



February 17, 2020

To: The Faculty and Staff

From: Greg Taylor, Interim Associate Provost

Dear Colleagues:

By now, you may have heard rumors that Purchase College is about to go through a multi-year process of reaccreditation by something called the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). Well, I can tell you with some authority that these rumors are absolutely true. But I also want you to know that this endeavor is vitally important, and incredibly useful.

The process itself is fairly straightforward. Federal law mandates that in order to be eligible for federal funds (including student financial aid), all institutions of higher education must receive ongoing accreditation by a recognized regional body, and SUNY colleges and universities fall under the jurisdiction of Philadelphia-based MSCHE. Every eight years, we are expected to write a substantial self-study document, in which we rigorously and honestly examine all areas of operation in order to show how we meet relevant standards. Do we have a clear mission? Do we serve to enrich and support our students, both inside and beyond the classroom? Do we operate ethically? Does our governance system make sense and function effectively? And—perhaps most importantly of all—are we able to use hard evidence to determine that we do all of the above effectively, while spending our resources wisely and planning with an eye toward continuous improvement?

Once the self-study document is completed, a team of peer evaluators arrives on campus for a multi-day site visit—for us, in spring 2022—after which they write a report and deliver it to the Commission. The Commission then reviews the report and issues its verdict. Importantly, this verdict is not just a summary decision (yay/nay), but also includes very specific recommendations, cautions, or even conditional requirements for changes in institutional practice, which we are expected to follow up on annually until the next formal accreditation review. The entire process takes just over two years, with much of this time spent researching, writing, and revising the self-study document.

One of my roles as Associate Provost is to serve as the college's Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO), which is a fancy way of saying that I'm an official go-between charged with communicating MSCHE business and rules back to the college, and informing the college about MSCHE and accreditation. Communication is a vital part of this process, not least because accreditation involves a lot of people from across the *entire* institution. A steering committee (chaired by Barbara Moore, Director of Institutional Research, and Dr. Ryan Taylor, Assoc. Prof. of Environmental Studies) is currently getting us ready to begin the research

process, but very soon, we will need to put together working groups to gather evidence and write the individual chapters over the next academic year. This itself might involve close to 100 additional faculty and staff. So, we don't simply need your help and expertise in this collective endeavor; we're counting on it.

Make no mistake, the reaccreditation process is a heavy lift, and to pretend otherwise would be disingenuous. But it's also a collective endeavor, and in some senses a collective endeavor of the best kind—an opportunity to celebrate this institution by coming together to make it as successful as it can possibly be. That this celebration is also, at heart, an exercise in assessment might seem somewhat ironic, but actually isn't so at all.

Assessment is something we often associate with distinctly un-fun activities such as paying property taxes, and many regard it as a necessary evil or mandated busy-work. And indeed, assessment is here to stay--it's something we have no option but to engage, whether at the institutional level (as in our MSCHE review), or in individual academic departments and offices across the college. But assessment also introduces an invaluable opportunity to look closely at what we're doing while determining what evidence we need to have on hand in order to know if we're currently being effective, and if we're setting ourselves up for continued success and improvement as we move forward. In these times of ever-shrinking budgets and ever-growing uncertainty, having evidence on hand is especially crucial, so that we don't find ourselves relying merely on intuition and past experience when making important decisions.

At the same time, however, we can be smart about how we conduct assessment, so as to make it minimally onerous and maximally beneficial. My own three tenets for assessment are that it be *simple* (though not simplistic), *useful* (i.e. not destined for a file cabinet or buried in a data folder), and *reportable* (to external stakeholders like MSCHE, and internal stakeholders such as faculty, students, and administrators), and I'm in the process of laying out a revised plan for academic program assessment that hopes to meet all three of these goals.

By now you may be thinking "how typical—he started out with a harmless explanation of reaccreditation and ended up sneaking in yet another pitch for assessment!" But my point is that they're utterly inseparable. The goal of the reaccreditation process is to ensure not simply that we comply with MSCHE standards, but also that we are engaging in productive, ongoing, evidence-based assessment of everything from our core mission and values to our program offerings, teaching practices, student support services, facilities, and everything in-between. That's why your participation in this process and your participation in assessment within your own program or office go hand in hand. The latter will support and enhance the former, and both will serve to benefit the college (im)measurably.

Upcoming Spring Award Deadlines

[Chancellor's Awards for Excellence](#): For all other categories, the deadline is February 18, 2020; the call for nominations will be issued by the respective peer review committee.

[Faculty Support Award](#) March 1, 2020

[PT Faculty Support Award](#) March 15, 2020

[Jewish Studies Faculty Award](#) March 30, 2020

[Fishbein Junior Faculty Research](#) April 1, 2020

School of Natural & Social Sciences



Janette Yarwood, PhD ('96, Anthropology)

Staff Director, House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Human Rights,
and International Organizations
U.S. House of Representatives

Date: Tuesday, March 3rd, 4:30pm

Location: Natural Sciences Building, Lecture Hall – Room 1001

Doing Anthropology in D.C.

In November 2019, Members of Congress traveled to the U.S. / Mexico border at San Ysidro to hear from asylum seekers. Following the visit, a congressional subcommittee held a field hearing not far from the border. What was this designed to do? There is currently a low-level conflict happening in the Anglophone region of the Central African country of Cameroon. People in the country are suffering serious human rights abuses. Can the United States impact events in the country? In November 2017, CNN broke a story about modern-day slavery in Libya that went viral. In the report, a grainy video showed men and women being beaten and sold for just a few hundred dollars. What is being done to stop this human rights tragedy? Cultural Anthropologist and SUNY Purchase Alumna, Dr. Janette Yarwood presents an ethnography of her everyday work in Washington, DC. Dr. Yarwood's presentation is based on her ongoing book project.

PAC 2019-2020:

Discounted tickets for the campus community at The PAC

February and March are busy months at The PAC, with something happening every weekend! Did you know that they offer \$5 student tickets for most performances? There are often last-minute faculty and staff deals as well. Check for info about upcoming rush sales on their website, social media, and keep an eye on your purchase.edu for sale announcements and event updates.