

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## ABOUT THE SELF-STUDY TIMELINE, DESIGN, AND GOALS

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) process began in fall 2020, with the appointment of two co-chairs. Dr. Wendy Morris, acting provost and dean of the faculty, and Dr. Pam Regis, associate dean of graduate and professional studies. Later in 2021, after Dr. Regis retired, Dr. Vickie Mazer, dean of graduate and professional studies stepped in to fill the co-chair role. A 13-member Middle States Steering Committee was appointed by the president in spring 2021. McDaniel was fortunate to have the advantage of a strategic planning process happening parallel to this self-study process, and we used this as an opportunity to inform both the self-study design and the goals of our new strategic plan, which were finalized in fall 2022. The goals for this self-study are:

1. *Demonstrate how the institution currently meets the Commission's Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation.*
2. *Focus on continuous improvement in the attainment of the institution's mission and its institutional priorities.*
3. *Engage the institutional community in an inclusive and transparent self-appraisal process that actively and deliberately seeks to involve members from all areas of the institutional community.*
4. *Use the self-appraisal process of the self-study to inform the institution's strategic planning process throughout 2021 and 2023.*

In summer 2021, eight workgroups were formed with representation from faculty, administrators, staff, and trustees. These workgroups were each charged with writing a chapter aligned with one of the seven standards and the additional added COVID-19 response chapter. The groups worked for more than a year (summer 2021 through spring 2023) writing the draft and getting feedback from the steering committee at multiple points along the way. The workgroup chapter drafts were finalized through a series of meetings with the steering committee and president's cabinet. The self-study draft was distributed to the college community for feedback, which occurred through a series of town hall meetings and an online feedback form (*Appendix A -Self-Study Timeline*).

## OUR INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES

The institutional priorities that guided this study reflect our community's focus on student success, DEIJ efforts, resource stewardship, and outreach to the communities beyond the campus. Focusing on these priorities during our self-study allowed us to reflect on the work that has been done over the past decade and to align with the new 2022-2027 strategic plan priorities that will lead us into the next decade. The institutional priorities of this self-study are:

- **Student Success:** Support and improve policies, procedures, and practices related to student success using data-informed metrics where applicable.
- **Anti-Racist Policies and Practices:** Establish anti-racist and inclusive policies and practices across the institution.
- **Strategic Resource Allocation:** Engage in strategic resource development and allocation to ensure the future health of the institution.
- **Building Relationships:** Build and make use of relationships with external communities to enhance the student experience.

Work on the self-study moved forward in tandem with work on our 2022-2027 strategic plan, "Reaching New Heights." Many colleagues who developed the strategic plan also contributed, in most cases significantly, to the work of writing the self-study. The four strategic initiatives in the strategic plan — Student Attraction,

Achievement, and Outcomes; Employer of Choice; Community Partnerships; and Revenue Generation and Enhanced Business Operation — overlap with the MSCHE self-study institutional priorities, which provided synergy between these two efforts.

## READING THE SELF-STUDY

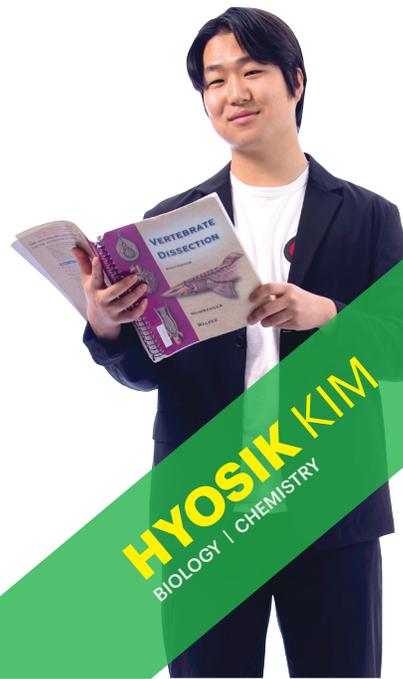
Each of the seven chapters that follow is devoted to a single MSCHE standard. Chapters are organized by criterion. Two additional sections — “Summary of Findings” and “Recommendations for Next Steps” — end each of these chapters. An eighth chapter is devoted to the college’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a new self-study requirement. McDaniel Budapest is mentioned when conditions there differ from those on the Westminster campus.

The institutional priorities and Requirements of Affiliation relevant to each chapter are identified at the beginning of the chapter. Evidence uploaded to the MSCHE portal is noted in parentheses throughout the text. Each evidence citation begins with EI to indicate Evidence Inventory, followed by the corresponding chapter number, criterion number and sub-criterion letter, followed by the title of the document. For example, (EI 2.2a *McDaniel Charter and Bylaws*) aligns to chapter 2, criterion 2, sub-criterion (a) and identifies the document name as McDaniel Charter and Bylaws. Where page numbers are provided in the naming convention, a full document is given as evidence.

The pages of this self-study document reflect our work and accomplishments in pursuit of our institutional priorities of the 2016 and the 2022 strategic plans, areas where improvement is recommended, as well as our ambitious plans for advancing that work in the new strategic plan “Reaching New Heights.”

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND NEXT STEPS BY CHAPTER AND STANDARD

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 derived 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.



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*As an international student, people might ask, “Why did you come to McDaniel? How did you find McDaniel?” Whatever the reason was, I liked this small community with strong bonds with professors and peers.*

— HYOSIK KIM | CLASS OF 2022

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## CHAPTER 1: STANDARD I. MISSION AND GOALS

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**Standard I. The institution's mission defines its purpose within the context of higher education, the students it serves, and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's stated goals are clearly linked to its mission and specify how the institution fulfills its mission.**

### 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 that 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 11 new majors, increased enrollment, and a stronger financial position.

Our new 2022-2027 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 tenets of our mission among our community, the strategic plan and self-study processes have led to the awareness that the college would benefit from finding ways to make itself more visible to our community.

## CHAPTER 2: STANDARD II. ETHICS AND INTEGRITY

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**Standard II. Ethics and integrity are central, indispensable, and defining hallmarks of effective higher education institutions. In all activities, whether internal or external, an institution must be faithful to its mission, honor its contracts and commitments, adhere to its policies, and represent itself truthfully.**

### 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 bold approach to DEI 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 innovative and collaborative approach of our admissions and financial aid offices in communicating early and often with our prospective and admitted students about available financial resources has had a positive impact on improving access and has led to a more diverse community.

McDaniel uses a decentralized approach to policy and compliance with various offices and individuals holding responsibility for their respective departments and divisions. While the current approach is effective, a more centralized approach to policy and compliance would lead to better awareness and communication concerning the policies and the regulations themselves, as well as any changes to them, including the need to communicate changes across all constituent groups. A centralized approach would also increase our confidence that we are meeting our compliance obligations in a timely manner.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS:

- Continue our commitment to bold development of DEIJ 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 with federal, state, and local regulations. 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

***Standard III. An institution provides students with learning experiences that are characterized by rigor and coherence at all program, certificate, and degree levels, regardless of instructional modality. All learning experiences, regardless of modality, program pace/schedule, level, and setting are consistent with higher education expectations.***

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

The addition of the McDaniel Commitment in 2019 to 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 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 2018-2019 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 11 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 program development to be proactive in strengthening 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

**Standard IV. Across all educational experiences, settings, levels, and instructional modalities, the institution recruits and admits students whose interests, abilities, experiences, and goals are congruent with its mission and educational offerings. The institution commits to student retention, persistence, completion, and success through a coherent and effective support system sustained by qualified professionals, which enhances the quality of the learning environment, contributes to the educational experience, and fosters student success.**

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

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, like many of our peer institutions. In response, we have taken several steps to address this pressing need, including implementing the McDaniel Commitment, which provides a structured framework to our student experience, beginning with orientation and following students to graduation. We have also expanded student support programs and activities, such as the addition of our STEM Center and expansion of our Student Accessibility and Support Services. While we have continued to make progress in areas related to the student experience and saw a rebound in our retention rates in fall 2022, we also recognize that COVID-19 has added a new layer of complexity to student success. We must continue to assess the impact of COVID-19 response through our programming. Our commitment to student success is evident in our 2022-2027 strategic plan. 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.

The strategic plan and the self-study process brought to light the need to develop a more centralized approach to institutional planning and assessment, which will provide stronger support and guidance for non-academic unit assessment. Ultimately, increased support for the assessment process will improve college-wide assessment that will inform our planning and resource allocation and will allow us to assess the extent to which we are meeting our mission's promise to prepare students for successful lives of leadership, service, and social responsibility.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS:

- Develop an Office of Institutional Effectiveness to provide additional 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.
- 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.

## CHAPTER 5: STANDARD V. EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS ASSESSMENT

**Standard V. Assessment of student learning and achievement demonstrates that the institution's students have accomplished educational goals consistent with their program of study, degree level, the institution's mission, and appropriate expectations for institutions of higher education.**

### 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 (SLOs) 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 Academic Assessment Committee (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.
- As recommended in Chapter 4, develop an Office of Institutional Effectiveness to provide additional 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 current process is very labor intensive.

## CHAPTER 6: STANDARD VI. PLANNING, RESOURCES, AND INSTITUTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

***Standard VI. The institution's planning processes, resources, and structures are aligned with each other and are sufficient to fulfill its mission and goals, to continuously assess and improve its programs and services, and to respond effectively to opportunities and challenges.***

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

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 "stable" to "positive", and the Council of Independent Colleges rated our financial performance at 8.5 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 \$1 million dollars in raises and market adjustments over the past two 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 in increasing salaries by incorporating and prioritizing salary increases in the annual budgeting process and the five-year budget model and explore opportunities to improve benefits.
- Invest in the development of new graduate and professional programs in the health professions as a strategy for continued revenue growth.
- Continue to implement the Enterprise Risk Management process.
- Launch a \$50 million capital 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

***Standard VII. The institution is governed and administered in a manner that allows it to realize its stated mission and goals in a way that effectively benefits the institution, its students, and the other constituencies it serves. Even when supported by or affiliated with governmental, corporate, religious, educational system, or other unaccredited organizations, the institution has education as its primary purpose, and it operates as an academic institution with appropriate autonomy.***

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

Shared governance is a central tenet 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 at 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 college's decision making through a strong faculty committee structure. However, the student governance model at the undergraduate level can be improved and a structure for graduate students should be developed.

Over the past five years there has been significant change 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 has a strong history of leading at McDaniel as our former provost, 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 "2022-2027 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 undergraduate and graduate student and staff 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.

## CHAPTER 8: PANDEMIC ADJUSTMENTS

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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 of 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 that 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-19 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 contributed 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.

The pandemic has changed the way we work and live. It has caused fatigue and has placed pressures on our faculty, staff, and students that were unforeseen and unprecedented. While we have returned to some sense of normalcy, there has been a profound and lingering impact on our faculty, staff, and students that we must continue to be mindful of as we move forward.