

John B. Duff

President

August 16, 1999

Dr. John A. Taylor
North Central Association
30 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2400
Chicago, IL 60602-2504

Dear Dr. Taylor,

I am writing to acknowledge receipt of the final, official NCA evaluation team's *Report of a Visit to Columbia College Chicago* and to request review by a Reader's Panel. The trustees, students, faculty, and staff of the College wish to thank the visiting team and the staff of NCA for an enjoyable and very helpful site visit this past April. The team's report presents a fair and thoughtful evaluation of Columbia College. There are only two points on which the College's perspective differs from that of the team. This response details actions that the College is taking to address the team's concerns and addresses the points of difference.

Since the site visit, Columbia has taken several actions that respond to the nine items the team identified as challenges for the College. Chief among these is a decision to reorganize Columbia's administrative structure in order to give more administrative attention to three critical areas, academic affairs, student services, and the development of the College campus. As of this fall, a newly created position, Academic Vice-President, will assume responsibility for the undergraduate and graduate programs, and related academic functions such as the Library. Dr. Samuel Floyd, a respected senior member of the faculty and former academic dean, will serve as the acting Vice-President. The current Provost, Bert Gall, will continue to direct student services and the development and management of Columbia's rapidly expanding physical plant.

This change responds to the team's concerns that Columbia's academic administration is insufficient for the current size and complexity of the College. The Vice-President can give full time and attention to academic matters and more actively support the faculty and chairs in their responsibilities. Mr. Gall, in turn, will have more time to address the issues that both the team and the self-study raised about student services, in addition to continuing his very able management and development of campus facilities.

Columbia is also making good progress on resolving the questions about its open admissions policy and practices. The Chairperson of the Board, Al Harris, and I are confident that the task force studying the open admissions policy issues will conclude its work this fall. In the meantime, the College is implementing the recommendations made in *Toward the Creation of a Coordinated and Comprehensive Freshmen Retention Program for Emerging Artists and Communicators at Columbia College*. (See page 34 of the site visit report.) The Associate Provost for Planning is coordinating the implementation, and \$500,000 above and beyond the regular budgets of the various participating departments is budgeted for the first year. One of the objectives of this initiative is to improve the effectiveness of student services for new students, which addresses another of the team's concerns, at least as it pertains to new students. Given these actions, and a firm commitment within the College to move forward on the issues of open admissions, I foresee no difficulty in submitting the required monitoring report by June 1, 2000.

Two recent policy changes go a long way to resolving the team's concern about Columbia's historic practice of allowing undergraduate students to graduate without completing a major. The College Council will take up a third related proposal this fall. Policies adopted at the end of the spring term now require students to declare a major in consultation with a faculty advisor within the first 60 hours of enrollment. The objective of this change is to encourage students to identify concrete educational goals and plan a course of study that allows them to complete a major within the equivalent of eight semesters of full-time attendance. Furthermore, beginning in 2000/2001, Columbia will give students a choice between B.A. and B.F.A. programs in select disciplines. College research indicates that this option should increase the number of students completing major requirements. Finally, the Academic Affairs Committee of the College Council plans to take up this coming year the issue of requiring completion of a major in order to graduate. A change in this basic policy, which reflects the value Columbia has long placed on student choice, is quite possible, although not certain.

Lastly, the team raises two related concerns: first, costs rising more quickly than revenues and second, maintaining tuition levels and increasing financial aid opportunities to keep Columbia affordable for lower- and middle-income families. The College's trustees and administration are likewise concerned about these two closely related issues. Columbia anticipates continued rising costs associated with goals such as expanded and improved physical facilities, sustaining the College's technological infrastructure, and increasing the size of the full-time faculty. Anticipated increases in enrollment should offset these costs somewhat; however, the College also intends to increase tuition more rapidly in the next few years than in the recent past to meet these costs. So far, tuition increases do not appear to have had a negative impact on enrollments. Information that the College now has suggests that the enrollment decline in Spring 99 that the team notes in their report was not the result of tuition pressure. Spring enrollment was down from the previous year. Annual enrollment of new students, however, continued to rise. What is changing is the proportion of students starting in the Fall as compared to the Spring.

That said, Columbia is concerned about sustaining its long-standing financial stability and remaining among the most affordable private undergraduate institutions in Illinois. On the cost side, for example, the College is more systematically collecting the productivity information that it collects, such as class size and faculty load data, and utilizing it in planning and budgeting.

Columbia is also more aggressively seeking partnership opportunities, particularly with regard to physical expansion. A task force under the leadership of the Vice-President for Development, Dr. Woodie White, recently convened to cultivate partnership opportunities from the growing interest in developing the South Loop as a mixed-use education, arts, and residential district among developers, local businesses, the arts community, and the City of Chicago. Another task force headed by the Vice President for Finance, Mike DeSalle, is studying the College's institutional aid to students, considering questions such as discount levels and priorities for institutional aid.

The preceding paragraphs discuss major actions the College is taking in regard to the team's concerns. Columbia is also responding to other issues raised in the report, such as consistent inclusion of the required information about NCA accreditation in College publications. There are, however, two points on which Columbia's perspective differs from that of the site visit team. These are the question of full-time faculty credentials and the status of student services.

A discussion about the size and credentials of the faculty appears on pages 11 to 12 of the team report. The College agrees with the team's point about the effect of the size of the full-time faculty on the management of the curriculum, but does not agree with the conclusion that, "more full-time faculty *with more experience in and preparation for a college setting are needed,*" (emphasis added.) Columbia stands by its conclusion in the self-study that, "a faculty composed of working professionals is a fundamental premise of Columbia's educational purposes. For this reason, and by the nature of the disciplines in which the College specializes, Columbia gives less emphasis to traditional academic credentials and more to other types of professional accomplishment than is typical at colleges and universities in general."¹ The College certainly values higher education experience, particularly teaching experience, but not at the expense of the professional experience that is critical to Columbia's pedagogic priorities. Columbia balances its emphasis on professional over educational credentials with faculty development initiatives and academic administrative staff with substantial experience in higher education, and increasingly by encouraging and facilitating curricular interaction between the arts and communications programs and the general education programs, where a greater proportion of the faculty have experience in higher education.

Regarding student services, Columbia's self-study acknowledges that the College needs to, "focus on and systematically measure outcomes that can be used to identify areas [in student services] that need improvement and provide added coherence to student services planning and investment decisions." It also identifies the need for more student activities space, in general, and a student center, in particular. Since the team visit, the College has received a gift of land for a student center and is working to find funds to construct one. I am a little confused, however, by the characterization of Columbia's student services as disconnected and out of the decision-making loop. Student services at Columbia are organized in two large units, both of which report directly to the Provost. Admissions, financial aid, and records comprise Student Affairs. The Dean of Students' Office encompasses advising, placement, student activities, and resident life. Although many colleges have introduced "one-stop-shopping" student services, I believe that broad divisions such as those at Columbia are not uncommon. The faculty handbook details not only the available services, but also clearly describes the organizational structure.

¹ Columbia College Chicago, *Self-Study Report to the North Central Association*, 1998-99, Volume One, page 133.

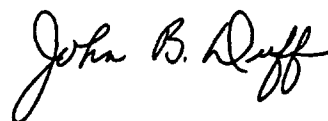
The student handbook presents the same functions, in a more consumer-oriented layout, as student services and student life. None of the College's internal surveys indicate any significant confusion about what services are provided or who does what.

As for coordination, leadership, and involvement in decision-making, I note that the Associate Provost for Student Affairs, the Dean of Students, and the Director of Admissions are all members of the President's Cabinet, a body that meets weekly. The Dean of Students sits on the College Council and several of her staff serve on the Student Affairs Committee of the Council. Both the Dean and Associate Provost participate in the quarterly meetings of the Board of Trustees, and, as noted above, both the Associate Provost and the Dean of Students report directly to the Provost.

It is generally true, that there are fewer opportunities for staff to participate in college committees than there are for faculty. Consequently, academic concerns are more broadly represented in college governance than student affairs or administrative services. I am not sure that this is either unusual or inappropriate, and note that student services staff sit on a variety of administrative committees and task forces, including strategic planning, technology planning, developmental instruction, registration, and the retention task force to name just a few. That said, the self-study recommends greater staff involvement in the life of the college across the board. I shall ask both the Provost and the Academic Vice-President to bear in mind this recommendation and the observations of the site visit team as they undertake their new and reconfigured responsibilities in the coming year. Furthermore, the Provost can now devote more attention to student services than was possible in the past.

Measured against the whole, the two points on which the College disagrees with the team report are minor, but they are of some consequence to Columbia. Overall, the College agrees with team's assessment and values the insights it adds to the self-study process. In closing, therefore, I wish to again extend the thanks of the entire Columbia community to the site team, and I look forward to the results of the Reader's Panel review.

Sincerely,



Dr. John B. Duff
President
Direct Line: 312.344.7200
Fax: 312.344.8069
E-mail:
jfulgium@popmail.colum.edu

xc: NCA Site Visit Team