

May 5, 2003

Report to the

Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students

Of

New School University

New York, NY 10011

By

An Evaluation Team Representing the

Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Working with the Team from the

National Association of Schools of Art and Design

Prepared After Study of the Institution's Self-study Report

And a Visit to the Campus on April 6-9, 2003

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

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THE TIME OF THE VISIT

New School University

Date when Instruction Began	1919
Year of First Graduating Class	1948
President	Robert Kerrey
Provost	Elizabeth Dickey
Chairman, Board of Trustees	Phillip Scaturro

INTRODUCTION

New School University encompasses schools (also called divisions) and one program: The New School; the Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science; Parsons School of Design; the Robert J. Milano Graduate School of Management and Urban Policy; Eugene Lang College; Mannes College of Music; Actors Studio Drama School; and the Jazz and Contemporary Music Program.

The Middle States team arrived in the middle of an intense and exciting conversation about the future of the university. The conversation was abetted by a self-study that is notable for its frankness and analytic character as well as for the extensive involvement of the institution's stakeholders in its creation.

New School University is an important constellation in the academic universe; each of the eight stars shines brightly; the struggle is to determine the pattern they reveal. Centripetal forces struggle against centrifugal forces whether the conversation is about academic integrity, student engagement, teaching and learning resources, budgetary rules and allocations, service to students, theory and practice, or debating about what constitutes a well-furnished mind.

Building a new collegiality among the schools themselves and among the schools and the central administration has been an important product of the self-study. What does it mean to become a great university? The 3,000 plus institutions of higher education in this country make it plain there's no single model, but there are lots of successes. What the successes have in common is verifiable academic excellence. The scope of the institution – whether it has professional schools, conservatories, research prowess, or a football team is far less relevant than its commitment to quality.

The debate about what being a great university means to New School University is appropriately based on a shared understanding that the right model for New School University must take account of its unique history and great strengths; the academic universe has no single model for it to emulate.

The team commends New School University for the passion and frankness of its conversations. Whatever model is built, it is plain that

the economies and diseconomies of scale will be thoroughly explored. Whether the New School University should operate more like a traditional university or like a holding company (Ohio State or Harvard and Oxbridge) is not for our team to suggest.

The recommendations made in each of the self-study's thematic chapters reflect passionate thought. Prioritizing the recommendations and devoting appropriate institutional resources to them are the strategic tasks that lie ahead. If the strategic discussion is as inclusive as the tactical has been, the team believes the appropriate model will reveal itself. The constellation will be named, and no one will mistake it for another.

This report concerns itself primarily with the university chapters of the self-study report. The team makes no effort to address each of the many recommendations contained in the document, but we do underscore the importance to the institution of continuing the process of prioritizing the recommendations and offer some suggestions that we hope will help guide that process.

MISSION AND GOALS

The reputation of New School University is based for the most part on the strength of its individual schools. The overarching mission statement encompasses well the academic ethos of the institution, yet it is plain that much work remains to be done to integrate the divisional mission statements into the university's statement. Priorities need to be established among the many important recommendations contained in the self-study. New School University needs to become a university in more than name without sacrificing the strengths of the divisions that make it unique.

The self-study identifies three overarching goals for New School University. The first is to "provide [learning] space for connections to be made among the arts, design, and the social sciences." The second is to provide "a common education for undergraduates." The third is to "develop the competence necessary to educate everyone who wants to be educated." While the third may be too broad for any one institution, New School University recognizes that its enrollment patterns are shifting and has taken appropriate steps to consider how

resources, both human and financial, need to be redistributed in the light of those changes.

The importance of a strategic plan for the institution as a whole cannot be overemphasized. Fortunately, New School University is engaged in intense discussions of program duplication, administrative duplication, and the best ways to link development and fund-raising to its strategic priorities. Even more important, it is engaged in profound discussions of the ways in which the programs of the divisions can be forged into a vital set of curricula and programs.

Whether further consolidating support services would lead to more resources for the academic divisions is worthy of intense examination.

OUTCOMES

Institutional effectiveness is best determined by understanding the relationship between educational inputs -- like library robustness, student and faculty credentials, and average class size -- to educational outcomes, such as student learning, career-readiness, and personal growth. New School University has begun what promises to be a full program to measure valued outcomes. The best developed are the surveys of student satisfaction in the various divisions, such as Lang College, that have enabled the divisions to make policy in their light. In addition, the university has been participating in both long-running and new national surveys (such as CIRP and the National Study of Student Engagement) that allow it to benchmark its own outcomes against those of other institutions. It is noteworthy that a high level of student engagement is a hallmark of the institution.

The self-study reports on a wide variety of these efforts, puts forward a timetable for further development, and is sensitive to the issue of whether the university should seek to achieve identical student outcomes in all its divisions.

The team suggests that the institution consider lodging the institutional research capacity in the Provost's office, and strengthening its ability to relate educational goals to budgetary decisions and the institution's strategic plan. New School University should also decide whether the office should focus on an annual schedule of reports or focus more energy on responding to requests that will inform policy decisions.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The New School University self-study focuses this topic by identifying for particular examination four areas: faculty status, faculty development, interdivisional collaboration, and general education. Within the self-study and during the visit, it became plain that the issue of faculty status is pressing.

To carry New School University to greatness, it needs to implement confederation where that makes sense and to maintain the distinctive strength of the divisions. Developing a common calendar, creating a unified catalog, and offering one-stop shopping for registration and financial aid are under appropriate consideration, and the institution is wrestling with the daunting question of faculty status.

New School University has been a unique institution throughout its history, and the unusual nature of the faculty has been a traditional source of great strength. Among a total faculty 1901 only 29 are tenured and 13 more are tenure-track; only 146 faculty are full-time. New School University is currently engaged in a Herculean effort to draft and implement policies that will rationalize appointment, reappointment, and evaluation. The team offers no prescriptions, but it does wish to point out that New School University has achieved very high levels of student engagement while relying on practitioners and part-time faculty. In the case of Eugene Lang College, it is worth considering whether the problem of too small a menu of courses might be exacerbated by more full-time and tenure-track positions.

The team encourages the administration and faculty expeditiously to conclude their shared work on the issue of full time and part time faculty appointments and evaluations. Developing a model appropriate to New School University can only enhance academic cooperation across divisions and enrich student engagement.

The self-study also identifies two other important faculty development opportunities. Developing faculty as teachers is especially relevant to New School University because many are not primarily academics and therefore might benefit from assistance in the skills of teaching. The team endorses the recommendation for the creation of a center for teaching excellence, noting that to be successful such an entity

requires budgetary support for well-trained staff and appropriate space.

The team also endorses the self-study's recommendation for the creation of a faculty center to provide desk space, telephones, and copying machines to improve the quality of life for part-time faculty.

The most important debate about faculty development at New School University is about support for faculty research and other opportunities for scholarly or creative productivity. The university recognizes that research and travel support have been meager, but a more important issue is an apparent difference of priority among the schools. The Graduate Faculty and Milano express concerns that research may be undervalued in relation to teaching, while the divisions that have traditionally emphasized teaching are concerned that expectations for research and scholarship may trump teaching performance in the classroom and studio.

The team suggests that the senior administration of New School University, in collaborative discussion with the division deans and faculty, seek to define appropriate objectives with regard to research, to make them known clearly to all faculty, and to make appropriate budget commitments.

No discussion of the strategic direction of New School University is possible without full consideration of the role of the Graduate Faculty. The Graduate Faculty has two major strengths: a long and distinguished history of providing haven and context for critical discourse, and the scholarly productivity and excellence of a dedicated faculty. Implicit in the university's recent investment in ten new faculty lines is recognition of the importance of graduate education. Yet an underlying theme of the self-study is the importance of increasing undergraduate enrollment to the stability of a tuition dependent institution. The document is not sufficiently clear about how the costs of doctoral education are consistent with the need to be financially self-sufficient, and the study lacks a discussion of the research infrastructure and efforts to enhance the resources necessary to support both research and education.

The negative impact of an extraordinarily heavy advising load may be particularly perverse for junior faculty who are themselves in the process of establishing productive scholarly careers. The average

number of dissertations being supervised by faculty, as primary or secondary advisor, is very high (about 14 combined). Time to degree problems are exacerbated by constrained time to provide advice to so many students.

Moreover, the Graduate Faculty lacks the resources to provide adequate support to doctoral students. Fewer than 25% of graduate students are supported on fellowships or teaching or research assistantships – in part because the faculty does not generate a significant amount of money through research grants. A comparable support ratio for doctoral programs at large public universities is likely to be between 60 and 80%. The level of support – in terms of average stipend levels as well as tuition and health benefits – is below national research university averages. Although the unique reputation of the Graduate Faculty and the opportunities to study in New York City may mitigate this competitive disadvantage, it is unlikely that substantial progress in improving the quality of incoming students can be made in the absence of financial resources to support them.

The graduate programs and emerging new masters programs will need to find ways to obtain student assessments and ensure student feedback to inform subsequent planning and development. In addition, measuring existing programs against standard benchmarks and using program assessment strategies will ensure continued relevance. Providing greater academic articulation between divisions is important to undergraduate students, while graduate student life would be improved by having greater access to their advisors and mentors.

In sum, the Graduate Faculty adds intellectual prestige to the university, and members increasingly teach outside the division. But the high cost of its operation limits investments that could be made in other divisions, facilities, or undergraduate studies. The university wants to strengthen the faculty, but long-term funding is not yet certain. High quality doctoral study is expensive; it is reasonable to ask if the university is best served by trying to support all the programs currently offered.

The team suggests that the university administration, working with the dean's office and the faculty, undertake a review of the current array of programs and degrees with a focus on academic quality, competitive advantage, and financial sustainability.

The team suggests that given the relatively open admissions policy of the masters program, attention should be paid to encouraging those students unlikely to pursue doctoral work to make use of a non-thesis option. Such a strategy may make more effective use of very limited faculty resources for advising and might also provide timelier, career-relevant preparation.

The Milano School has a highly qualified faculty engaged in scholarship, research, and teaching, as well as important recruitment partnerships with agencies and innovative community service projects.

The faculty needs to integrate computers into classroom teaching, and should reassess the academic quality of the undergraduate program at Malta that might benefit from more direct involvement of New School University faculty.

During the course of our visit we reviewed materials and had several discussions with deans and faculty about the university's bachelor's degrees. Undergraduate degrees have grown in size and importance in recent years, and as mentioned earlier they are important to the institution's plans for future development. The New School, Eugene Lang, Mannes, Jazz and Contemporary Music, and Parsons all currently offer the bachelor's degree. The New School and Lang B.A.'s are legally or technically the same degree, though students and classes in the two programs have been largely distinct since the 1980s.

We were pleased to find that the deans with undergraduate degree programs clearly see the desirability of cooperation, in order to avoid wasteful duplication and in order to expand options for their students. The deans and their faculties need to continue to find opportunities for collaboration in curriculum and instruction at both introductory and advanced levels. Structures must be put in place for cross-school curricular planning and the deans will need to work with the Provost and the budget office to forge clear policies for transfer tuition when students cross-enroll in other divisions. Discussions about a "core" or liberal arts curriculum will also benefit from continuing cross-divisional planning.

New School University bachelor's degrees seem well conceived and administered, with strong advising and the attraction of small class

sizes. There has been an aversion to lecture classes, but a few will begin on an experimental basis as “university” courses rather than courses owned by one division.

What the team learned of the ongoing effort to collaboratively describe and mount an appropriate “liberal arts” component for undergraduate education at the university, and to find ways to link the visual and performing arts to that education, seem to us emblematic of the best and most exciting possibilities New School University can generate. Generating new and distinctive models for interdisciplinary education and for preparing informed and imaginative citizens could provide an ideal testing ground for what can be accomplished by New School University to render the whole more than the sum of its parts.

Because of the importance of these initiatives the team strongly suggests that they be conceived not as a separate entity like a center or freestanding program, but as a university-wide solution or set of solutions to the issues.

Though online learning was not significantly featured in the self-study, the team examined the New School Online University, which has become a significant program serving most of New School’s divisions. An impressive aspect of the program is its size and financial success, producing nearly 4,000 enrollments this year and a significant surplus. It is also notable that a majority of students are at a distance of more than 50 miles from campus, something that has not occurred in other online programs.

We applaud New School University’s decision to make this program a university-wide learning resource under the Provost, after its successful incubation and development within The New School.

When considering expanding the program, New School University should continue to pay attention to issues of system reliability and academic quality, and should consider reinvesting some of the surplus to upgrading courses, new course development, and upgrading technology. More can be done to incorporate images and interactivity. Clearly the student market appreciates the asynchronous nature of the courses, but faculty can add value by creating some live events.

STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND STUDENT AFFAIRS

New School University is striving to build an efficient university structure to appropriately support the needs of a growing freshman population seeking a full residential experience while bringing greater focus to meeting changing adult student needs. The student service unit has carefully considered the question of what can best be centralized and has worked towards a blend in its service delivery model in order to meet the needs of both the divisions and the students. In many ways, student services has become the model of what the university should do to support a constellation of unique divisions. The model will be helpful as the institution considers integrating more broadly in academic areas, building shared freshman experiences, building a more comprehensive educational experience, and providing students information and access to new curricular opportunities.

Recent graduation and retention rate data should be a key measure. The most recent data show freshman year retention at 80% with six-year graduation rates from undergraduate programs between 49 and 52%. Greater persistence and higher graduation levels can enhance New School University's visibility and provide a stronger financial base. Institutional research including the study of student engagement and the Lang College's student satisfaction survey may help inform the issues that impact retention and be a useful guide to setting the priorities for service delivery. Areas of student concern include: the availability of career planning and academic advising, student activities and organizations, and the efficiency of registration processes. Students expressed lower levels of satisfaction with course availability and areas of concentration. Students wish to have more opportunities to access courses outside of their home school and to have more university sponsored opportunities for getting to know each other outside the classroom.

The stated intent in the five-year plan of reaching 9,000 degree/diploma enrollments is heavily dependent on The New School and Parsons, which account for 80% of the headcount enrollment. In a declining economy, with 50% in-State enrollment and demographic trends in the Northeast (from which most students come) less favorable than national projections, past trends may not be as likely to give a clear picture of the future.

The team suggests that New School University consider the value of building a central view of course offerings and an understanding of how out of division courses are handled in each curriculum. In addition, the institution needs more profound analysis of enrollment goals. The ideas of optimum size and program mix need to be considered not only in the context of the New School University cultures, but be linked directly to financial and physical resource allocation. Similarly, growth potential needs to be analyzed in more depth. Increases have been relatively modest overall, averaging about 3% a year at a time when higher education is experiencing greater demand at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

DIVERSITY

New School University began a diversity initiative in the early 1990s; it included a coordinated and centralized set of resources and programs to increase representation of minority groups and other underrepresented groups “in every facet of university life and to demonstrate intellectual and cultural diversity in every aspect of the education offered to students.” Affirmative Action plans were decentralized to the schools; a review revealed differences that prompted a centralized coordinating effort.

The Board of Trustees adopted a New School University 2001-2004 Affirmative Action and Diversity Plan in November 2001 after an open and comprehensive process among all the institution’s components. The university has in place methods for evaluating its affirmative action and diversity plans for faculty and staff, students, and curricular issues. The university reported increased representation of minorities in all categories for 2000-2001, and it reports that all schools and colleges reaffirmed their commitment to review course offerings and concentrations for content on diversity. The plan itself is impressive and comprehensive; it includes established goals and timetables and the programmatic efforts are well funded. Continued vigilance will be required.

Although the institution may not have achieved all the success it hoped for, it is no less successful than most institutions and it exhibits considerable strength on which to build.

UNIVERSITY ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE

In the self-study and during the team's visit themes of organization, governance, and communications were prominent. The historic autonomy of the division is eroding while increased collaboration and centralization of university services are increasing. Those themes chime throughout this report.

Several new developments encouraged by the President include a cross-school faculty forum that is likely to evolve into a faculty senate appropriate to the character of New School University as an institution, and monthly meetings of the deans, which may evolve into a Dean's Council.

New School University is in an excellent position to undertake a university-wide strategic plan that should reflect its new leadership, positive growth and development within the divisions, and resolution of the challenges outlined in the self-study and in this report. President Kerrey's action plan, "Becoming New School University" provides an important template, and the five-year plans submitted by the eight deans provide richness and detail. The institution continues to be served well by the inclusive and participatory process that produced the self-study, and the team encourages the institution to maintain that sense of collegiality as it builds its strategic plan.

To enhance strategic planning, the team encourages the institution's efforts to develop a process for bringing the faculty and relevant stakeholders into the governance of New School University and continuing the regular meetings of the divisional deans with the President and Provost. Enhancing vertical communication, connecting the President and Trustees with other university stakeholders like the Provost and the deans should continue to be a priority. As the self-study recommends the deans need to communicate university developments and decisions systematically to and from their faculties, staffs, and students.

BUDGET, FINANCE, AND FISCAL HEALTH

New School University's financial goals and objectives include maintaining balanced budgets, growing the endowment, protecting the university's real estate assets, and enhancing its credit rating. The university has endeavored to bring transparency into the annual budget process and financial reporting.

New School University has a history of balanced budgets, and the endowment has grown continuously in recent years. The bond rating was upgraded to Moody's A3 from Baa1 in spring, 2001 largely because of New School University's significant real estate holdings.

The university's FY 03 budget is \$ 163.7 million; the current value of the endowment is over \$100 million. The budget is tuition driven with tuition net of discount comprising 75% of revenues. The budget process is designed to analyze revenue and expense factors and to provide opportunities for various constituencies to understand and comment during budget development.

The central budget office forecasts enrollments based on input from the divisions. The central office establishes a target tuition rate, although divisions may go above or below the suggested target resulting in differing tuition rates among the schools. Each division has its own unique budgeted tuition discount rate for which it is charged, but financial aid is centrally administered. Central administration costs are allocated to the division using a complex methodology that includes student and employee headcounts. The university has in place sound processes to maintain financial equilibrium during the year.

New School University's most recent audited financial statements received unqualified opinions, and the external auditor's management letter of recommendation contained no matters of significance.

The capital budget process is less transparent. It is centrally controlled, and although a source of frustration among the deans its success can be seen in the improved bond rating and the lack of significant deferred maintenance.

Budget transparency has led to some stresses. The academic divisions are categorized as either “surplus” or “deficit” schools; deficit schools have been encouraged to move toward financial equilibrium by the FY 04 budget deliberations. A “balance of trade” issue arises because divisions do not compensate each other when students take out of division courses or when faculty teach in other divisions. Budget practices thus contribute to duplication of course offerings; they may also contribute to smaller than desirable class sizes and to higher than necessary expenditures on faculty. Questions have been raised about budget transparency within the divisions, and as is often the case financial management is uneven at the school level.

While New School University has capable business and financial personnel, sound financial management, an improved bond rating, and clean audits, management is encouraged to continue to work to resolve “balance of trade” issues, take advantage of the efficiencies that could accrue from allowing students and faculty to work across divisions, and seek opportunities to achieve savings in institutional support.

DEVELOPMENT AND FUND RAISING

New School University’s founders did not foresee the importance of development to protect a non-profit institution. The culture began to change during the 1980s with a successful capital campaign. The Board of Trustees accounts for about 29% of all funds raised, reflecting both the mandatory financial commitment of members as well as individual generosity. The lack of capacity in some basic development functions like alumni relations, donor capacity analysis, stewardship, and public relations is being addressed by the addition of new personnel. New School University should continue to work to define the roles and responsibilities of the central administration and the deans. Currently the university has a mixed approach to development. Research, stewardship, gift accounting, special events, and institutional grants are managed centrally while the academic divisions focus on approaching potential donors and individual faculty research grants.

The team suggests that New School University actively seek ways to expand external financial support and enhance its facilities. Strategic planning efforts should be linked to fund-raising at the university and divisional levels, and should lead to the start of a new capital campaign

when the Board of Trustees determines that the economic climate is ripe. At the same time, the administration should continue to work to resolve issues involving the balance of trade among the academic divisions in order to take advantage of the many efficiencies and enhanced academic opportunities that could accrue by allowing more students and faculty to work across divisions. So doing may reduce institutional support expenses.

LEARNING RESOURCES

The measure of merit for learning resources and services is the extent to which the resources support the university's objectives, their quality, availability and delivery on-site and elsewhere; their relevance to the institution's current program; and the extent to which they are actually used.

New School University has three libraries: Raymond Fogelman Library, a general collection strongest in the social sciences and humanities; Adam and Sophie Gimble Design Library, a special collection serving Parsons School of Design; and the Harry Scherman Library, a special collection at the Mannes College of Music.

New School University belongs to the Research Libraries Association of South Manhattan. The consortium, including New York University, Cooper Union, and the New York Academy of Art provides access to in-depth resources and borrowing privileges to faculty and students associated with degree granting students. But the consortium does not provide such privileges for non-degree students. An agreement with Cordozo Law School Library provides both reciprocal reading privileges for students and borrowing privileges for faculty. Of concern are deteriorating collections, worn and overcrowded library facilities, and extremely thin staffing at both professional and paraprofessional levels.

Digital resources are important to New School University's mission, but getting information to students while helping to develop their research skills is often an unmet challenge. On-site information literacy training is not well sustained because of limited staffing levels. Distance programs also have unmet requirements for reference services and for training in how to conduct research.

New School University's libraries are challenged to reconceive the need for student study space and their service roles in a complex environment. They need to evaluate resources available to students in the light of diminished purchasing power; to rationalize and expand the breadth of support provided by the consortium and the consequences of such dependence; to determine the actual use of libraries and resources both on-site and off-site; and the degree to which emphasis should be placed on technology infrastructure and increased access to electronic resources at the expense of traditional resources such as books and periodicals.

The effectiveness of New School University's learning resources has been enhanced in recent years, and the institution should continue to define collection development policies, and rationalize the content of collections in light of learning needs, and consortium arrangements. Where no history of strong collections exists, alternative arrangements such as using libraries as centers of instructional support, computer literacy, and reference services should be considered. Access and ownership issues must be balanced, while ongoing discussions with faculty about learning resource decisions should continue. The collaboration between the libraries and information technology should lead toward a comprehensive program of resource support and delivery.

UNIVERSITY FACILITIES

Facilities are the physical expression of an institution's aspirations, and they are essential to achieving them. The decision to expand undergraduate enrollment will exacerbate the need for additional real estate, and the institution needs to work rapidly on a master plan that incorporates new construction as well as rehabilitation of existing facilities. Consideration should be given to consolidating schools into academic cores; maximizing classroom utilization; and changing the focus of Fogelman Library to a central destination for teaching, learning, study, and socializing – a place for faculty/student interaction. A model for the university's libraries may be the Knowledge Union, which acknowledges the incremental impact of technology on academic institutions.

The university should continue to capitalize on its real property assets and consider whether to leverage them to allow the construction and

purchase of additional space for both Mannes and Jazz and Contemporary Music at the uptown location and for expansion in the village.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Middle States team thanks New School University for the extraordinary effort put forward by students, faculty, and staff throughout the institution to prepare for our visit. The divisions created superb exhibits, as did the office of institutional research. Finally, the team expresses its appreciation for the professionalism and collegiality of the collaborative review process exhibited by the team from the National Association of Schools of Art and Design.