the following conclusion:

### **The institution meets this standard.**

The Fashion Institute of Technology delivers educational offerings that are consistent with its mission. Each course has a course coordinator and programs receive ongoing input from advisory boards from business and industry. They are consistent with the fast-paced, ever-changing nature and technologies of fashion design and related professions.

Information literacy, technological competency and proficiency in skills related to general education is a clear goal for the institution. Assessments in these areas are being put into place and the faculty has noticed student progress in this area.

Many ideas for the future were cited by the faculty and administration including interdisciplinary work and collaborative efforts among programs and carving out space in the curriculum for more elective courses. Students have little opportunity to take electives outside of their requirements for their major. The College recognizes that students need choices yet the extremely tight curriculum can be prohibitive.

Sixteen minors were established in 2010, which help to support the mission to develop the core curriculum. The notion of a foundation program will be addressed so that students will not necessarily have to elect their area of focus at the time they enter the College. Additionally, the possibility of a Liberal Arts major as an aid to undecided students is being discussed.

Discussions have begun regarding the need for creative competencies versus technical competencies. FIT's curriculum is grounded on the needs of the professions it serves. The programs appear to be suitable in structure and content, and the faculty are generally recruited appropriately to teach the professional courses, although until recently it appears that there were few hired from outside the FIT community. As a broader curriculum is put into place in certain majors, an analysis of the needs set forth by industry will need to take place.

The Evaluation Team noted that applicants interested in transferring credits from another institution have a smooth pathway if they are from another SUNY school. On the other hand, students have reported many inconsistencies in transfer credit evaluation for colleges and universities outside of the SUNY system. Liberal Arts courses are reviewed by the Registrar's office, and courses in the major are reviewed departmentally. According to students, this potentially leads to time delays and inconsistencies.

*Suggestion*

**Attention needs to be given to creating an efficient process for timely credit transfer and development of consistent criteria for cross-program articulation.**

As noted earlier in this report under the standard for faculty, in order for graduate programs to be successful, they will require a different set of academic and support structures than do the undergraduate programs and will need an organizational coherence that will connect them into a graduate school. The concept of the *Creative Hub* will be integral to the development of a vibrant research intensive graduate studies program, but the details of that linkage, including structure and funding support mechanisms are still not in place.

*Recommendation*

**A strategic plan for the School of Graduate Studies should be developed along with a clear definition of what constitutes an appropriate research agenda for the institution.**

## **Standards 12 and 13: General Education and Related Educational Activities**

*The institution's curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, and technological competency.*

*The institution's programs or activities that are characterized by particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorship meet appropriate standards.*

Based on the materials provided in the Self-Study packet and a review of the information presented on the FIT website, including "*FIT at 75*" and the "*Vision*" pamphlet, the Evaluation Team makes the following conclusion:

**The institution meets these standards.**

### *GENERAL EDUCATION*

The Fashion Institute of Technology has been committed to improving its General Education offerings and measuring outcomes for the last few years. The Evaluation Team observed evidence that outcomes are embedded in the culture of FIT. FIT faculty members supported this assertion with comments related to how assessment is now part of the organizational culture. While progress is being made, the institution has aspirations that include a stronger emphasis in this area. According to Standard 11, Middle States requires that a program of general education be "of sufficient scope to enhance students' intellectual growth, and equivalent to at least 15 semester hours for associate degree programs and 30 semester hours for baccalaureate programs." FIT reported in the Self-Study, that 30 general education credits approved by SUNY are required for a bachelor's degree.

General Education requirements at FIT have traditionally been drawn from ten areas, but in the future, may move to the adjusted requirement from SUNY which requires seven general education areas out of ten. There is not yet a plan in place to implement this change and the website and documentation still refer to a requirement of ten areas. Middle States guidelines suggest that "15 semester hours are required for associate degree programs." According to the Self-Study FIT requires 24 credits for associate programs. Consistent with the institutional mission, FIT states that the General Education requirements include cultural diversity. General education credits include English, communication, science, math and writing. Business and technical programs include additional requirements for oral communication and additional English, science and mathematics courses may be required, depending on major.

FIT reports that assessments include exams and rubric based methods to evaluating written and oral communication which are present in about 20% of the courses. The Evaluation Team found evidence of learning outcomes assessment as documented in Self-Study Appendix 7.3. FIT has implemented a Critical Thinking Initiative Committee, which has resulted in improved Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) scores from slightly below the national mean in March 2006 to slightly above the national mean in 2011.

Faculty members who support the General Education courses are enthusiastic about the results of

their new minors, which encourage students to take additional liberal arts courses. Faculty members suggest that they would like to see students have more flexibility and work more collaboratively across the institution. General Education faculty members express satisfaction with the impact of their assessment efforts and their ability to implement changes quickly.

### *Suggestion*

**FIT should continue to build the number of courses that use imbedded assessment.**

### *BASIC SKILLS*

FIT reports in the Self-Study that roughly 28 percent of students that enter are identified as unprepared in writing and 30 percent were identified as unprepared in mathematics. Students are identified using the SAT, ACT or the Accuplacer test. Faculty members report that some students are unprepared when they reach class and perhaps some are “destined to fail.” As a result, some faculty members feel that the rigor of their instruction must be compromised in order to address the needs of the less prepared students in the class. Faculty representatives suggest that this is especially true in math. However, they recognize that FIT is making a concerted effort in this area including implementation of an emporium model. Faculty are very collegial and support each other in areas of basic skills to ensure the best experience for the student.

Survey results reported in the Self-Study Report suggest that international students are challenged in terms of English proficiency. To support these students, the Evaluation Team found evidence of remedial credit and 0 credit courses through the Educational Skills and Science and Mathematics departments. To support all students, Survival Grammar is available to students during English Composition. FIT has also launched a six-week summer, Intensive English Language Program to support international students who will be starting in the fall term.

### *CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS*

FIT states in the Self-Study Report that it offers eleven credit-based certificate programs and a twelfth has recently been approved. Members of the institution’s community suggest that this is an area of growth and several programs are listed as new on the website. The Evaluation Team confirmed that programs are comprised of 12 to 15 credits. Programs are developed based on changing industry requirements and are published on the institution’s website. The Team observed evidence that FIT is very agile in this area. Certificate programs have goals and outcomes that are developed by the faculty in the related academic department, but there is no formal review process to assess program effectiveness and industry relevance. FIT reports that advisors support the certificate program students, and the Evaluation Team found evidence that some courses within the for-credit certificate programs can transfer into associate programs. The College has had difficulty maintaining data and tracking students awarded certificates for completing these programs and is addressing that issue through modifications to the student information system and on-line declaration by the students.

### *Suggestion*

**The Evaluation Team endorses the College’s consideration of moving oversight for credit certificate programs to the academic departments and to include them in the academic program review process.**

### *EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING*

According to the Self-Study, FIT offers credit for Advanced Placement but not for experiential learning. Internship credit is awarded for internship experiences.

### *NON-CREDIT OFFERINGS*

Middle States guidelines suggest that non-credit offerings should be consistent with institutional goals. As a community college, non-credit offerings align with FIT's community mission. FIT states in their Self-Study that it offers a total of 20 non-credit programs that are available to the community, including 14 industry-focused training programs in *Professional Studies* and 6 business-oriented programs through *Enterprise Studies*. "Saturday Live" and "Summer Live" through *Precollege Programs* are designed for high school students to explore design areas. Interested students can register for these courses without having to seek formal admission to FIT. Non-credit offerings are assessed through student evaluations, faculty input and reviews for relevance. According to the website, FIT's non-credit courses can be transferred into some non-credit certificate programs. Middle States also suggests that the impact of non-credit offerings on the overall mission be assessed periodically. Participants in the interviews conducted by the Evaluation Team suggested that these offerings are essential to FIT in that they allow the College to be responsive and provide a -way to vet new technology.

### *BRANCH CAMPUSES, ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS AND OTHER INSTRUCTIONAL SITES*

Middle States stipulates that other instructional sites must meet the standard for quality of instruction, academic rigor and educational effectiveness comparable to the other institutional offerings. According to the Self-Study, FIT currently supports residential programs in Florence and Milan or in one of the College's many approved or consortium programs in Australia, Canada, China and Europe. In alignment with Middle States requirements to provide "adequate and appropriate support services," FIT's Office of International Programs coordinates study abroad and other international experiences. The Evaluation Team found evidence that support services are available to international students. Programs in Italy have support services in that country and students can access student groups and other campus activities through the online portal, collegiate link. FIT provided their Strategic Plan for International Initiatives, which was drafted on May 1, 2006, and is aligned with the goals outlined in the overall Strategic Plan. No additional updates to the plan were provided but FIT is planning to revisit this area in the near future. Approved minutes from the Advisory Board for International Programs were provided from November 3, 2008, but according to FIT interviewees, the Advisory Board has since been disbanded.

The Self-Study refers to concerns expressed by international students on campus in an satisfaction survey and the plans to create an International Programs Center to address them. According to visit participants the strategic plan and vision for the Center is being revisited.

Academic deans and chairs approve study-abroad programs for each student. In Florence, students study at Polimoda, in a program registered with the Italian Ministry of Education of Universities and Research. In Milan, students study at Politecnico University in a program that was approved by Middle States in June 2011. The Self-Study did not describe in detail how international programs are assessed but did note the assessment of student work at the international locations as part of the academic review process; for instance in Florence and Milan in 2011 in conjunction with the academic review of FIT's Fashion Design Department. The

College further notes that a broader, more formal evaluation of these residential programs will be considered within the larger context of FIT's review of all its international programming.

***Suggestion***

**FIT should update the Strategic Plan for the Office of International Programs to align with its vision to be global and purposefully diverse.**

*DISTANCE EDUCATION, DISTRIBUTED LEARNING AND CORRESPONDENCE EDUCATION*

The Team found evidence in the Self-Study Report, institutional documents and website that FIT currently offers a single fully online program and 115 individual courses. Since the Self-Study was published the institution now has 118 online courses and one new online program a B.S. in International Trade and Marketing that is scheduled to launch in Fall 2013. The institution began to deliver online courses in 1999 and, following Middle States guidelines, has demonstrated a commitment to continue to make online education available for students. Blended courses were introduced in 2009, and currently 16 blended courses are offered as part of a pilot program.

The Evaluation Team found evidence that all online courses have the same learning objectives as face-to-face courses. Additionally, FIT has a rigorous process for approval and support of online programs. FIT's administration and staff report that distance education is aligned with FIT's goals and mission, and as a community college, online programs help the institution to reach working adults who would not otherwise be able to attend classes on campus. FIT affirms its role as a "community college" based on its history and mission, which ties it strongly to New York City and its fashion and related industries. Middle States Hallmarks of Quality for Distance Education Number 2 notes that an "institution's plans for developing, sustaining, and if appropriate expanding online offerings, are integrated into its regular planning and evaluation processes." FIT employs a two person staff of an Executive Director and Coordinator who support the work of online programs and classes. The Evaluation Team found evidence that the institution is pursuing a measured and deliberate path to development of online programs in order to ensure a high level of quality and that the appropriate levels of infrastructure are in place.

In accordance with Middle States guidelines for verification of identity, FIT notes on its website that some courses include exams and require in-person proctors to confirm identity and maintain academic integrity. The Evaluation Team found evidence that the institution is also investigating other ways to ensure online academic integrity and participants in the visit interviews report that integrity is valued highly at FIT. SUNY provides access to the ANGEL course management system which is a password protected environment. The online program, Fashion Merchandising Management, is offered both on campus and online and has clearly stated program learning objectives which are consistent across the programs.

Middle States Hallmark of Quality number 7 stipulates that the institution "provides effective student and academic services to support students enrolled in online learning offerings." FIT currently has eleven students in its online degree program who are well supported not only by the faculty of the fashion merchandising management program but also by the student services support personnel. The library offers databases and resources that are available online and 24/7 technical support is available for both on-campus and online students. According to the Self-Study Report, faculty members complete 13 hours of training by SLN and FIT's Online Learning Office.

*Suggestion*

**The Evaluation Team concurs with the need FIT has self-identified to periodically review support for students in online programs to ensure that support services and access are consistent with on-campus programs.**

*CONTRACTUAL RELATIONSHIPS AND AFFILIATED PROVIDERS*

The FIT Self-Study did not report any contractual relationships with vendors to support their distance education programs.

*Suggestion*

**In support of Middle States guidelines, FIT should further clarify and engage in an ongoing process for periodic assessment of the impact of distance education, international programs, and summer and weekend programs on the institution's resources and its ability to fulfill its institutional mission.**

## **Standards 7 and 14: Institutional Assessment and Assessment of Student Learning**

*The institution has developed and implemented an assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals and its compliance with accreditation standards.*

*Assessment of student learning demonstrates that, at graduation, or other appropriate points, the institution's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals.*

Based on the Self-Study, extensive program review materials and evidence of evaluated student work, and discussions with faculty and administration, the Evaluation Team makes the following conclusion:

**The institution meets these standards.**

### *INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT*

Over the past decade, the Fashion Institute of Technology's Board of Trustees, President, faculty, administration, and staff have worked vigorously to incorporate into their standard operating procedures a great variety of outcomes assessment measures and processes. As a result, FIT appears to be moving steadily toward the creation of a college-wide "culture of assessment," whereby institutional effectiveness at all levels and across all departments can be demonstrated through "systematic, sustained, and thorough use of multiple qualitative and/or quantitative measures" (Characteristics of Excellence, 12<sup>th</sup> ed., 28).

As noted earlier in this report, the FIT mission statement and goals emanating from it, as well as the institution's strategic plan, are reviewed regularly and are supported by leadership at the highest level. In the words of the Self-Study Report, "the College community 'lives and breathes' the plan" (Self-Study, 11), as evidenced by the extensive list of achievements the Plan has so far inspired (see Appendix 2.2 in Self Study).

One of these achievements has been the inauguration of a regular process of departmental review. A schedule for reviews has been agreed upon, and a standard template for conducting a review has been devised. An Associate Dean for Institutional Assessment, appointed last year, manages the reviews across departments and schools. In conjunction with these efforts, three departments, the Gladys Marcus Library, The Museum at FIT, and Information Technology have gone a step further: they have developed strategic plans for their units and are using these to gauge and improve effectiveness year by year. All the work done by the departments under review already has yielded valuable information on unit performance, and modifications to enhance productivity are being proposed and implemented. How well the college as a whole is addressing the five goals of the strategic plan is being and will continue to be measured through a "report card with quantitative metrics for each goal" (Self-Study, 13), an assessment instrument that can provide a kind of global snapshot of activity and progress over time.

An important component of the Administrative Program Review is the preparation of a self-study by the department's personnel. Before the self-study is finalized, two external reviewers from colleague institutions analyze the draft and offer recommendations to help make departmental

operations more efficient. These are duly considered, and an action plan to orchestrate any necessary changes is prepared. The College's President then conducts a final review of findings with the Vice President to whom the department reports, and follow-up activity is assigned. The department's response is monitored and assessed after one year. These multiple and multi-level reviews bring diverse perspectives to the departmental assessment process, insuring that "no stone is left unturned" as the process unfolds.

A related analytical procedure, the Internal Audit and Risk Assessment Program, focuses on a "wide range of processes that could pose a risk to the College if not managed properly" (Self-Study, 93). Complementing the annual audit of FIT's financial statements, this review is led by an Internal Auditor, who probes carefully in selected areas to be sure the College, for instance, is in compliance with state and federal statutes in the way it administers grant or student assistance programs or is following appropriate guidelines in dispensing reimbursements for college travel. As with the Administrative Program Review, wherever necessary, the Internal Auditor makes recommendations for improvement in operations and monitors implementation.

### *ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING*

The FIT mission stresses the need for all graduates, regardless of major, to assimilate knowledge transmitted in ten general education areas and to show competencies in critical thinking and information management. Assessment of learning outcomes in general education takes place within courses through standardized testing, rubric-based evaluation of oral and written work, problem solving, and combinations of these and other measures. In an effort to make assessment via rubrics consistent, FIT requires that "a minimum of two faculty evaluators assess student work and participate in norming sessions" (Self-Study, 96). General Education faculty coordinators, who are given release time to perform assessment duties, organize the varied assessment activities, collect and collate information revealed by the different measures, and prepare a summary analysis of findings. Department chairs and faculty, as well as administrators connected to the general education program, react to the data and develop departmental action plans to address deficiencies within their areas of responsibility. The Associate Dean for Institutional Assessment, with input from the Faculty Senate's campus-wide Academic Assessment Committee, oversees plan implementation.

Over the past eight years, FIT's reviews of general education assessment results have stimulated numerous efforts to improve outcomes throughout the program. In English and Speech, for instance, faculty made revisions in the Basic English Composition course and created a standardized style manual after evaluating writing assessment data collected over three academic years. Also in response to concerns raised by assessment, in 2008, the College opened a Writing Studio, which supports students' work in composition and research with hands-on tutorial assistance and a wide range of online resources. Innovations in foreign language instruction occurred after faculty considered assessment data; one of the most notable was the development of an Italian curriculum website that allows FIT Italian language students in New York to receive help and advice from FIT study abroad students in Italy. Through a committee consisting of faculty from FIT's three undergraduate schools, as well as the Associate Dean for Institutional Assessment and the Writing Studio Director, the College addressed its students' somewhat disappointing performance on the CAAP test in Critical Thinking in 2006 and 2008. The Critical Thinking Initiative Committee, as it became known, worked intensively with faculty across disciplines to promote the introduction of class assignments that would compel students to sharpen their critical thinking skills. Through the Committee's mini-retreats, the Adjunct Summer Institute and one on one consultations (see Self-Study, 78), faculty became more comfortable with and more accomplished in devising critical thinking exercises, projects, and presentations for

their courses. This college-wide focus certainly was a major factor in the improvement FIT's students registered in the CAAP Critical Thinking Exam in 2011, a result all constituencies are determined to build on going forward.

At FIT, assessment of learning within major programs is linked to overall program assessment. As the Self-Study reports, "Since the last Middle States visit in 2002, FIT has reviewed all of its undergraduate majors and is now in its second cycle of reviews" (98). These reviews are designed to determine how effectively program faculty and supporting staff are performing their essential instructional tasks. As with non-academic units, a self-study begins the process. This document evaluates program goals and objectives, curricular relevance and coherence, graduation and retention data, alumni experience, and related issues. How well students have synthesized the knowledge and skills presented in program coursework is revealed through the faculty's rubric-guided summative assessment of final projects or portfolios, among other items. "Out of the box" points of view are part of the program review as well. Two external consultants, one from the academic world and one from industry, spend several days at FIT meeting with program faculty and students, observing classes, reviewing data, and assessing the curriculum's strengths and weaknesses. They summarize their views in interviews with college and department leaders and, later on, submit a report with recommendations. All of this information is taken into account within the department. An action plan to bring into being any changes considered necessary or desirable is drawn up, and, with the concurrence of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, program faculty and staff begin follow-up work.

Like the Liberal Arts faculty, FIT's program faculty have endeavored to "close the assessment loop" by authorizing a number of post-review alterations to curricula and to instructional methods. The Photography Department is working to update two curricula and build a new darkroom to answer current digital media needs; Toy Design has added workshops in character development and has prepared a new Haptic Lab to meet industry standards; and Visual Art Management recently received permission to change its departmental title to "Art History and Museum Professions" to describe better the content of its coursework.

Characteristics of Excellence states that "assessment is not an event but a process that is an integral part of the life of the institution" (64). While there is abundant evidence that the Fashion Institute of Technology's entire community is taking this reminder to heart in undertaking so many assessment initiatives college-wide, the institution needs to "assess its assessment" protocols in certain academic areas to ensure that the time and effort devoted to this work are yielding a full and rounded portrait of student learning at FIT. The first area is Basic Skills instruction. The Self-Study notes that the "effectiveness of the [Basic Skills] academic departments and support services is assessed through the general education and administrative program reviews," but concedes that "FIT needs to further assess program outcomes as they relate to retention of incoming students" (82). Although program reviews are important and enlightening, a more focused assessment of the effectiveness of Basic Skills instruction should be added to confirm that students completing non-credit coursework in English and mathematics are, indeed, performing capably in the credit courses that follow. Interviews conducted by the team revealed that mathematics faculty, in particular, have doubts about the effectiveness of the Basic Skills program in preparing students for success in subsequent credit courses. Comparing the grade and attrition data of those who began in Basic Skills to those who did not, or comparing the performance of those who took just one non-credit class to those who took several, could produce informative statistical data on this issue. In addition, because Basic Skills coursework in English is now available online, comparing the performance of those who take these courses in the classroom to those who take them online may be similarly revealing.

A second concern relates to the requirement in Characteristics of Excellence that “institutional and program-level goals [be] clear to the public, students, faculty, and staff” (64). FIT has formulated mission statements for each of its schools and program goals for each major course of study. These statements and goals, however, are not readily accessible. They are not included in the curriculum listings in FIT’s catalog, and while they are published on its website, the mission statements and goals are not placed with the particular schools and programs with which they are associated, leading to confusion.

The College’s assessment of learning within programs highlights rubric-guided evaluation of capstone projects and portfolios as activities that confirm graduating seniors’ mastery of program goals and skills. While such projects and portfolios can reveal a great deal about assimilation of learning, interviews with a number of students who recently prepared capstone projects or portfolios suggest that variations in evaluation procedures for their submissions may be yielding uneven data about student performance. It appears that some program evaluators are assigning simply a letter grade to a student’s final project or portfolio, despite having distributed rubrics as criteria of quality, while in other programs intensive formative evaluation occurs as industry volunteers critique a student’s project or portfolio in bi-weekly advising sessions. Such radically different approaches to assessment can create skepticism regarding the thoroughness and reliability of the review processes.

Academic program review at FIT is the vehicle for determining how well students in various majors have mastered program content. As has been noted earlier in this report, significant improvements in program structure and pedagogy have emerged from these reviews. But because Standard 14 in Characteristics of Excellence stresses that an accredited institution must gather and assess evidence that “at graduation, or other appropriate points, the institution’s students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals” ( 63), FIT should make the presentation and consideration of assessment results the central theme of program evaluation. As it stands now, the template for the review process places review of outcomes data within one section near the end of the self-study; whether intended or not, such placement has the effect of making this most important activity seem peripheral. FIT should reverse the emphasis in program review from how well the program content is organized and how well its governing department is operating to how well its program graduates are or could be learning. The institution should consider expanding and refining its assessment processes to incorporate the whole range of evaluations currently undertaken throughout a student’s tenure at FIT. Formative and summative instruments and activities ought to be embedded into every program’s assessment practices so that the value added by study at FIT can be demonstrated. Drawing conclusions from the assessment of student projects and portfolios, the reports of industry advisors and advisory groups, the responses of internship supervisors, and all other outcomes compilations a program generates should be the principal task a department’s faculty and staff engage in as they strive to determine whether and how well students are performing.

### *Suggestions*

**Because the mission of each of FIT’s schools and the learning outcomes of each program within these schools guide their operations, the FIT website should give more prominence to these mission and outcome statements by linking them clearly to the curricula they support, so that current and prospective students clearly understand what a school values and upholds and what a student majoring in a program administered by a school’s departments is expected to know and be able to do upon graduation.**

**FIT should consider making outcomes assessment within programs a “stand-alone” activity and not a component of general program review in order that the widest range of formative and summative measures can be incorporated into a comprehensive report on student achievement in each course of study over a prescribed period.**

### ***Recommendations***

**The Team endorses the recommendations for improving institutional assessment and the assessment of student learning as advanced in the Self-Study Report (p. 95 and 101). These include better communication to the broader FIT community regarding Administrative Program Review results and student learning outcomes; formalizing the linkage between student learning assessment and institutional assessment results; formal assessment of the School of Continuing and Professional Studies programs; assessment of Liberal Arts courses outside of the general education structure, as well as courses outside the majors; and implementing a systematic approach for periodic review of the assessment process.**

**FIT should gather more evidence of Basic Skills’ students’ performance in follow-on coursework and their persistence to degree to determine how effectively its Basic Skills Program and individual courses are preparing students for a successful academic experience.**

**FIT’s program faculty across departments should coordinate rubric-based evaluations of student capstone projects and/or portfolios to insure that they are performed with greater consistency and, therefore, yield more usable outcomes information.**