McDaniel College
Middle States Self-Study
Draft Report – Summary of Findings and Next Steps
February 20, 2023

After a two- and one-half year process and with the help of over 50 authors, the following is an executive summary of the findings and next steps lifted from our Middle States self-study report. The findings and next steps are organized by and aligned to one of the seven Middle States standards with a final summary of a reflection of our COVID-19 response, a new requirement of the self-study.

Chapter 1: Standard I. Mission and Goals

Summary of Findings:

McDaniel's mission is the core of who we are, what we do, and our success. Since our last Middle States visit, our 2016 strategic plan led to significant improvements which are aligned with our mission including:

- The development of the McDaniel Commitment, our signature academic experience that delivers on our mission's promise to prepare students for "lives of leadership, service, and social responsibility" and challenge students to "develop their unique potentials with reason, imagination, and human concern";
- Bold and intentional expansion of our diversity, equity and inclusion efforts which has created a culture place of belonging and inclusion on the hill.
- A proactive program prioritization and resource allocation effort resulting in 10 new majors, increased enrollment, and a stronger financial position.

Our new 2022-27 strategic plan, *Reaching New Heights,* was developed with wide representation from our community and is aligned with the current landscape of higher education and our mission. It identifies priorities for resource allocation, incorporates measurable outcomes, and provides a well-defined plan for monitoring progress.

Recommendations for Next Steps:

- While there is a strong understanding of and commitment to the basic tenents of our mission among our community, the strategic planning process led to the awareness that the college would benefit from a review of the mission to consider a more succinct description.

Chapter 2: Standard II. Ethics and Integrity

Summary of Findings

The college upholds academic freedom as a cornerstone of its identity; recognizes diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice as an ethical imperative; develops and implements policies and practices for fair and equitable treatment of our campus community; values honesty and truthfulness in our communications and is committed to access and affordability. We are particularly proud of our work in being bold in our approach to DEIJ and our focus on promoting access and affordability through our test optional policies, elimination of our application fee, and investment in merit and need based financial aid. The collaborative approach of our admissions and financial aid offices to be innovative in communicating early and often with our prospective and admitted students about available financial resources has had a positive impact on improving access and diversity.

Recommendations for Next Steps:
- Continue our commitment to boldness in the development of structures, policies and processes in our approach to DEIJ using data from our campus climate surveys.
- Complete revision work on the intellectual property policy and the new freedom of expression policy. Consider a conflict-of-interest policy for administrators, faculty, and staff.
- While the college has made progress with policy review through the development of the Policy on Policies and creation of a college Policy Committee, we should centralize and create a systematic approach to policy review and compliance across the college. This will ensure the institution is keeping abreast of regulatory changes and requirements, addressing needed policy and process revision, monitoring compliance with federal and state regulations, and coordinating the strategies for communication and dissemination of information related to policies and processes in a transparent and user-friendly format.

Chapter 3: Standard III. Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience

Summary of Findings:
The launch of the McDaniel Commitment in 2019 within an already well-designed general education curriculum has enhanced our ability to support and mentor students throughout their entire college experience. We have a wide range of programs and activities to support our academic programs to improve the student learning experience.

Our efficient and well-designed shared governance structure places faculty in the center of the development, delivery, and assessment of our curriculum. Our faculty are highly qualified and actively engaged in teaching, scholarship and service to our students and community and are provided strong professional development opportunities.

While it was and continues to be difficult, the program prioritization process implemented in 2018-19 has been an effective strategic response to declining enrollment and has positioned the college to be more proactive in allocating resources to both academic and support programs. The enrollment impact of adding 10 new programs has allowed us to redirect our efforts through a position of strength as opposed to necessity.

The addition of senior-level leadership positions (associate vice president for student success and associate provost for equity and belonging) is critical to our success in addressing retention and graduation rates. Further, the progress made over the past decade in our DEIJ work has placed McDaniel ahead of our peers and we make our commitment to this effort evident through our policies, processes, and structures.

Recommendations for Next Steps
- Invest in new graduate and undergraduate program development to be proactive to strengthen our financial position and to allow continued reinvestment for moving our strategic plan priorities forward, including student success and DEIJ.
- Continue to closely monitor enrollments to address staffing pressures in majors with growing enrollment and expedite searches to support new program development.
- Strengthen our support for using data to assess our academic support programs.
- In support of Goal 1.2 of the current strategic plan, "Build student success structure and programming to increase retention, persistence, and graduation rates," we recommend the college move forward with investment in student success software that will provide additional data that can be used for assessment and the ability to use predictive modeling.

Chapter 4: Standard IV. Support of the Student Experience

Changes in our recruitment and admissions policies, processes and structures have led to improved access, increased enrollment, and a more diverse student body. At the same time, McDaniel has experienced a shift in our retention and graduation rates. In response, we have taken several steps to address this pressing need including the implementation of the McDaniel Commitment which provides a structured framework to our student experience which begins at orientation. We have also expanded student support programs and activities such as the addition of our STEM Center and expansion of our Students Accessibility and Support Services. While we have continued to make progress in areas related to the student experience and have seen a rebound in our retention rates this fall, we also recognize that COVID-19 has added a new layer of complexity to student success that we must continue to assess and respond to through our programming. A new senior level position, associate vice president of student success, has been charged to lead this assessment and to develop a coordinated campus-wide approach to student success.

Recommendations for Next Steps:
- Improve the assessment of our student support programs to ensure they engage in an active cycles of continuous assessment and improvement and use data to make improvements that are aligned with student success goals.
- Improve campus living environments to promote community and student satisfaction.
- Review the current advising system to consider models of best practice.
- Develop a cross-divisional Wellness Plan under the leadership of the newly created Wellness Steering Committee
- Become more transfer-friendly in our course transfer policies and explore block transfer.
- Implement an external review process for key campus life departments with a goal of identifying opportunities for efficiencies and improvement.

Chapter 5: Standard V. Educational Effectiveness Assessment

Summary of Findings:

Since our last MSCHE visit, McDaniel has created a growing culture of academic assessment having established a systematic plan of assessment for all undergraduate programs, the McDaniel Plan (our general education program which includes the McDaniel Commitment), graduate program assessment, and graduate student learning outcomes assessment. Academic assessment is embedded in new programs from their inception and our curriculum approval process now includes the submission, review, and approval of SLOs for new courses or programs.

Although we are proud of our progress in developing a culture of assessment at McDaniel, we recognize the need to continue to evaluate the effectiveness of our assessment system and procedures to make continual improvement as we move forward.

Recommendations for Next Steps:
- The AAC recommends that the structures to support undergraduate academic assessment be strengthened by appointing a long-term chair of the AAC instead of rotating the chair position on an annual basis.
- Consider developing a more centralized and well-resourced program for institutional effectiveness to provide support for assessment planning, data collection, and reporting for both academic and non-academic assessment and to create a more comprehensive and centralized institutional approach to planning and assessment across the college.
- The college should invest in technology to assist with data collection and reporting for the purpose of assessment. The process currently used is very labor intensive.

Chapter 6: Standard VI. Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement

Since our last MSCHE visit, McDaniel has improved our financial strength through intentional planning and alignment of resources aimed at creating efficiencies, improving our curricular offerings, and generating new revenue. Annual budgets are carefully managed and aligned with our college mission and goals, and longer-term planning has been strengthened by the relaunch and revision of a five-year budget model tool.

Through careful planning and sound financial stewardship, McDaniel's financial strength has moved from an S&P rating of BBB to BBB+, and the Council of Independent Colleges rated our financial performance at 8.55 out of a possible 10 (with any score above 3.0 signaling good financial health).

Human Resources has made positive steps toward improving faculty and staff salaries, having invested over one million dollars in raises and market adjustments over the past three years. While we are proud of this progress, we also recognize that more needs to be done to improve salaries.

Our strategic plan clearly identifies the strategic priorities of the college for the next five years and further identifies the fiscal resources required for the plan to be executed with success.

Recommendations for Next Steps:
- Develop a new campus facilities plan to guide planning and prioritization for facilities improvement, maintenance, and expansion.
- Continue recent progress to increase salaries by incorporating and prioritizing salary increases in the annual budgeting process and the five-year budget model.
- Invest in the development of new graduate and professional programs as a strategy for continued revenue growth.
- Continue to implement the Enterprise Risk Management process.
- Launch a $50 million comprehensive campaign to support our strategic plan initiatives and to continue investing in college supported grants and scholarships.

Chapter 7: Standard VII. Governance, Leadership, and Administration

Summary of Findings:
Shared governance is a central tenent of McDaniel's culture. We have a well-qualified, engaged and committed Board of Trustees, who operate under the college's Charter and Bylaws. We are particularly proud of their leadership and commitment to our DEIJ efforts and their decision to establish a board level DEIJ sub-committee that reports to the full board each meeting. Our governance structure has also embedded DEIJ committees at every level of the organization providing yet another confirmation of our strong commitment to DEIJ.

Our faculty play a critical role in shared governance and are highly engaged in the colleges decision making through a strong faculty committee structure.

Over the past five years there has been significant change and turnover at the senior leadership level as a result of retirements, including the retirement of our ninth president. However, under the stabilizing leadership of a new president who hails from McDaniel, we turned change into opportunity and have a highly qualified and experienced leadership team in place. We have a new, robust, and forward-thinking

strategic plan. The 2022-27 Strategic Plan – Reaching New Heights was developed with extensive community involvement, is clearly aligned with our mission, and delineates short-and long-term goals and measures for success.

Recommendations for Next Steps
- Increase both undergraduate and graduate student involvement in college governance.
- The Faculty Council should continue to consider changes to faculty meetings that ensure more time for discussion and improve the faculty governance process.
- Implement plans for assessing senior administrators.
- Improve Board of Trustees processes following insights gained at the January 2023 AGB seminar, including agenda expansion to include educational elements, offering monthly Zoom engagement meetings, assessing trustees earlier in the year, and improving the trustee selection process (*EI 7 Action Items for Board Chairs*).

Chapter 8: Pandemic Adjustments

After all students and faculty worked from home during the second half of the spring 2020 semester, the goal of our response to the pandemic focused on the safe return our residential undergraduates and our workforce in fall 2020. The collaborative spirit of our Board, administrators, faculty, and staff enabled us to put into place the myriad facility, procedural, pedagogical, and personnel adjustments needed such as PPE, remote work options, and a hyflex undergraduate course delivery system. We welcomed undergraduate students back to campus in August 2020 with a 6-foot distanced smile from behind our masks and a health kit which included a thermometer, hand sanitizer, and cleaning supplies. Graduate students remained online while we moved forward with a permanent post pandemic plan to transition to online for most programs. Different COVID-19 case numbers in Europe meant that the Budapest campus was online until fall of 2021.

Our COVID response goal to host an on-campus residential experience and in-person classes in fall 2020 tested our innovation and stamina, but it also highlighted the commitment and dedication of our faculty and staff to provide the best educational experience possible for our students. This plan also expanded McDaniel's reputation regionally, expanded faculty development opportunities related to online learning and course design, and brought us the largest first-year class in the college's history which strengthened our financial position. Many of these achievements were only possible due to the characteristic teamwork, care, commitment, and dedication of our college community.