

Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, and Students
of

*Thiel College
Greenville, PA 16125*

by
A Visitor/Team Representing the
Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Prepared After a
Follow-Up Visit to the Institution on:
October 7-9, 2015

The Visitor(s):
*Brigitte Valesey, Ph.D., Assistant Provost for Teaching, Learning and Assessment,
Widener University, PA, Small Team Chair*

*Vernon Harper, Jr., Ph.D., Vice President for Planning and Academic Administration,
West Chester University, PA*

Working with the Visitor(s):
*Sean McKittrick, Vice President,
Middle States Commission on Higher Education*

At the Time of the Visit:
Troy VanAken, Ph.D., President
Lynn Franken, Ph.D., Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the College

Chair of the Governing Board:
Mark Benninghoff, Associate Director at Navigant Consulting, Pittsburgh, PA

I. Institutional Overview

Founded in 1866, Thiel College is an independent, faith-based Lutheran institution in the Pittsburgh, PA region with about 1,000 students and 61 full time faculty. Its programs provide liberal arts and pre-professional educational opportunities, with a redesigned core curriculum.

The team extends its sincere appreciation to Thiel College for hosting this visit and for the engagement of faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees in this peer review process.

II. Nature and Conduct of the Visit

The purpose of this visit was to determine whether or not there was sufficient evidence and ongoing action to determine if the institution is in compliance with Standard 14.

This visit follows several prior actions by the Commission and by the institution. Thiel College submitted its Periodic Review Report in June 2013. Following a peer review and a formal institutional response, the Commission acted in November 2013 to require a monitoring report and a followup visit. A monitoring report was submitted to the Commission on September 1, 2014, followed by a small team visit in September 23-24, 2014. The Commission action on November 20, 2014 was

To accept the monitoring report and to note the visit by the Commission's representatives. To warn the institution that its accreditation may be in jeopardy because of insufficient evidence that the institution is currently in compliance with Standard 14 (Assessment of Student Learning). To note that the institution remains accredited while on warning. To request a monitoring report, due September 1, 2015, documenting evidence that the institution has achieved and can sustain ongoing compliance with Standard 14. To request that the monitoring report include, but not be limited to, documented evidence of an organized and sustained assessment process, in all programs including general education, that is used to improve student learning, with evidence that assessment information is used in budgeting, planning and resource allocation (Standard 14). A small team visit will follow submission of the monitoring report. To direct a prompt Commission liaison guidance visit to discuss Commission expectations. The due date for the next evaluation visit will be set when accreditation is reaffirmed.

The small team interviewed a number of individuals, including board members, the president, institutional administrators, department chairs, and faculty. The agenda for the small team can be found at the end of this document

III. Team Findings:

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning: 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.

In the team's judgment, the institution appears to be *in compliance* with Standard 14.

Summary of Key Evidence and Developments

Thiel College's current general education curriculum had been in place for many years. Thiel College faculty and administration developed a new curriculum which it formally adopted in November 2013 and which they began to implement in 2014-15. However, the student learning outcomes in the prior curriculum had not been systematically assessed. Assessment for the student learning outcomes in the new core began in fall 2014. At that time, a Middle States small team could not find sufficient evidence to document an organized and sustained assessment process in general education, although it found ample evidence to conclude that such a process was rolled out in educational offerings.

For the purposes of this visit, Thiel College provided a monitoring report that endeavored to document an organized and sustained assessment process in all programs including general education. With regard to Thiel College's educational offerings, they provided ample and compelling evidence of a fully implemented assessment process for academic programs with clear evidence of followup and how the process is used to enhance curriculum and instruction. Interviews with faculty and department chairs revealed a robust culture of assessment in which faculty can clearly articulate how they are using assessment to improve teaching and learning. Annual assessment reports found in the monitoring report (Appendix, pp. 1-32; also see website for 2014-15 reports) document learning outcomes, assessment activities, measures, findings, and follow-up actions for programs assessed in the institution's defined cycle. The faculty are to be commended for the progress they have made with regard to the assessment of student learning in Thiel's educational offerings.

While the documentation of the general education process is less clearly described in the monitoring report, on-site interviews and information available on site provided clarity that was not apparent in a close reading of the monitoring report. For example, there was initially insufficient clarity concerning the student learning outcomes required in Thiel College's general education (core) outcomes but after interviews with the assessment steering committee, the core curriculum committee and department chairs, there was greater clarity concerning these student learning outcomes and their assessment. The monitoring report provides a comprehensive core curriculum assessment summary (Appendix, pp. 33-56) that provides evidence of the new student learning outcomes, the use of direct assessment in the form of rubrics, detailed results, faculty reflections on the results, and the followup actions. Interviews with members of the core curriculum committee and department chairs confirmed the information found

in the monitoring report and elicited examples of how faculty were engaging in cross-disciplinary discussions related to the assessment findings. For example, some faculty spoke about engaging in discussions about identifying areas of common ground in order to develop common assessments across departmental clusters. Department chairs also received written and oral feedback about their annual reports from the Vice President of Academic Affairs.

In order for Thiel College to continue its progress in general education assessment, the institution needs to continue rolling out its assessment plan for the newly developed (general education) core curriculum and outcomes. Much akin to the substantial progress it has made over the years in the assessment of educational offerings, Thiel College should continue to work with its faculty and department chairs to ensure ongoing assessment of core student learning outcomes and to assure a manageable process for ongoing use of results in enhancing student learning and curriculum.

Requirements: *None.*

Recommendations:

1. *Continue implementation of the assessment process for all educational offerings and the new core (general education) curriculum.*
2. *Continue efforts to sustain assessment processes through support and collaboration of both administration and faculty.*

Suggestions:

1. *Especially in view of a renewed focus on documenting inter-relationships between mission and student learning outcomes in the Commission's new standards, particularly in general education, we suggest doing so as Thiel implements its new core curriculum. This would also enable the Thiel College community to express the worth of general education to prospective and current students and the public.*
2. *Thiel College might consider implementing good practices that encourage continued faculty engagement in assessment and assessment scholarship, such as faculty recognitions and awards. Systematic sharing of good practices in assessment could also be used to augment grant application and other additional funding opportunities.*

IV. Commendations and Summary of Institutional Strengths

The team commends the institution for making assessment practices more visible and transparent by posting Middle States documents, assessment plans and assessment report summaries on the college website.

VI. Summary of Compliance

This visit follows several prior actions by the Commission and by the institution. After Thiel College submitted a monitoring report to the Commission in September 2014 and a small team followup visit occurred in late September 2014, Thiel College was found to be out of compliance with Standard 14, specifically in regard to assessment of general education. Thiel College submitted another monitoring report in September 2015 followed by this small team visit.

The team interviewed faculty and administrators to confirm that assessment of general education as well as assessment of educational offerings is organized and sustainable. The team examined the assessment summaries in the monitoring report as well as onsite documents. There is ample evidence to confirm that Thiel College has a well articulated, manageable, and sustainable assessment plan for general education that is currently being implemented at the institutional and departmental levels.

Given the documented and onsite evidence as well as the substantial progress made, the team concluded that Thiel College is currently in compliance with Standard 14. There are no requirements. Two recommendations from the analysis of evidence are to continue implementation of the assessment process for all educational offerings and the new core (general education) curriculum and to continue efforts to sustain assessment processes through support and collaboration of both administration and faculty. Thiel College is to be commended for its public communication of assessment on their website.

**Thiel College
Middle States Team Visit Schedule**

October 7-9, 2015

Wednesday, October 7, 2015
Arrive at Cianci's Motel
Dinner at The Greens of Greenville (Gallery Grille)

The VanAken Conference Room in the Pedas Center has been reserved to be used as a work space for the MSCHE Team during their visit.

Thursday, October 8, 2015	Meeting	Location
8:00-9:00 a.m.	Breakfast will be provided for the Small Team	VanAken Conf. Rm. , Pedas Center
8:30-9:00 a.m.	Troy D. VanAken, President	President's Office, 2 nd floor of Roth Hall
9:00-10:00 a.m.	Assessment Steering Committee – Implementation Group Dr. Lynn Franken, VP for Academic Affairs/Dean Dr. Jenni Griffin, Associate Academic Dean/Professor of Psychology Mike McKinney, VP for Student Affairs Dr. David Buck, Assistant Academic Dean/Professor of History Dr. Mary Theresa Hall, Chair of Faculty/Professor of English Dr. Mike Balas, Professor of Biology Dr. Pete Rydberg, Professor of Performing Arts/Theater Tressa Snyder, Reference Librarian for Instruction Gary Witosky, Professor of Business Administration and Accounting	Andrews Executive Conf. Rm. in the Howard Miller Student Center (HMSC)
10:00-11:00 a.m.	President's Cabinet Troy D. VanAken, President Lynn Franken, VP for Academic Affairs/Dean Kurt Ashley, VP for Technology and Marketing Jenni Griffin, Associate Academic Dean/Professor of Psychology Terri Law, VP for College Advancement Jack Leipheimer, Athletic Director Mike McKinney, VP for Student Affairs Bob Schmoll, VP for Financial Services Linda Nohta, Administrative Assistant to the President	Andrews Executive Conf. Rm., HMSC

11:00-11:30 a.m.	Lynn Franken, VP for Academic Affairs/Dean	Andrews Executive Conf. Rm., HMSC
11:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.	Break	VanAken Conf. Rm., Pedas Center
12:00 – 1:00 p.m.	Assessment Steering Committee - Policy Group (Trustees) Lunch will be provided Dr. Alan Fager, Chair, Committee on Academic Affairs (via phone) Mark Benninghoff, Chair, Board of Trustees (via phone) Dr. Frank Maenpa	Andrews Executive Conf. Rm., HMSC
1:00 – 1:30 p.m.	David Buck, Assistant Academic Dean/Professor of History	Andrews Executive Conf. Rm., HMSC
1:30-2:00 p.m.	Break	VanAken Conf. Rm., Pedas Center
2:00-3:00 p.m.	Core Curriculum Group Dr. David Buck, Department of History Prof. Andy Erb, Department of Performing Arts/Music Dr. Jennifer Griffin, Department of Psychology Dr. Jared Hanneman, Department of Sociology/Criminal Justice Dr. Laura Pickens, Department of Psychology Dr. Russell Richins, Department of Mathematics/Computer Science Prof. Amy Schafer, Department of Health and Physical Education Prof. Karen Shaffer, Department of Bus. Admin. & Accounting Dr. Peter Rydberg, Department of Performing Arts	Room 125, Pedas Center
3:00-4:00 p.m.	Department Chairs Dr. Ellen Lipper, Department of Art Dr. Sarah Swerdlow, Department of Biology Prof. David Miller, Department of Bus. Admin. & Accounting Dr. Chris Stanisky, Department of Chemistry Dr. Dane Claussen, Department of Communication Dr. Chris Moinet, Department of English Dr. Anna Reinsel, Department of Environmental Science Prof. Amy Schafer, Department of Health and Physical Education Dr. David Buck, Department of History Dr. Kristin Carlson, Department of Languages Prof. Andy Grover, Department of Mathematics/Computer Science Dr. Greg Butcher, Department of Neuroscience	S-100, Rhodehouse Science Center

	Prof. Andy Erb, Department of Performing Arts/Music Dr. Buddy White, Department of Philosophy Dr. Patrick Hecking, Department of Physics Dr. Laura Pickens, Department of Psychology Dr. Dan Eppley, Department of Religion Dr. Allan Hunchuk, Department of Sociology Dr. Curt Thompson, Dietrich Honors Institute	
4:00-4:30 p.m.	Break	VanAken Conf. Rm., Pedas Center
4:30-5:00 p.m.	Dr. Troy VanAken, President	President's Office, Roth Hall
Friday, October 9, 2015	Meeting	Location
8:00 – 10:00 a.m.	Small Team work time (free) Breakfast will be provided	VanAken Conf. Rm., Pedas Center
10:00 – 11:00 a.m.	Small Team Report to the Thiel Community	Bly Hall, Academic Center