

The background of the cover is a photograph of a student sitting on a lawn with a laptop, looking thoughtful. In the background, there are trees and a building. A blue semi-transparent box covers the left side of the image, containing the title and other text. A banner with the American University logo is visible in the upper left background.

# AMERICAN UNIVERSITY SELF-STUDY

Prepared for the Middle States Commission on  
Higher Education and the AU Community

JANUARY 2014



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY  
WASHINGTON, DC

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# INTRODUCTION



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY



# Introduction

## OVERVIEW OF AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

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American University's self-study evaluates and analyzes the ways in which the university satisfies the Middle States Commission on Higher Education's *Characteristics of Excellence* and meets its own high standards for performance. This report will show that American University is a strong institution that is becoming even stronger through a continual process of self-assessment, based on systematic benchmarking to peer institutions and professional best practices, and by making bold and transformative changes in response to any identified deficiencies. In many respects, the university is a fundamentally different institution since its last self-study in 2003–04 and even since the last Periodic Review Report in 2009. The university community appreciates the opportunity to reflect on its collective accomplishments and to identify the continuing challenges that AU faces and the proactive steps it is taking to address them.

### History and Mission

[American University](#) (AU) is a private doctoral research university located in Washington, D.C. Chartered by an Act of Congress in 1893, the university was originally a graduate institution established to train and support public servants. The first class graduated in 1916, and by 1925 the first undergraduate students were admitted. The university was founded under the auspices of the United Methodist Church. Today, the university's academic focus is defined by the programs and faculties of its schools and colleges: the College of Arts and Sciences, School of Communication, School of Public Affairs, School of International Service, Kogod School of Business, School of Professional and Extended Studies, and Washington College of Law (<http://www.american.edu/about/history.cfm>).



Throughout its history, AU has stayed true to its roots. It is an institution dedicated to interdisciplinary inquiry, international understanding, interactive teaching, research and creative endeavors, and the practical application of knowledge. It values public service and encourages the integration of academic programs and campus life with the larger local, national, and international communities. It strives to combine the finest qualities of a liberal arts college with the best qualities of a research university that has many prominent professional schools. AU's mission, known as the [Statement of Common Purpose](#), states:

The place of American University among major universities with first-rate faculties and academic programs grounded in the arts and sciences is secured by its enduring commitment to uncompromising quality in the education of its students. But its distinctive feature, unique in higher education, is its capacity as a national and international university to turn ideas into action and action into service by emphasizing the arts and sciences, then connecting them to the issues of contemporary public affairs writ large, notably in the areas of government, communication, business, law, and international service (<http://www.american.edu/president/Statement-of-Common-Purpose.cfm>).

In 2008, under the leadership of President Neil Kerwin, university students, faculty, staff, alumni, and trustees worked collaboratively to develop a new strategic plan designed to advance the university's mission. The plan, [AU in the Next Decade: Leadership for a Changing World](#), was developed by a 20-person committee that included members from every division on campus. The group had access to data and assessment information. Through a series of town hall meetings, online chats, a blog, and a dedicated email address, the committee was able to gather feedback from the university community. It issued a report that focused on four major areas: the university's strengths, limitations, opportunities, and challenges. This report formed the basis of other discussions across campus that culminated in the development of the final plan. The plan includes the following 10 transformational goals:

1. Epitomize the scholar-teacher ideal.
2. Provide an unsurpassed undergraduate education and experience.
3. Demonstrate distinction in graduate, professional, and legal studies.
4. Engage the great ideas and issues of our time through research, centers, and institutes.
5. Reflect and value diversity.
6. Bring the world to AU and AU to the world.
7. Act on our values through social responsibility and service.
8. Engage alumni in the life of the university, on and off campus.
9. Encourage innovation and high performance.
10. Win recognition and distinction.

In addition, the plan includes six enabling goals designed to assist in the fulfillment of the university’s mission. These goals are as follows:

1. Diversify revenue sources.
2. Employ technology to empower excellence.
3. Enhance the university library and research infrastructure.
4. Forge partnerships by leveraging our capital location.
5. Continue as a model for civil discourse.
6. Align facilities planning with strategic goals.

Although a strong institution, the university recognizes the changing nature of higher education and the challenges that it faces. As President Kerwin stated at a recent event:

Never has the fundamental model of American higher education been challenged by so many strong forces. Some may pass, others will prove difficult to resist. Cost, the diversity and complexity of our students and their lives, technology as both a tool and a challenge, questions about the value of what we do, and our growing prominence as an issue in political struggles create pressures to prove our worth and demonstrate the enduring importance of what we do.

## Location

Located in the heart of one of the world’s most influential cities, AU’s 84-acre campus—an officially designated arboretum—provides an attractive collegiate setting, characterized by federal-style architecture and the contemporary Katzen Arts Center, a state-of-the-art exhibition and performance space that serves both the AU and greater D.C. communities. In 2010, the School of International Service moved to its new home, a LEED Gold–certified building. Restoration of the McKinley Building—for which former President Theodore Roosevelt laid the cornerstone—will create a high-tech hub for the School of Communication in 2014. As noted by AU’s Community Relations office, “neighborhood relations is one of our most important priorities at American University. It is our hope [through information and engagement to] achieve a higher quality of life for both our students and neighbors living near the American University campus.” AU’s relationship to the surrounding community is visible through programs such as various on-campus learning opportunities for the local community, family activities on campus, access to campus facilities, communication via the AU in the neighborhood newsletter, and an Advisory Neighborhood Committee (for more details, see [the Community Relations website](#)).

## Student Body and Educational Offerings

The university enrolls more than 13,000 students, including approximately 7,300 undergraduate students; 3,700 graduate students; 1,700 law students; and more than 600 visiting students. All of the schools and colleges except the Washington College of Law (WCL) have both undergraduate and graduate programs. Each of the university's seven schools has unique strengths. The [School of Public Affairs](#) (SPA) is one of the nation's oldest public policy schools and includes one of the highest-ranked public affairs programs in the country. The [School of International Service](#) (SIS) is ranked in the top 10 worldwide for both undergraduate and graduate study. The [Kogod School of Business](#) (KSB) has been ranked by some of the top publications in the United States, including as no. 21 for the undergraduate international business specialty and in the top 10th percentile for the MS in taxation program. The [School of Communication](#) (SOC) has risen to prominence as a leader in professional education, with a focus on investigative journalism, documentary film, and political communication, enhanced by a new PhD in communication studies. The [College of Arts and Sciences](#) (CAS) provides the liberal arts foundation of the university and is home to renowned artists, scientists, educators, and scholars in the social sciences and humanities. The [Washington College of Law](#) is known for its highly ranked programs, including international and clinical education. It is recognized for the diversity of its student body and its commitment to the public interest. Together, these six schools and colleges offer 68 bachelor's degrees, 54 master's programs, 10 doctoral programs, and 5 law programs. Undergraduate and graduate certificate programs are also offered. A seventh school, the [School of Professional and Extended Studies](#) (SPExS), was created in 2012 to oversee a range of programs for nonmatriculated students, including the Washington Semester Program, Washington Mentorship Program, Graduate Gateway Program, and Washington Internships for Native Students. The new school develops programs that meet the educational needs of precollege students, undergraduate students within and outside of the United States, and working professionals.

Admission to the university is selective. AU's freshman admission rate is 43 percent. AU's graduate programs also attract high-quality students, and many are considered among the best in the country. Students come from all 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia, and almost 150 countries. The profile of the student body has changed dramatically in the last few years. The percentage of minority undergraduate students has increased from 19.4 percent in 2008 to 29.9 percent in 2013. Between those same time periods, the percentage of first generation freshmen increased from 3.7 percent to 10.5 percent, and representation of Pell-eligible freshmen has gone from 7.7 percent to 18.6 percent. Approximately 10 percent of the student body is composed of international students. The percentage of students from the west and south regions of the country increases each year.

Graduate students account for almost 30 percent of the student body, and law students make up another 13 percent. The university has added several new master's and professional programs since 2008, including an MS in sustainability management, an MA in political communication, an MA in comparative and international disability policy, an MS in audio

technology, an MA in international media, an MA in media entrepreneurship, and an MA in social enterprise. The university currently offers PhDs in the following fields: anthropology; clinical psychology; behavior, cognition, and neuroscience; communication; economics; international relations; justice, law and society; political science; and public administration. The law school offers an SJD doctoral degree in addition to a JD, LL.M., and other professional degrees.

## Administration, Faculty, and Staff

American University is led by President Neil Kerwin, an alumnus of the university who became interim president in 2005 and was appointed permanent chief executive officer in 2007. Kerwin has been a member of the faculty since 1975. As of fall 2013, his cabinet\* includes:

Scott A. Bass, provost (2008)  
Teresa Flannery, vice president of communication (2008)  
Gail Short Hanson, vice president of campus life (1997)  
Mary E. Kennard, vice president and chief legal counsel (1995)  
Thomas J. Minar, vice president of development and alumni relations (2008)  
Donald L. Myers, chief financial officer, vice president and treasurer (1982)  
David Taylor, chief of staff (2000)

*\*Date in parentheses is the year that the individual began service in the position.*

The provost is assisted by the vice provost for administration, vice provost for undergraduate studies, vice provost for undergraduate enrollment, vice provost for graduate studies and research, and the senior vice provost and dean of academic affairs. In addition, the deans of the schools and colleges play a vital role not only in managing their own teaching units (departments or divisions) but also in working with the provost and vice provosts to enhance administrative coordination and strategic collaboration across the different parts of the university. As of fall 2013, the academic leadership is as follows:

Nancy Davenport, University Library  
Michael Ginzberg, Kogod School of Business  
James Goldgeier, School of International Service  
Claudio Grossman, Washington College of Law  
Barbara Romzek, School of Public Affairs  
Jeffrey Rutenbeck, School of Communication  
Peter Starr, College of Arts and Sciences  
Carola Weil, School of Professional and Extended Studies

The heart of AU's mission is advanced by 848 full-time faculty, consisting of 366 tenured professors, 129 tenure-track faculty, and 353 term faculty. In addition, there are 621 adjunct

professors, many of whom are practitioners in their field. There are approximately 2,500 full-time staff who also dedicate themselves to the work of the university. Known as a college-centered research university, AU values scholar-teachers who are fully engaged in research, creative, or professional activities and in undergraduate and graduate teaching.

## University Governance

The legal powers of the university are vested in the Board of Trustees. Executive and administrative authorities are given to the chief executive officer, President Neil Kerwin. The 2013–15 officers are Jeffrey A. Sine, chair, and Patrick Butler, vice chair.

## RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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In reviewing AU's recent history, much has been accomplished:

- economic stability during the world economic downturn—AU has successfully met its enrollment targets for freshmen and has had success in other major enrollment categories as well. Standard and Poor's reaffirmed AU's A+ rating in 2012, and Moody's recently reaffirmed AU's rating of A2 while upgrading the outlook from stable to positive. Overall, the university budgeted for \$573 million in revenue for fiscal year 2013 and closed the budget with a small surplus.
- implementation of an ambitious strategic plan with budgeting tied to strategic plan goals and regular assessments of progress in meeting plan objectives and results used to inform new budgetary allocations
- creation of an open and transparent administration, following best practices in shared governance, and a culture of participation and collective commitment to ensuring the realization of the mission and goals of the university
- review and revision of major university policies and procedures, including the faculty manual and the academic regulations (undergraduate and graduate), resulting in high standards that exemplify fair and impartial practices in matters related to faculty and academic inquiry
- institution of regular program reviews and use of Academic Analytics to track program strengths and weaknesses and induce improvements
- development of AU2030, enabling academic, future-oriented, strategic allocations of new and existing tenure-line positions in areas of interdisciplinary inquiry based on a vision for areas where AU can achieve distinction in the coming decades

- improved campus facilities and a new 10-year campus plan for further enhancements (two new and two renovated dorms, new SIS and SOC buildings, to be followed by new WCL, East Campus, etc.) and relocation of administrative offices to off-campus sites to maximize academic and student space on the main campus
- expansion of innovative learning opportunities that meet the needs of wider, non-traditional audiences, including increased online learning opportunities during the summer, the launching of fully online master’s programs, and the creation of SPExS
- increased focus on faculty and student research and external funding; vast improvements to grants infrastructure and support systems; hiring of prominent new faculty with major research grants and the creation of interdisciplinary centers and institutes to promote faculty and student scholarship
- enhancement of a culture in which learning outcomes drive curriculum and assessment is done on a regular basis to ensure the quality and rigor of learning experiences, as well as a culture of ongoing assessments of important programs such as the honors program and general education
- significant improvements in services that assist various student populations, including the new Center for Diversity and Inclusion, the Frederick Douglas Distinguished Scholars Program, a dedicated Veteran’s Affairs staff person, and AU Central
- a commitment to providing need-based aid to more fully meet the demonstrated needs of under-graduates who want to attend AU and mission-focused aid for graduate students
- demonstrable gains in alumni engagement—Alumni from across the country now take a more active role in university life. Alumni participate in strategic planning by providing feedback on AU initiatives, and they are more engaged with the schools and colleges, supporting a wide range of activities, from student admissions to student career advancement.
- establishment of new communications and marketing initiatives that have focused on a message that provides meaningful insight into AU’s strengths

## NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE SELF-STUDY

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The goal of the self-study is to analyze, in an integrated way, how American University is fulfilling its mission as well as how it is formulating, implementing, and evaluating its strategic goals. The university has undergone major transformations in the last several years. Since 2007, AU has a new president and provost and a new organizational structure that includes two new vice presidents plus additional academic leadership (including two new vice provosts, one in graduate studies and research and the other in undergraduate studies). Six of the seven schools and colleges have deans who have been hired since 2009. The new

strategic plan, has led to numerous new initiatives relating to every Middle States standard, as will be documented throughout this report.

Given the major transformations that have occurred since the last Periodic Review Report in 2009, the university welcomes the opportunity to conduct a self-study that is comprehensive with an emphasis on highlighting the new initiatives that AU is adopting in order to meet the challenges currently facing U.S. institutions of higher learning. By engaging in a comprehensive self-study with this emphasis, AU intends to use this report as a way to explore and expand on the planning processes, assessment efforts, and institutional transformations currently under way.

## **Major Challenges in Higher Education**

The self-study process led to the identification of several major areas of challenge facing U.S. academia in general, and AU in particular. AU's responses to these challenges are highlighted throughout the remaining chapters of the self-study, as indicated below.

### *Economic Challenges*

The single greatest issue facing higher education today is rising costs, which are threatening to price higher education out of the reach of middle-class families. In part, this problem stems from an inevitable economic logic: labor-intensive services such as education (or health care) tend to become relatively more expensive over time, especially when they require significant amounts of highly skilled and qualified professional labor. This underlying problem is exacerbated by the pressures on institutions of higher learning to deliver an increasingly wide array of services to students, faculty, and staff that were not expected in the past. Moreover, higher education is an area in which the adoption of advanced technologies often raises rather than lowers costs. Although technology is not the main driver of rising costs in higher education, and it can reduce expenses in many administrative functions, the expenses of the hardware, software, and highly skilled personnel needed to remain at the technological frontier can strain the operating budgets of higher educational institutions.

AU is doing its utmost to address its strategic objectives and provide the services that students expect in cost-effective ways, as well as to hold down the rate of tuition increases for students relative to comparator institutions. AU is also seeking to diversify its revenue sources and increase its endowment through improved alumni outreach, development activities, and external grants, although success in these areas so far has been more modest. The infrastructure and staff required to build up AU's capabilities in these areas have to be paid for in the short run, even though many of the payoffs will only be realized in the long run. These efforts are addressed especially in chapter 2.

In response to the rising costs of tuition and fees, students and their families are adopting various strategies. One common response has been the growth of student loans, which may saddle a graduating student with a heavy debt burden. Another response has been for students to attend public institutions, which are able to offer lower tuition than private univer-

sities like AU because of their state subsidies, although such subsidies are now diminishing as a result of budget cutbacks. Some students who could qualify for a four-year college are now deliberately attending a community college for their first two years and then seek to transfer to a four-year college or university to complete their undergraduate degrees. Chapter 6 details some of the ways in which AU is addressing the needs of transfer students.

In spite of the rising cost, demand for higher education is not likely to diminish in the foreseeable future. On the contrary, educational expectations for most jobs and careers are, if anything, constantly ratcheting upward. The income gap between college-educated and non-college-educated workers has been rising steadily since the 1980s and shows no signs of diminishing. Thus, even a relatively expensive, private university like AU is likely to see steady streams of applicants in coming years (the more so, as the prestige of AU increases), and finding ways to bridge the gap between the strong demand for higher education and the increasing cost of providing it will be more important than ever in the coming years. AU has instituted various measures to assist students in affording and completing their studies, as discussed in chapter 5 for undergraduates and chapter 7 for master's and professional students.

A closely related economic challenge is one that is increasingly facing university graduates: the difficulty in finding jobs appropriate to their educational qualifications in a slack job market during a weak period in the U.S. and global economies. This problem then interacts with the burden of student loans, because student debts are harder to pay off for students who do not get the high-paying jobs they expected after obtaining their degrees. Concerns over future employability are diminishing applications and enrollments in certain graduate and professional programs, notably in law schools and non-elite business schools, as well as in some liberal arts fields—and the resulting enrollment decreases in turn compound budgetary problems for the universities and colleges thus affected. Furthermore, concerns over the employability of university graduates are increasing external scrutiny of higher educational institutions with regard to how well they are preparing their students for successful and remunerative careers as well as their job placement outcomes. This challenge is one that AU is addressing through various initiatives described especially in chapters 6–8.

### *Demographic Changes*

The U.S. student population is becoming more diverse at the same time as students from less privileged economic backgrounds are aspiring to attend colleges and universities in order to enhance their career prospects. According to a study from Georgetown's Public Policy Institute, *Separate and Unequal: How Higher Education Reinforces the Intergenerational Reproduction of White Racial Privilege*, college enrollment more than doubled for Hispanic students and increased by 73 percent for African American students between 1995 and 2009. A majority of U.S. college students nationally today are women, and this is also true at AU. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students are increasingly open in their identities and seek institutions of higher learning that are accepting and inclusive. Geographically, the most rapid growth in the U.S. student-age population is in the Sun Belt states of the South and West, far from AU's former comfort zone of the mid-Atlantic region. Increased diversity



also includes many prospective first-generation college students, whose families may not have the resources or experience to help guide them through the processes of applying to, matriculating at, and ultimately succeeding in higher educational institutions.

AU has made a concerted effort to diversify both its student body and the faculty who serve as role models to students. AU has always been a coeducational institution, and its law school (the originally independent Washington College of Law, which merged with AU in 1949) was founded by women (<http://www.wcl.american.edu/history/founders.cfm>). One recent ranking placed AU in the top 10 percent (31st out of 346 schools) on its LGBT-friendly campus climate index (<http://www.campusprideindex.org/>), with five stars out of a possible five. However, AU has only recently tried to actively recruit more diverse students in terms of race, ethnicity, geographical origin, and economic background, and its successes and difficulties in regard to undergraduate diversity are addressed mainly in chapter 5. Issues of diversity related to faculty and graduate and professional students are discussed in chapters 4 and 7, respectively.

In addition, more and more postcollege-age adults are finding that they need to go back to universities to retool or upgrade their skills or to train for new and changing career opportunities. AU has long admitted many graduate students who work in the daytime and take master's or professional courses (and sometimes doctoral programs) at night, but today there is growing demand for nontraditional forms of advanced higher education, such as weekend programs, professional certificates, executive education, and online master's degrees. Examples of these programs are discussed in chapters 7 (which focuses on on-campus graduate programs) and 8 (which covers online programs).

### *Expanding Intellectual Frontiers*

The emerging knowledge economy of the twenty-first century clearly challenges the traditional disciplinary silos that still shape much of the higher educational system. Students and faculty alike must increasingly be able to curate vast amounts of often disparate information across disciplinary and geographic boundaries. They need to serve as “translators” or multi- or interdisciplinary “connectors,” not only across different areas of scholarship, but also between academe and the practical world of employment and workforce development. This is not to say that pure disciplinary research or teaching is outmoded; there will always be room for some scholars to work and teach within “pure” mathematics, physics, history, statistics, literature, law, and other traditional fields. But the need for interdisciplinary approaches is increasingly becoming apparent in areas as diverse as environmental studies, physical anthropology, economic policy, business, health, inter-national relations, human behavior, and communication, just to name a few. AU's new initiatives related to interdisciplinary research and teaching are covered in numerous chapters. Chapters 2 and 4 discuss the AU Project 2030 initiative, which seeks to identify clusters of interdisciplinary scholarship in which to concentrate AU's faculty hiring and future program design. In addition, interdisciplinary studies are covered in chapters 6 and 7 (for undergraduate and

graduate and professional programs, respectively), while research centers are discussed in chapter 8 (“Other Educational Initiatives”).

Aside from moving toward an interdisciplinary approach, universities need to reconceptualize the way they teach in order to prepare students for an increasingly complex world. Historically, universities have focused on content delivery or imparting information and skills to students. Although this remains important, universities need to move beyond content delivery to enable students to develop problem-solving skills in their various areas of inquiry. One important set of benchmarks are the “Critical Domains for Higher Education Student Learning Outcomes” proposed by the Educational Testing Service: creativity, critical thinking, teamwork, effective communication, digital and information literacy, citizenship, and life skills. Chapter 6 describes how AU is already injecting similar educational objectives into its General Education Program.

### *Competitive Pressures*

In the past, many colleges and universities had limited geographic areas from which they drew most of their students (for AU, this was largely the northeastern United States and certain international regions), and they could also use the appeal of their own location as a draw for students (as AU did with its Washington locale). Today, however, a combination of factors is leading to greater competition between different institutions of higher education. Some of the competition for students arises out of the economic challenges described above. For example, in the past, private four-year schools like AU did not have to worry about students preferring to attend a community college for the first two years, but this is happening today as families struggle to afford a college education for their children. Another source of competitive pressures is the rise of for-profit universities, many of them national in scope and largely online in their instruction, which have the financial resources to advertise heavily and attempt to attract students away from more traditional campuses.

Furthermore, many traditional universities—including some of the largest and most elite ones—are expanding their operations geographically and encroaching on the formerly safe “turfs” of local institutions. AU has experienced this sort of competition for a few decades, as many universities have established special programs in Washington, D.C., that compete with its long-established Washington Semester Program. As another example, many law schools from other cities have recently set up internship programs in D.C., so that a student need not enroll at a local law school like AU’s WCL in order to get experiential legal training in the nation’s capital. Internationally, many countries that used to send large numbers of students to the United States for higher education are now building up their own university systems, either on their own or in partnership with U.S. or other Western schools; this may reduce enrollments of international students unless U.S. institutions actively join in partnerships with overseas counterparts.

Meanwhile, all universities are seeking to rise in the various types of rankings in order to attract the best students and faculty, as well as to leverage greater external resources in

response to the economic challenges discussed previously. At the same time, tighter budget constraints at both the federal and state levels, as well as the financial market turmoil of recent years, have made the competition for external funding even stiffer. Some of these sources of external funding may not be sufficiently robust in the future for all to be able to gain simultaneously in this endeavor.

In response to this set of challenges, AU is seeking to increase its ability to compete for external funds for research and to improve its fundraising capabilities, but this remains a work in progress as discussed mainly in chapter 2. Another response has been advertising and marketing activities. In recognition of the importance of such outreach, the university created the position of vice president of communication in 2008 and invested in the “wonk” (“know” spelled backward) branding campaign, in addition to stepping up more traditional recruitment activities (such as visits to high schools) on a wider geographic and socio-economic basis (as described in chapter 5).

### *Technological Transformations*

The rapid growth of online education in last few years poses serious challenges for any bricks and mortar institution. Universities of all types are actively creating online courses and programs that enable students to enroll without having to physically attend a particular campus or move to a particular location. Although noncredit options like the so-called MOOCs (massive open online courses, often offered by highly prestigious institutions) have received a lot of attention in the media, the number of for-credit courses and programs offered by institutions at all levels of higher education is increasing dramatically and could potentially reduce demand for traditional, on-campus education, especially at the master’s and professional level. AU’s approach to online education is discussed in chapter 8.

The rise of online higher education is perhaps the most prominent, but certainly not the only way in which new technologies are transforming higher education. Faculty, students, and staff all require the hardware and software necessary to stay at the cutting edge in scholarship, teaching, learning, and administration. Even in traditional classrooms, laptops and projectors have transformed the way professors teach and students participate in classes, while online discussions and the use of social media can greatly expand opportunities for student participation. Libraries have been transformed from repositories of physical books and journals into centers of information technology and points of access to online materials of all sorts. As discussed in various chapters in this self-study, AU has embraced online administrative systems successfully in many areas but is still working to implement or improve them in certain applications (especially faculty reporting and graduate admissions, as discussed in chapters 4 and 7, respectively).

Faculty often note that office hours have become less frequently used as a means for contact with students, while they receive emails or other electronic contacts from students at all times of the day and night, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Academics and administrators alike find that they can never really leave work, as they are fully connected via email, the

Internet, smartphones, and other technology to their offices and responsibilities (which can affect “life-work balance”). On the one hand, this can increase stress levels for faculty and staff who are bombarded with work-related messages and expectations when they are physically away from campus. On the other hand, the ability to work remotely or tele-commute can lessen commuting costs (which enhances environmental sustainability) and allows for flexible schedules that can reduce employee stress levels. Concerns about work-life balance at AU are addressed in several chapters, especially chapter 3 for staff and chapter 4 for faculty.

On the research side, enhanced connectivity can increase scholarly productivity, because research can be done at off-campus locations and information resources can be accessed remotely. Moreover, technology can enhance research collaboration by allowing scholars to easily work together on common projects and manuscripts without having to physically visit each other’s offices or campuses or to send hard copies of documents back and forth. The great expansion of coauthored research in many fields is due in part to the greater ease of communicating between potentially far-flung collaborators, as well as to the need for different individuals to bring a variety of disciplinary perspectives and specialized knowledge to bear on a particular research project.

On the pedagogical side, in addition to the radical changes in pedagogical methods both in class and online, faculty need to be aware of how technology is transforming their fields and alter their programs and instruction accordingly. For example, schools of communication have to grapple with the demise of print journalism or photography as a likely career path and need to prepare students for newly emerging fields such as online journalism, public communication, and media arts (as AU’s SOC is doing). AU’s Center for Teaching, Research, and Learning (CTRL) continues to expand technology-enhanced pedagogical training for faculty (as described in chapter 4). Technology also is having a significant impact on the tracking and measurement of learning outcomes, as discussed in relation to assessment of student learning in chapters 6 and 7. AU has already begun and will continue to consider how best to incorporate new technology-enhanced metrics and tools throughout the university.

### ***Accountability and Assessment***

Given the challenges of rising economic costs, greater diversity of students, increasing competitive pressures, and technological transformations, higher educational institutions are under increasing scrutiny from policy makers as well as students and their families about the quality of the education they impart, their success (or lack of success) in preparing students for employment, and their conformity with various regulatory standards and social norms. Some of the impetus for accountability comes from the increased role of the federal government in higher education. The increase in federal reporting expectations were designed to ensure quality, although others see the regulations as stifling innovation. President Kerwin has been asked to serve on a U.S. Senate task force that will examine the burden of federal regulations and reporting requirements on colleges and universities in the United States.

To some extent, the scrutiny of higher education is understandable. As the federal government administers student loan programs, it wants to make sure that the loans are being used to attend schools that are properly managed and that offer genuine learning experiences in their classes. In addition, numerous federal, state, and local regulations have to be upheld by universities in various areas, including in public safety and health; equal opportunity in hiring; the enforcement of intellectual property rights; the use of human subjects in research; and accommodations for disabled students, staff, and faculty (among others). The rising cost of higher education also makes students and their families more concerned about the value of the education that they are paying so much to obtain. Efforts to make an AU education have a greater payoff in employability are discussed in various chapters, including chapters 6–8, while the university’s other ways of making itself more accountable are discussed in various other chapters, including chapter 3 on leadership and governance.

One area that has received much attention in recent years—and which is a primary focus of this self-study—is the increased attention to assessment of learning outcomes in academic programs and courses within those programs (see chapters 6 and 7 for undergraduate and graduate learning, respectively). Today, attention has shifted to whether the outcomes of these assessments are being used to make improvements to programs and courses that can enhance the achievement of learning outcomes. An assessment culture is also spreading from individual courses and programs to higher levels, such as academic units (colleges, schools, and departments); nonacademic and administrative functions; the central university administration; and Board of Trustees. The institution of regular, periodic assessments ensures that the effectiveness of any programmatic or pedagogical changes will be promptly evaluated, so that further improvements or changes can be made if necessary. Overall, AU is moving toward what might be called a “circle of continuous improvement,” in which assessment efforts drive changes and further assessment efforts lead to refinements in existing strategies or new directions of change. This theme is highlighted in chapter 2, on mission, goals, and resources, and chapter 6, undergraduate education, but is also found throughout this self-study.

### **AU’s Initiatives and the Objectives of the Self-Study**

The university has already taken many steps to address the changing nature of higher education. Below are a few examples.

- AU is focusing on diversity and inclusion. Its current planning process and admissions strategy are already taking into account the changing demographics of the U.S. student population and the impact this is likely to have in higher education.
- AU is also focusing on the integration of liberal arts and skill sets for the workplace. The curriculum is being reviewed and revised to ensure that students have a solid liberal arts background, with skills that will serve them well in their careers.
- The university recognizes the increasing role that technology plays in learning. Streamlined content, for example, can change the role of teacher and learner.

- Demands for both specific skills and integrative problem-solving abilities are growing rapidly, and AU is adjusting its curriculum to meet these needs. The changing nature of master-level graduate programs and the growing demand for more flexible, convenient delivery methods are other factors motivating new program development and delivery methods.
- Research specialization and applicability are the focus of several initiatives on campus, including a new task force on high-impact research.

Change at AU is driven by assessment activities and external benchmarking at all levels. The new academic regulations and faculty manual emerged out of extensive study by committees of faculty and administrators of best practices at comparator schools and were adopted after extensive review by the Faculty Senate. Over the past few years, one committee worked on how to best enroll and support traditionally underrepresented students, while another group studied how best to move forward with online learning. An all-day faculty leadership retreat in 2011 addressed the future of master’s and certificate education, while an all-faculty retreat in 2012 explored issues of diversity and inclusion. In spring 2012, the provost launched the AU Project 2030 initiative, an ongoing process that uses faculty collaboration to identify future interdisciplinary areas of inquiry in which AU can achieve academic distinction via concentrated hires across different schools and cross-unit program development. Around the same time, a task force was formed to focus on improving enrollment-management practices for graduate and professional programs; this task force examined best practices at comparable universities.

With these types of initiatives in mind and with the hope of informing future strategic-planning efforts, this self-study offers recommendations for how AU can more fully realize its potential between 2014 and 2024, when the next self-study is due. In particular, the self-study will focus on the following topics, which are priorities for AU going forward:

- the changing demographics of the student populations (including—but not limited to—issues related to changes in the ethnic and racial makeup of the United States, regional shifts in the home states of graduating high school students, and the increase of Pell-eligible and first-generation college students)
- online, hybrid, and alternative methods of student learning
- the needs of a changing workforce
- the needs of a wide variety of students, including graduate students and students interested in nondegree opportunities
- experiential education opportunities that advance the mission of the institution
- the best ways to support and advance student success, including how faculty and staff are positioned to help ensure success
- the value proposition for an American University education, highlighting AU’s current strengths and planned enhancements

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE AND SUBCOMMITTEES

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### Self-Study Committee

In November 2011, Provost Scott A. Bass appointed **Robert A. Blecker**, professor of economics in the College of Arts and Sciences, and **Karen Froslid Jones**, director of institutional research and assessment in the Office of the Provost, as co-chairs of the Middle States Accreditation Self-Study Steering Committee. Both co-chairs have extensive experience with accreditation, assessment, and self-study. Blecker was a member of the last Self-Study Steering Committee and co-chaired the Subcommittee on Graduate Education in 2003–04. In addition, he led his department’s program review in 2008–09 and has served as both a doctoral program director and department chair. Froslid Jones co-chaired the last AU Middle States Self-Study and has been a regular presenter at Middle States training institutes on self-study. She has been a member of several visiting teams for Middle States.

In addition to Blecker and Froslid Jones, the members of the Steering Committee are:

- **Jorge Abud**, assistant vice president for facilities development and real estate, Office of Finance and Treasurer\*
- **Sharon Alston**, vice provost for undergraduate enrollment, Office of Enrollment
- **Nana An**, assistant vice president of budget and finance resource center, Office of Finance and Treasurer
- **Fanta Aw**, assistant vice president of campus life and director of international student and scholar services, Office of Campus Life
- **Alberto Espinosa**, professor, Department of Information Technology, Kogod School of Business (KSB)
- **Violeta Ettle**, vice provost for academic administration, Office of the Provost\*
- **Nancy Davenport**, university librarian, Bender Library\*
- **Leeanne Dunsmore**, associate dean, Graduate Admissions and Program Development, School of International Service (SIS)
- **Abbey Fagin**, assistant vice president of development, Office of Development\*
- **Christine Farley**, professor, Washington College of Law (WCL)
- **Adriana Ganci**, undergraduate student, School of International Service (SIS)\*
- **James Girard**, professor and chair, Department of Chemistry, College of Arts and Sciences (CAS)
- **Jon Gould**, professor and chair, Department of Justice, Law and Society, School of Public Affairs (SPA)

- **Larry Kirkman**, professor and former dean, School of Communication (SOC)
- **Douglas Kudravetz**, associate vice president of finance and treasurer, Office of Finance and Treasurer\*
- **Lisa Leff**, associate professor, Department of History, CAS
- **Howard McCurdy**, professor, Department of Public Administration and Policy, SPA
- **David Pitts**, associate professor, Department of Public Administration and Policy, SPA
- **Arthur Rothkopf**, member, Board of Trustees\*
- **Stephen Silvia**, associate professor, SIS
- **Virginia (Lyn) Stallings**, vice provost for undergraduate studies, Academic Affairs
- **James (Joe) Ste. Marie**, undergraduate student and shadow board of trustee member, SPA\*
- **Maggie Stoeckel**, doctoral candidate, Department of Psychology, CAS\*
- **David Swartz**, assistant vice president and chief information officer, Office of Finance and Treasurer\*
- **David Taylor**, chief of staff to the president, Office of the President
- **Carola Weil**, dean, School of Professional and Extended Studies (SPExS)

*\* denotes at-large member*

Every school and college is represented, as is every division (with the exception of the General Counsel's office). The Steering Committee has representation from students and the Board of Trustees. It includes members who are new to the university, as well as members who have been with the university for many decades. Most members were in charge of co-chairing one of the subcommittees. Others are at-large members (listed with an asterisk). As such, they were not expected to head any particular subcommittee but provided their expertise to all subcommittees as issues arose. The student members were not expected to co-chair any of the subcommittees, but some served on the subcommittees for undergraduate or graduate programs as appropriate.

### **Organization of Subcommittees: Covering the Standards**

In order to ensure broad participation in the self-study process, the bulk of the initial review of the standards and the study questions was completed by six separate subcommittees. Each subcommittee (see figure 1.1) was responsible for producing a draft of one chapter for the report. The Steering Committee itself constituted the subcommittee for chapter 2 on advancing and supporting AU's mission.



The standards were grouped so that the self-study could cover issues of importance to the university in a way that facilitated review of its strategic initiatives. The mission, goals, planning, and resource standards were explored together, because the university places great importance on linking planning and budgeting. The leadership, governance, and administration standards were discussed together so that the university could discuss the many ways that the leaders of the institution (broadly defined) advance the mission. A separate chapter is devoted to standards 8 and 9 together as they relate to undergraduates, because there are a number of initiatives on campus that already link these standards specifically for undergraduates. Otherwise, undergraduate and graduate educations are treated in separate chapters, because the opportunities and challenges in the two program areas are quite different. Then, a chapter on other educational initiatives explores the ways in which online learning, the creation of the School of Professional and Extended Studies (SPExS), and interdisciplinary research centers are helping AU to meet the challenges identified in this self-study. These initiatives, which cut across the areas of focus in the earlier chapters (for example, they apply to faculty, undergraduate education, and graduate and professional education, and include new or enhanced sources of revenue), have substantial overlap with many aspects of standard 13.

**Figure 1.1: Organization of Steering Committee and Subcommittees by Chapter and Standard**



*\*Standard 6 (integrity) is covered in all chapters, as appropriate*

## SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

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### 2. Advancing and Supporting AU's Mission Subcommittee\*

- **Nana An**, assistant vice president of budget and finance resource center, Office of Finance and Treasurer\*\*
- **Robert A. Blecker**, professor of economics, CAS\*\*
- **Karen Froslid Jones**, director of institutional research and assessment, Office of the Provost\*\*
- All other members of the Steering Committee

### 3. Leadership, Shared Governance, and Administration Subcommittee\*

- **James Girard**, professor, Department of Chemistry, CAS\*\*
- **Arthur Rothkopf**, member, Board of Trustees\*\*
- **David Taylor**, chief of staff, President\*\*
- **Anthony Ahrens**, associate professor, Department of Psychology, CAS
- **Matteo Becchi**, chair, Staff Council
- **Barlow Burke**, professor and former chair, Faculty Senate, WCL
- **Doug Kudravetz**, associate vice president of finance and assistant treasurer, Office of Finance and Treasurer
- **Lauren Lane**, president, Graduate Leadership Council
- **Beth Muha**, assistant vice president of human resources, Office of Finance and Treasurer
- **Ulysses J. Sofia**, professor and associate dean of research, physics and computer science, CAS
- **Emily Yu**, president, Student Government (undergraduate), 2012–13

### 4. Faculty Subcommittee\*

- **Alberto Espinosa**, professor, Department of Information Technology, KSB\*\*
- **Howard McCurdy**, professor, Department of Public Administration and Policy, SPA\*\*
- **Stephen Silvia**, associate professor, SIS\*\*
- **Naomi Baron**, professor and executive director, Center for Teaching Research and Learning, CAS

- **Robin Beads**, associate director, Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, Office of the Provost
- **Kimberly Cowell-Meyers**, assistant professor, Department of Government, SPA
- **Robert Dinerstein**, professor, WCL
- **Phyllis Peres**, senior vice provost and dean of academic affairs, Office of the Provost
- **Gwendolyn Reece**, associate librarian, University Library
- **Colin Saldanha**, professor, Department of Biology, CAS
- **Lacey Wootton**, Hurst senior professorial lecturer, Department of Literature, CAS

## 5. Admitting, Supporting, and Retaining Undergraduates Subcommittee\*

- **Sharon Alston**, vice provost for undergraduate enrollment\*\*
- **Fanta Aw**, assistant vice president of campus life and director of international student and scholar services, Office of Campus Life\*\*
- **Funches Cheria**, undergraduate student, SPA
- **Jimmy Ellis**, manager, student retention and success, Office of the Provost
- **Jill Heitzmann**, senior advisor, undergraduate recruitment and retention, SOC
- **Rob Hradsky**, assistant vice president and dean of students, Office of Campus Life
- **Leena Jayaswal**, associate professor, SOC
- **Sherri Mikols**, associate director of financial aid, Office of Financial Aid
- **Chris Moody**, executive director, Housing and Dining, Office of Campus Life
- **Nancy Snider**, musician in residence and director, Music Program, CAS
- **Meg Weekes**, associate dean of academic affairs for undergraduate education, SPA

## 6. Undergraduate Education Subcommittee\*

- **Lisa Leff**, associate professor, Department of History, CAS\*\*
- **Lyn Stallings**, vice provost for undergraduate students and associate professor, Office of the Provost\*\*
- **Melissa Becher**, associate librarian and former chair of the faculty senate committee on learning assessment, University Library
- **Joe Campbell**, professor, SOC
- **Adriana Ganci**, undergraduate student, SIS
- **Patrick Jackson**, professor and associate dean, Undergraduate Studies, SIS

- **Kiho Kim**, associate professor, Department of Environmental Science, CAS
- **Rose Ann Robertson**, associate dean for academic affairs, SOC
- **Cathy Schaeff**, associate professor of biology and associate dean for undergraduate affairs, CAS
- **Larry Thomas**, director, Fredrick Douglass Distinguished Scholars Program, Office of the Provost
- **Bob Thompson**, senior associate dean, KSB
- **Paula Warrick**, director, Office of Merit Awards, Office of the Provost

## 7. Graduate and Professional Education Subcommittee \*

- **Christine Farley**, professor, WCL\*\*
- **David Pitts**, associate professor, Department of Public Administration and Policy, SPA\*\*
- **Terry Davidson**, professor, Department of Psychology, CAS
- **David Kaib**, senior research analyst (and alumnus), Office of the Provost
- **Kathryn Montgomery**, professor, SOC
- **Shoon Murray**, associate professor, United States Foreign Policy, SIS
- **Maggie Stoeckel**, doctoral candidate, Department of Psychology, CAS
- **Jon Tubman**, vice provost for graduate studies and research, Office of the Provost
- **Paul Winters**, associate professor, Department of Economics, CAS

## 8. Other Educational Initiatives Subcommittee \*

- **Leeanne Dunsmore**, associate dean of graduate admissions and program development, SIS\*\*
- **Carola Weil**, dean, School of Professional and Extended Studies, SPExS (2013–14) \*\*
- **Ed Beimfohr**, associate dean for administration and planning, SOC
- **Sarah Irvine Belson**, dean, School of Education, Teaching, and Health, CAS
- **Francine Blume**, director, Experiential Education, Career Center
- **Derrick Cogburn**, associate professor, SIS
- **Sara Dumont**, director, AU Abroad
- **Jon Gould**, professor and director, Washington Institute for Public and International Affairs Research, SPA

- **Eric Hershberg**, director, Center for Latin American and Latino Studies, SPA
- **Alex Hodges**, associate librarian, University Library
- **Larry Kirkman**, professor and former dean, SOC
- **Jill Klein**, executive in residence, Department of Information Technology, KSB
- **Sherburne Laughlin**, director, Arts Management Program, CAS
- **Sarah Menke-Fish**, assistant professor, SOC
- **Tony Varona**, professor and associate dean for faculty and academic affairs, WCL

*\* Numbers correspond to chapters in this self-study*

*\*\* Indicates co-chairs of subcommittees*

## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

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American University Website

<http://www.american.edu>

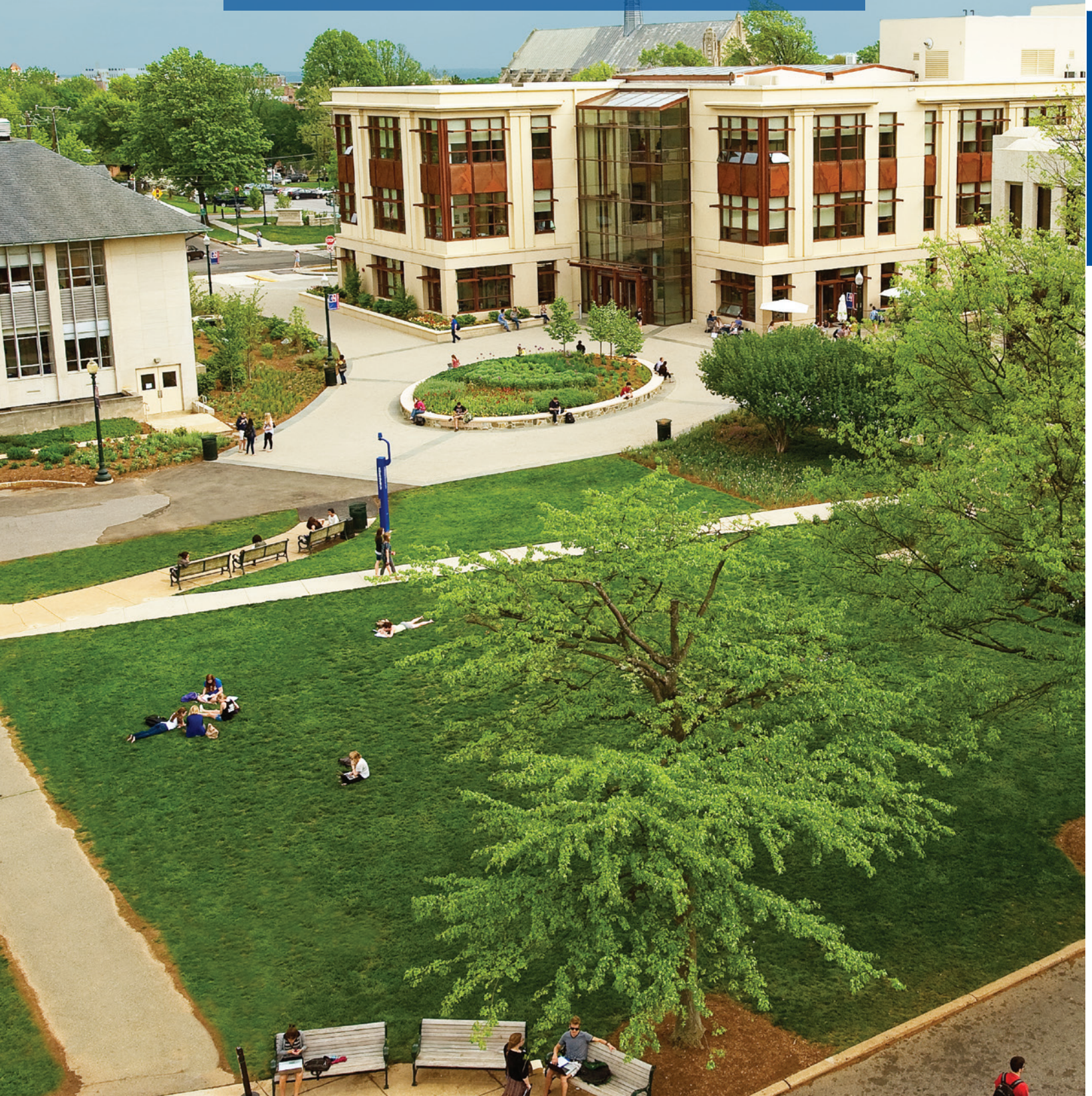
American University Middle States Website

<http://www.american.edu/middlestates>

*Characteristics of Excellence in Education* (Middle States Commission on Higher Education Requirements of Affiliation and Standards for Accreditation)

<http://www.msche.org/publications/CHX-2011-WEB.pdf>

# ADVANCING AND SUPPORTING THE MISSION OF AMERICAN UNIVERSITY





# Advancing and Supporting the Mission of American University

## INTRODUCTION

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American University has a well-defined mission that reflects its values and aspirations. Using this mission as a foundation, AU has forward-looking strategic planning processes that enable it to articulate ambitious, mission-consistent goals for the future and to advance the institution steadily toward achieving those goals. To ensure that the strategic goals are achieved in a financially responsible way, the university uses carefully targeted budgeting practices to help reach those objectives. In addition, the university continuously utilizes assessment results to gauge its success in meeting the plan objectives, to refine and inform the strategies involved, and to make necessary adjustments to both strategic goals and implementation methods in pursuit of its mission.

This chapter analyzes how well American University meets standard 1 (mission and goals); standard 2 (planning, resource allocation, institutional renewal); standard 3 (institutional resources); and standard 7 (institutional assessment). By reporting on these standards together, the self-study team hopes to better demonstrate the extent to which the current mission meets the needs of the institution and the degree to which planning, resource allocation, and assessment are used to advance the mission and strategic goals. The study questions answered in this chapter, as described in detail in the self-study design, focus on three areas of institutional quality:

**Mission and Strategic Plan.** The first section of this chapter examines the appropriateness of AU's mission and strategic plan, given the changing nature of higher education, and the processes in place to ensure integrated planning and community involvement.

**Resources.** The chapter then examines the degree to which AU has appropriate resources, both financial and other, to carry out its mission. The chapter also reviews how strategic priorities drive the allocation of resources in the areas of academic planning, fiscal budgeting, human resources, information technology, and campus facilities.

**Assessment.** Finally, the chapter details the degree to which AU has effective assessment resources and processes at the institutional level that enable it to track progress on its mission and goals and how it uses these assessments to advance institutional effectiveness and guide resource allocations.

## THE STATEMENT OF COMMON PURPOSE AND THE STRATEGIC PLAN

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### Mission

American University's mission is grounded in its rich history. It was founded by Bishop John Fletcher Hurst under the auspices of the United Methodist Church and focused on preparing and training students for a life of public service. Its location in Washington, D.C., facilitated close relationships with the nation's government. President Woodrow Wilson officially dedicated the university in 1914. The Washington Semester Program, which provides experiential education in public policy, began as early as 1947. The university's organizational structure, with emphasis on schools and colleges devoted to public service, became evident early in the institution's history.

The university's current mission statement, known as the [Statement of Common Purpose](#), was developed in 1994 in collaboration with faculty, students, and staff and was widely discussed on campus. The statement was then endorsed by the Faculty Senate and formally approved by the Board of Trustees. The Statement of Common Purpose provides a strong foundation for communicating the overall vision of the university. Its first paragraph captures important aspects of that vision:

The place of American University among major universities with first-rate faculties and academic programs grounded in the arts and sciences is secured by its enduring commitment to uncompromising quality in the education of its students. But its distinctive feature, unique in higher education, is its capacity as a national and international university to turn ideas into action and action into service by emphasizing the arts and sciences, then connecting them to the issues of contemporary public affairs writ large, notably in the areas of government, communication, business, law and international service.

The mission statement also sets five primary commitments:

- **interdisciplinary inquiry** transcending traditional boundaries among academic disciplines and between administrative units
- **international understanding** reflected in curriculum offerings, faculty research, study abroad and internship programs, student and faculty representation, and the regular presence of world leaders on campus
- **interactive teaching** providing personalized educational experiences for students, in and out of the classroom
- **research and creative endeavors** consistent with its distinctive mission, generating new knowledge beneficial to society
- **practical application of knowledge** through experiential learning, taking full advantage of the resources of the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area

The Board of Trustees evaluated and reaffirmed *the Statement of Common Purpose* as part of the development of the latest strategic plan (discussed below). The strategic plan document [\*American University and the Next Decade: Leadership for a Changing World\*](#) states:

Our mission, expressed in the *Statement of Common Purpose* and our vision for the next decade, is based on the intellectual leadership and dedication of our faculty; the committed professionalism of our staff; the talents, idealism, and energy of our students; and the accomplishments of our alumni. We anticipate a future of prominence and influence for American University among the nation's leading institutions of higher education.

(<http://www.american.edu/president/reports/upload/AU-Strategic-Plan-adopted-Nov-2008.pdf>.)

Today the mission continues to guide the university in a way that strengthens its core initiatives and emulates the Middle States “fundamental elements” of best practice (outlined on pages 2–3 of the *Characteristics of Excellence*). Emphasis on research and creative endeavors has enabled the university to re-energize its efforts to support scholarly and creative activity. Commitment to interdisciplinary inquiry has found new expression in AU Project 2030, an initiative that targets cohesive clusters of scholarly focus in which AU can achieve national distinction. These areas, identified through a participatory process involving the faculty and deans, cut across intellectual boundaries, build upon existing strengths, and are likely to be key areas of scholarly inquiry and policy relevance in future decades (see further discussion below, in the section on the strategic plan). AU’s commitment to interactive and personalized teaching is broad enough to guide all new teaching initiatives, including online and blended learning opportunities. The mission’s emphasis on social responsibility and international understanding are appropriately related to external constituencies. Specific mention of serving diverse populations is included in the Statement of Common Purpose and the overall

spirit of the mission gives impetus to specific goals related to diversity by emphasizing the importance of high-quality experiences for all students.

The strength of the Statement of Common Purpose is that it has been broad enough to enable the university to grow, focusing on different aspects of the mission as priorities and times change. A good example of the mission's flexibility is its ability to support the university's view of itself as a college-centered research university. Recently, the university has stressed the importance of being a college-centered research university, meaning that it has the expectation of providing an outstanding undergraduate experience, not unlike aspects of the best liberal arts colleges, while also making intellectual contributions similar to those of the finest research universities. This dual responsibility can be found in a subset of universities that have helped serve as benchmarks for AU. For example, while far better resourced, Princeton University serves as an ideal of this type of university. It can point the way for places like AU, nevertheless, with recognition that this is an institutional direction. Other models that AU has identified include the University of Rochester, Tufts University, Brandeis University, Washington University in St. Louis, and Boston College, to name a few. For the identification of best practices, however, AU has looked to adopt elements from liberal arts colleges as well as from large research universities. In examining their settings, the university recognized that it would need to strengthen its standards for faculty hiring, tenure, and promotion. Each academic unit would need to develop explicit guidelines or academic milestones reflective of its peers. Each unit would also need to redouble its efforts in teaching. The underlying undergraduate and graduate regulations would need modernization and benchmarking. Further, upgrades would need to occur for all of the administrative systems that serve to enhance faculty production and distinction as well as services to students and their families. And, finally, the facilities need to match this renewed ambition.

Overall, the university embodies all the strongest qualities of an institution that lives its mission. As Middle States standard 1 states, the "institution's mission clearly defines its purpose within the context of higher education." AU's mission is the foundation for the goals set by the university at all levels, as described in the strategic plan.

### **Strategic Plan: Leadership for a Changing World**

The last several years have marked a major turning point for American University. The way that the university implements its mission has changed dramatically since Cornelius M. Kerwin was inaugurated as its 14th president in 2007. Soon after, he appointed Scott Bass as the next provost. The change in leadership brought together two very important elements: knowledge of the institution's strengths and history combined with an external perspective on academic excellence. The development and implementation of a new strategic plan provided the university with an opportunity to not just move the institution forward but to take it in a new direction.

The strategic planning process exposed some sobering realities. Significant improvements in undergraduate student quality and other areas sometimes left members of the university

community content with the institution's progress. While pride in accomplishments is understandable, American University still had goals that were unmet.

This close review also exposed the fact that while the university valued social responsibility, implementation of core values was not fully realized. Despite the changing national landscape, the university still tended to serve students from majority ethnicities and cultures and students from the highest socioeconomic backgrounds. While there were many reasons for this, including financial, this practice did not reflect what the university community believed it could be.

Also, there was the realization that American University had sometimes fallen into the trap of thinking itself unique. The location in Washington attracts certain students, such as those interested in political activism, international relations, or law. However, the fact that American offers something special does not mean that the overall ambitions are unique. It was important to look at how AU compares to other college-centered research universities. By looking to peers and aspirant institutions AU recognized that, while academically strong, there was room for improvement. AU could do more to produce cutting-edge research, raise external funds, and compete for the best and brightest faculty and students. AU could have better facilities that would enable the university to provide high-quality student experiences in and out of the classroom. More could be done to fulfill the university's mission. It is in this context that the strategic plan was adopted and is being realized.

American University's strategic plan is both visionary and practical. The plan engages in careful planning and assessment of each objective, founded upon the values and characteristics highlighted in the university's mission. The plan is a living document that drives every aspect of university decision making. One of AU's strengths is that the plan has significant buy-in from the university community. On any given day, task forces, committees, university organizations, and units across campus come together to make the plan a realization. This does not come about by chance. The processes AU used to develop the plan, the structures and procedures used to implement the plan, and the culture of assessment all come together to make the planning process a success.

### **Collaborative Development of the Plan**

In November 2007, shortly after his inauguration, President Kerwin announced the start of a strategic planning effort. This charge outlined a broad scope and called for intensive involvement from all campus constituencies. A 20-person steering committee was convened shortly thereafter, consisting of representatives from across campus. The Strategic Planning Steering Committee (SPSC) was charged with developing a plan for every functional aspect of the university grounded in the institution's mission, current strengths, and future opportunities.

From February to July 2008, the committee members reviewed institutional data on admissions, enrollment, faculty, and other aspects of the institution. The committee used assessment data from surveys such as the Campus Climate Survey, the National Survey of Student

Engagement, faculty surveys, and graduation surveys. It conducted town hall meetings; collected and reviewed materials from constituent groups; and met with faculty, students, staff, and alumni. It also made use of reports on external trends in higher education and benchmark data. Committee members and members of the university community were able to access this information via a strategic plan website. As part of its work, the committee completed environmental scanning and developed an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) that served as a foundation for the development of the strategic plan.

Opportunities for members of the university community to participate in the strategic planning process were numerous. The committee developed a website, a blog, and a dedicated email address to help communicate with the community. (See supporting document: Development of the Strategic Plan—Opportunities for Outreach.) In all, more than 30 meetings were devoted to the strategic plan, engaging more than 1,000 alumni, faculty, staff, students, and administrators. Summary records for each meeting were prepared and posted on the strategic plan website, resulting in more than 130 pages of comments and ideas. Most of the documents related to the strategic plan process are still available on the plan website (<http://www.american.edu/strategicplan>, in the Development link). A common theme found in feedback from all areas of the community centered on the need for appropriate resources, coupled with the need for accountability, to bring the university's goals to fruition. Many in the community indicated an interest in specific action steps. AU's highly participatory strategic plan process was featured as exemplifying best practices in *Strategic Planning in Higher Education: A Guide for Leaders* by Sherrie Tromp and Brent Ruben, published by the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) in 2010.

The resulting plan, *American University and the Next Decade: Leadership for a Changing World*, was made final in November 2008 and formally approved by the Board of Trustees. The plan includes 10 transformational goals and 6 enabling goals, as follows, to assist in fulfilling AU's mission over the next decade.

Ten transformational goals:

1. Epitomize the scholar-teacher ideal.
2. Provide an unsurpassed undergraduate education and experience.
3. Demonstrate distinction in graduate, professional, and legal studies.
4. Engage the great ideas and issues of our time through research, centers, and institutes.
5. Reflect and value diversity.
6. Bring the world to AU and AU to the world.
7. Act on our values through social responsibility and service.

8. Engage alumni in the life of the university, on and off campus.
9. Encourage innovation and high performance.
10. Win recognition and distinction.

The six enabling goals listed here underpin the transformational goals and ensure their effective implementation:

1. Diversify revenue sources.
2. Employ technology to empower excellence.
3. Enhance the university library and research infrastructure.
4. Forge partnerships by leveraging our capital location.
5. Continue as a model for civil discourse.
6. Align facilities planning with strategic goals.

### **The Strategic Plan as a Living Document**

American University relies on the strategic plan as a way to look forward, developing goals and objectives that help it address issues of importance to the university while remaining true to its mission. To that end, the university has a process that enables it to review the objectives set forth in the plan every two years.

When the strategic plan was developed, it included a set of objectives for each strategic plan goal. The objectives were designed to be specific, concrete ways to realize the goal. Each objective had a set of specific metrics (which AU called “measures”) that could be used to track whether the objectives had been met. A Strategic Plan Measurements Team, consisting of members from all divisions, reviewed the measures and offered recommendations on changes. In 2010, after a comprehensive report was circulated on the status of the strategic plan, the objectives and measures were revised and consolidated so that each objective was more concrete and measurable. This revision eliminated the need for separate measures (a layer of data that was not always useful) and enabled the university to sharpen its focus on objectives that were more concrete and outcomes driven. The objectives are now reviewed every two years, most recently in spring 2013.

The 2013–15 objectives are informed by assessment, reflective of the mission, and helpful in advancing the Middle States standards (<http://www.american.edu/president/announcements/archive/April-1-2013.cfm>). As expected by Middle States, many objectives focus on student learning. Goal 1 includes an objective to “maintain high level of instructional effectiveness as evidenced by strong student evaluation of teaching (SET) results, student learning assessments, faculty teaching awards, and other examples of teaching quality” (strategic plan goal 1, Middle States standards 10, 11, and 14). In an effort to meet the communication and assessment expectations of

Middle States standards 11 and 14, goals 2 and 3 of the strategic plan include an objective to “effectively communicate expected learning outcomes to . . . students and use assessments to demonstrate competencies and address areas of concern.” Assessments played an important role in the development of this goal 2 objective: to “conduct a review of undergraduate quantitative offerings campus-wide, sharpen current curricular offerings and develop new training options” (strategic goal 2, Middle States standards 11 and 12).

### Using Assessment to Measure Implementation

The implementation of the strategic plan has been in progress since 2009, and much has been accomplished already. The university sets specific targets for each objective, and progress on each objective is tracked using the university’s assessment system, TracDat. Measures include a combination of quantitative and qualitative metrics. Most objectives are assessed using data that are regularly collected by the university. The aim is to make effective use of assessments that the university already conducts by analyzing assessment results in the context of specific university goals.

Each year, the university reviews how well it is meeting its objectives, and the status of the plan is the main agenda for a Board of Trustees meeting each year. A detailed report provides the AU community with the status of every objective, including whether the objective is met, progressing, or the focus of further study. In addition, a summary report that highlights successes and challenges is available (<http://www.american.edu/strategicplan>).

Overall, the 2012 report demonstrates that, while many challenges still exist, AU has made significant progress on advancing its strategic plan goals ([https://myau.american.edu/TS/strategicplan/Shared%20Documents/September\\_2012\\_Progress\\_Report.pdf](https://myau.american.edu/TS/strategicplan/Shared%20Documents/September_2012_Progress_Report.pdf)). Examples of successes and challenges in meeting the transformative goals of the strategic plan are numerous and may be summed up as follows:

- AU has met AAUP level 1 salaries for professors and associate professors and is still striving to bring salaries for assistant professors up to that level in order to be more competitive in hiring. The impact of scholarship is demonstrated and recognized (goal 1).
- Learning outcomes and assessment plans are in place for all academic programs, and review of fall 2011 assessment reports indicated that almost all units made progress on plan implementation (goal 2).
- The 2012 report noted that master’s degree application and enrollment performance declined in fall 2011 but improved in 2012. Applications for master’s programs increased by almost 200 and new master’s enrollment increased by almost 130 in fall 2012 compared to fall 2011. PhD completion rates and time to degree have improved. By fall 2012, WCL was on target to exceed or maintain its goals with respect to admitting high-quality students (goal 3).



- AU has established a multidisciplinary Center for Latin American and Latino Studies (CLALS), which is actively pursuing external support, and greatly improved its grants infrastructure for assisting individual faculty in obtaining external funding. CLAS increased its external funding in FY2012. Two life sciences laboratories have been established. At the time of the 2012 report, the Aviary Lab was almost complete and bids were being reviewed by the university architect for a new Neuroscience Center laboratory (goal 4).
- The university has established a new Center for Diversity and Inclusion and has exceeded targets for minority, low-income, and first-generation enrollment; it is working to ensure that a more diverse student body will feel comfortable and be successful at AU. Additionally, in FY2012, the Office of Development raised \$2.4 million for scholarships and secured new scholarship endowments of more than \$1.5 million (goal 5).
- AU has maintained a top-10 ranking in study abroad and has increased its number of international undergraduate students (goal 6).
- In fall 2011, the pilot phase of Green Office (GO!) launched, helping faculty and staff “green” their work environment through a year-round sustainability program. At the same time, a new social responsibility committee was established. Since these innovations took place, there has been a 50 percent reduction in AU’s net greenhouse gas emissions (goal 7).
- The number of AU graduates attending alumni events has increased dramatically, and at the time of the 2012 report the university was on track to increase alumni donors by FY2013 (goal 8).
- American University participated in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*’s “Great Colleges to Work For” survey but was not recognized. (The university established a group to examine ways to improve workplace climate.) Academic Affairs and the Faculty Senate completed a revision of the academic regulations in order to streamline and simplify the regulations. For the first time in the station’s history, WAMU 88.5 was the no. 1 station in the Washington, D.C., metro area in the winter 2012 Arbitron ratings report (goal 9).
- AU exceeded goals for media placements and the percentage of faculty media placements (46 percent of 38,088 placements). AU received 16 Presidential Management Fellowships (goal 10).

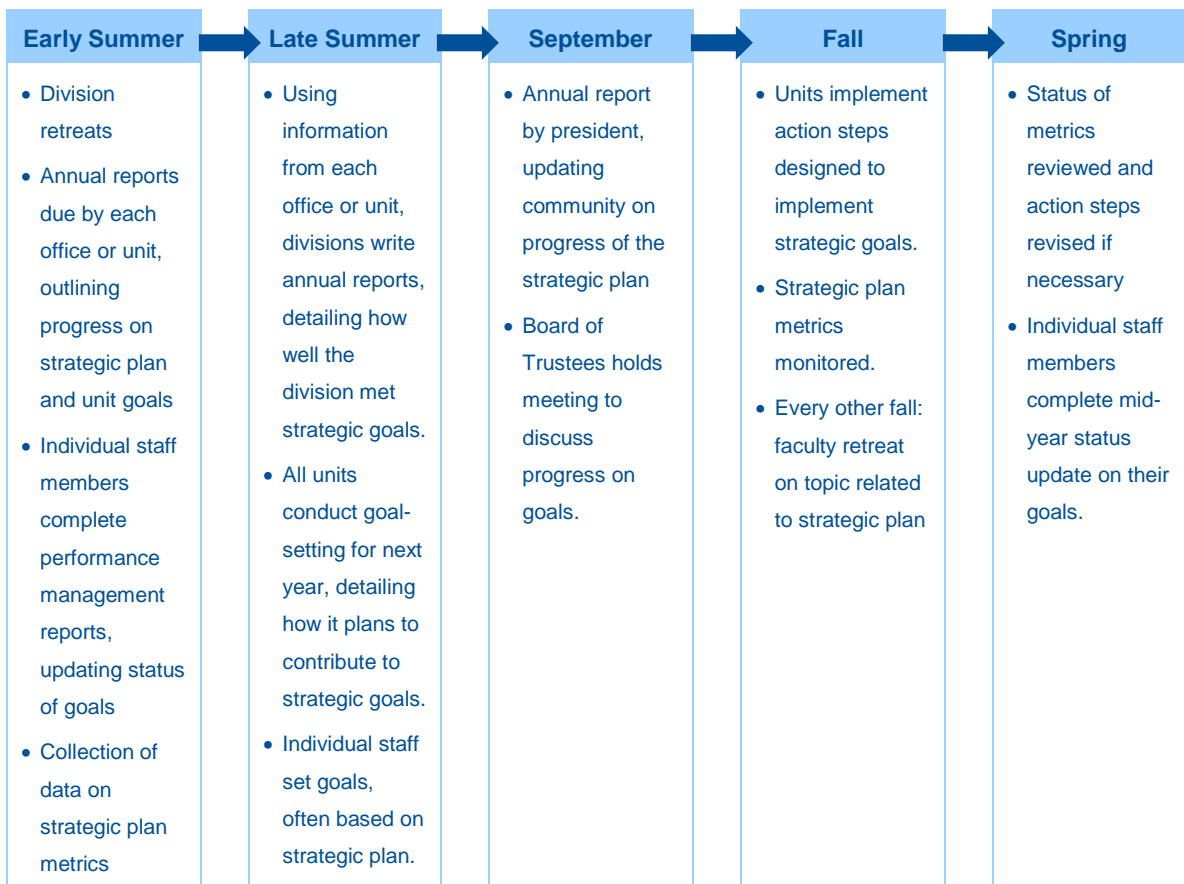
### **The Integrated Nature of Planning**

The strategic plan informs and supports planning efforts across the university. All six divisions within AU (president, academic affairs, campus life, communications and marketing, development, and finance and treasurer) conduct extensive planning. Each division has responsibility for implementing aspects of the overall strategic plan. The divisions also set additional, unit-specific objectives. Each summer, divisions (as well as schools and colleges) hold meetings or retreats to discuss progress made toward the strategic plan as well as specific objectives for the next year. A cascading process occurs, in which university goals in-

form divisional goals, divisional goals inform program or unit goals, and unit goals inform individual goals (see figure 2.1). Assessment is typically an important part of the goal-setting process.

Each summer, units produce annual reports that summarize progress made toward the strategic goals. The annual reports serve as a way to record the many activities and accomplishments that advance the mission and goals.

**Figure 2.1: American University Planning Cycle**



Annual reports cascade through the university, with reports from individual units going to supervisors, and supervisors incorporating the information into their own reports to higher levels. Ultimately, cabinet members develop reports for their divisions, and these are used by the president to evaluate progress on the strategic plan. In the academic affairs division, the 2012 unit reports show significant alignment between unit goals, division goals, and university goals. While the metrics may be different for different units, the reports demonstrate progress on the strategic plan. For example, for goal 1:

- The College of Arts and Sciences noted the success it had in hiring high-quality faculty.
- The School of Communication noted the many awards that its faculty received.
- The [Office of the Dean of Academic Affairs](#) (DAA) described its role in advancing overall university hiring and promotions:
  - The Center for Teaching Research and Learning (reporting to the DAA) described the success of its faculty orientations and its teaching and research conference.
  - The Study Abroad Program (reporting to the DAA) reported on its sponsorship of faculty to make site visits, as well as the fact that it developed a course equivalency database.

While annual reports capture the alignment between unit and division goals, the Performance Management Program (PMP) serves as the process through which individual staff members link their own goals to the goals of the unit and to the strategic plan as a whole. University staff with greater leadership responsibilities are expected to have most of their goals linked directly to university goals, but even employees in other positions (such as facilities or administrative support) have at least some goals that align directly with the strategic plan. By linking planning to the PMP process, every employee knows how his or her work is linked to strategic plan objectives and university goals (see staff manual, p. 30).

### **Strategic Plan Implementation: Collaborations across Divisions and Schools**

A number of strategic plan goals, objectives, and action plans in any given year require collaborations across divisions, schools, and departments. During the goal-setting phase, the members of the cabinet identify joint initiatives to undertake. These joint initiatives are recorded and tracked via TracDat, the university's strategic plan tracking and reporting tool, and are cascaded throughout divisions, schools, and departments for implementation efforts. Examples include the following:

- the Student Retention Initiative in coordination among the academic units, the Office of Undergraduate Studies, the Office of Campus Life, and the Office of Information Technology (OIT)
- the AU Central initiative, which integrates front-end services for students (registrar, student accounts, and financial aid) into a one-stop center
- academic research initiatives (for example, virtual computing, high-performance computing, and grants management system) between the academic affairs and OIT
- the development of numerous new degree programs that were developed and run in collaboration by two or more schools, such as degrees in political communication, business and entertainment, and foreign language and communication media

These types of joint initiatives help to transform the institution's culture from a traditional silo-based environment to a more collaborative environment.

## Communicating the Strategic Plan's Progress

Since the plan was formally approved, the university has provided regular updates to the community on progress using a variety of means:

- [strategic plan website](#)—Created while the plan was being developed, this site now serves as a depository for all things related to the strategic plan, including historic documents, reports, and implementation updates (<http://www.american.edu/strategicplan>). In addition to providing a communication archive, there is a strategic plan feedback (email) mechanism that goes to the president.
- president's campus letters—These missives are sent electronically several times a year to all members of the university community and include regular updates on strategic plan objectives and plan progress.
- report to the Board of Trustees—The president provides an annual report to the Board of Trustees, outlining plan progress, achievements, and shortcomings.
- report to campus—After updating the board on the plan's progress, the president often releases a report (of progress made and ongoing challenges) for campus review and response.

## Other Important Planning Initiatives

Although the strategic plan is the primary planning document for the university as a whole, there are important examples of more specific planning processes in particular areas. Two of the most notable of these are AU Project 2030 in academic affairs and the campus plan in facilities management.

### *Academic Affairs: AU Project 2030*

The strategic plan's vision statement sets the tone for much of AU's work, namely using the next decade to prepare for the future. The vision statement says, "Our nation will examine and adjust its role in the world and seek to improve its public and private institutions while exploring the dynamics and possibilities of a changing, diverse society and culture." In these historic efforts, American University will be an active and influential participant." To that end, it is natural that AU examines how the programs it offers, and the faculty it hires, fit with the changing needs of the nation.

Given its limited resources and existing strengths (and weaknesses), American University recognizes that it must be strategic in allocating new faculty tenure lines and building future programs. In light of this need to look to the future, Provost Scott Bass announced the inauguration of AU Project 2030 (often referred to as "AU2030" for short) in a memorandum to the faculty dated February 6, 2012 (<http://www.american.edu/provost/communications/February-6-2012.cfm>). This memo spelled out the motivation for this initiative, its connection to the strategic plan, and the process for implementing it:

The history of rising research universities reveals that anticipating and investing in subject areas and fields long before they move to the forefront is important. . . .

The academic investments of today, including faculty hires, provide the foundation for the academy of tomorrow. . . . Our strategic plan acknowledges the importance of achieving the scholar-teacher ideal, for it serves as a prerequisite for providing an unsurpassed education to our students, demonstrating distinction in our programs, engaging in the great issues of our time, achieving recognition and distinction, and accomplishing many of our other strategic plan goals. For these reasons, resources have been made available to strategically invest in hiring the faculty of the future. . . .

Therefore, in examining hiring priorities, we need to think not just to the next few years, but in what fields AU should be recognized 1520 years from now. Our vision of the future necessitates a long-term view as today's outstanding assistant professor is tomorrow's full professor, hopefully providing intellectual leadership worldwide. As a midsized university, our investments in different fields, subjects, disciplines, and professions must be carefully considered. Our goal should be to identify and build a few groundbreaking areas at AU that go beyond being very good and are considered by our colleagues nationally and internationally as the very best.

To engage the faculty in determining what niches these should be, the provost invited faculty to submit draft proposals for comment by other faculty on a special website. Faculty from all of AU's schools and colleges responded by collaboratively developing a total of 25 proposals in the spring of 2012, and many more faculty contributed comments on these proposals. After receiving the comments, the original authors submitted revised, final proposals to the provost by a deadline of March 1, 2012. The short timeline was designed to allow for the results of the AU2030 process to be used in making decisions about the allocation of new tenure-line faculty positions and other hiring decisions starting in AY2012–13. The deans of all the schools and colleges then considered the proposals based on the criteria set forth by the provost, who announced the selection of the following initial six priority areas in a memorandum on March 29, 2012

(<http://www.american.edu/provost/communications/March-29-2012.cfm>):

- decision science for policy
- environmental studies
- global disability policy, technology, and education
- global economic and financial governance
- human security
- metropolitan studies

Subsequent to this selection process, a series of workshops took place in May 2012, at which large numbers of faculty discussed the next steps for building strength in these areas (see provost’s memo of May 29, 2012), and four additional proposals for new clusters were submitted during AY2012–13. As discussed in more detail in chapter 4 (“Faculty”), faculty line allocations and hiring decisions for both new and replacement positions are now focused on positions that can help to build AU’s strength in these clusters of research across the relevant schools and colleges; several prominent senior faculty have already been hired in some of these positions. As new faculty join existing faculty in these areas, the university expects that interdisciplinary collaboration in scholarship and programs will be enhanced and that, as a result, AU will be moving toward national or international recognition in these domains in the coming years. The AU2030 agenda now drives many of AU’s academic planning and faculty hiring decisions. After an assessment of these efforts is conducted in conjunction with the deans, the provost reported to the campus community on the achievements of the project to date and the process going forward in September 2013 (<http://www.american.edu/provost/communications/September-4-2013.cfm>), as discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

### *Facilities Improvements: The Campus Plan*

After the adoption of the university’s strategic plan, work began on a new strategic master plan for campus facilities (<http://www.american.edu/finance/fas/2011-Campus-Plan.cfm>). In preparation for the 2011 campus plan, the Facilities Planning Project Team was formed to “assess the facilities needs of the university and to make recommendations for improvements needed to create high-quality experiences.” The team was composed of faculty, staff, and students representing the university’s primary constituencies and was co-chaired by the university architect and a professor from the Washington College of Law.

The team completed its assignment in one year and issued its report on March 24, 2010. The team solicited input directly from all university unit heads, departments, and student leaders. Requests for new facilities or for facilities improvements were shared at a university-wide open forum and at a special panel discussion with student leaders. The team developed a comprehensive inventory of facilities needs. These needs were given a priority rating by assigning a classification of “must do,” “should do,” and “like to do.” The team recommended many areas for priority consideration for additional facilities: student housing; dining, recreation, and activity space to support housing; additional law school space; space for faculty offices; science research and instructional space; a dedicated admissions welcome center; meeting and event space; facilities to support intercollegiate athletics; and faculty development space. Requests for additional space documented by the team totaled 1.7 million square feet of gross building area.

The cabinet further refined the list of priorities and requests in order to create a plan that could be accomplished within the university’s resources. The 2011 campus plan (<http://www.american.edu/finance/fas/2011-Campus-Plan.cfm>) was based on the following priorities:

- enhance undergraduate housing to remain competitive in higher education
- provide more recreation, dining, and activity space to give students an on-campus focus
- create a new law school campus close to public transportation and a retail corridor
- build additional offices to attract and keep top faculty
- improve science and research facilities to sharpen our scholarly edge
- add athletics facilities for fitness and campus wellness
- establish an admissions welcome center for new students and their parents
- create an alumni center to serve our graduates

The plan includes 12 projects totaling 1.2 million square feet of new facilities to be developed from 2011 to 2020, summarized as follows:

- new student housing to accommodate 1,100 students in contemporary-style units
- additional recreation, dining, athletic, and activity space to serve the diverse needs of our community
- a new law school campus at the Tenley Campus, which will result in a 50 percent increase in building area
- a new science facility and the renovation of an existing building to create an integrated science research and instruction center
- several academic and administrative buildings that will increase classroom capacity by 20 percent and add approximately 200 offices for faculty and staff

The university recognizes that facilities planning is a continuous process. Any long-term facilities plan needs to be flexible enough to evolve as the institution's needs evolve. Many of the facilities outlined in the 2011 campus plan have specific roles in support of the mission. However, there is sufficient flexibility in the plan to adjust for the specific needs at the time each project is actually developed. Various assessment and benchmarking processes will continue to help the university identify areas that will need future attention.

## FINANCIAL RESOURCES SUPPORTING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

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The success of strategic and planning efforts at American University relies on effective resources. Careful enrollment planning and resource allocation play a critical role in meeting short- and long-term institutional goals while maintaining financial equilibrium every year. The university uses a hybrid approach of centralized incremental budgeting and responsibility center management (RCM) budgeting for select units. Essentially, the university budget is established based on the prior year's operating budget plus changes in enrollment, revenue assumptions, and expense priorities. One of the challenges is to balance the university's immediate and long-term needs with strategic plan goals, while at the same time holding tuition to reasonable levels. From AY2011–12 to AY2012–13 (the latest years for which comparison data are available), AU's tuition and mandatory fees increased 3.8 percent compared to 4 percent at competitor schools and 4 percent for private institutions. In FY2014 and FY2015, tuition and mandatory fees will increase by 2.9 percent.<sup>1</sup> Tuition rates and housing increases are kept at a modest level; therefore, the expected increase in total revenues is generally limited, while requests for increases in expenditures or other priorities submitted by the provost and the vice presidents increase at higher rates based on individual program needs. Each proposed initiative is carefully reviewed by the president and the cabinet to ensure that the limited new resources are allocated effectively and consistently with the strategic plan of the university. In order to help fund strategic priorities, the university takes advantage of cost savings that derive from increasing operating efficiency, eliminating duplication of efforts and activities, sharing resources across divisions, and internal reallocations within each division.

### The Budget Process

Middle States standard 3 states, “. . . effective use of institutional resources, internal and external, is crucial to institutional performance.” One of American University's strengths is its ability to thoughtfully and strategically make use of its resources in ways that advance the mission and objectives of the institution. Specifically, AU has mechanisms in place to ensure that resources are available and that resource utilization is prioritized according to strategic objectives. The effective allocation of resources, and the use of assessment to inform decisions about resources, is engrained into everyday practices. This section highlights the procedures that are followed to ensure that financial resources are deployed to advance AU's mission and goals.

American University utilizes a two-year budget process to provide a direct link between resource allocations and the university's strategic plan. Begun in FY2004–05, the university is currently in the sixth two-year budget cycle. More than mere forecasting, AU develops a detailed two-year operating budget and sets tuition, fees, and housing rates for the next

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<sup>1</sup> See average AU tuition and mandatory fee increases at <http://www.american.edu/finance/budget/universitybudget/Budget-FY-2014-2015.cfm#tuitionhousing>. Please note that fiscal years at AU run from May 1 to the following April 30.



two years. Most importantly, this allows strategic, multiyear allocations to strategic plan initiatives.

The president appoints a [University Budget Committee](#) (UBC) every other year. The UBC, co-chaired by the provost and the CFO, vice president and treasurer, is composed of representatives from the Faculty Senate, student governance organizations, the Staff Council, administrators, and resource persons. The UBC is charged with:

1. developing budget guidelines for the president’s review and approval prior to his submission of them to the Board of Trustees at its November meeting
2. soliciting campus constituencies’ feedback on budget priorities through various forms of outreach, including town hall meetings
3. making recommendations to the president on the priorities to be included in detailed and balanced budgets

The budget development guidelines are informed by the university’s strategic plan objectives for the next two years; external environmental factors that will significantly impact the university operations (for example, slow economic recovery, competition for enrollment both nationally and globally, downward pressure on tuition levels—price and affordability, federal deficit, and regulatory obligations and changes); and by institutional priorities, especially those related to strategic plan objectives. (See <http://www.american.edu/finance/budget/universitybudget/> for details about the FY2014 and FY2015 budget development guidelines, the budget formulation schedule and the budget process.)

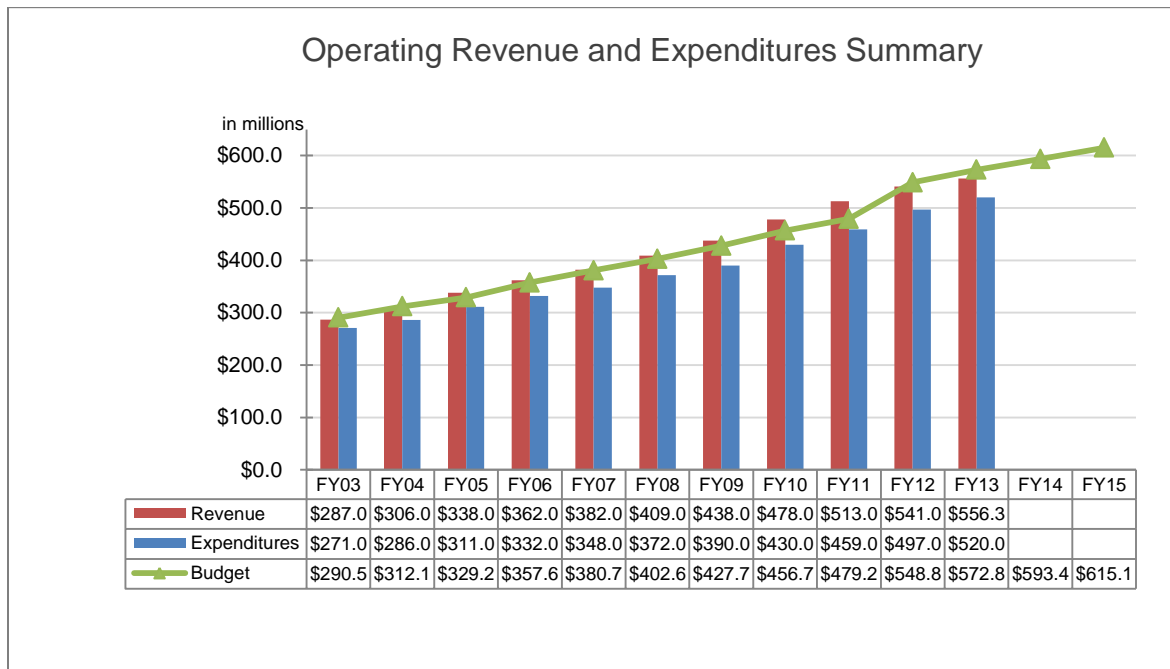
Once the Board of Trustees approves the budget development guidelines, the president issues a budget call to his cabinet, which is composed of the provost and other vice presidents. That call initiates enrollment projections by the academic units and the vice provost for undergraduate enrollment. Simultaneously, expenditure budgets are reviewed and prioritized by each division head. The provost and the CFO, vice president and treasurer hold a university-wide meeting to communicate the budget formulation and priorities and receive input from faculty, students, and staff. The Faculty Senate reviews the budget development guidelines and recommends academic priorities to the provost. The president reviews budget proposals from the cabinet with the University Budget Committee and presents a two-year budget proposal to the Board of Trustees for approval. Once the budget is approved, the president issues a special report to the university community and makes budget summaries and highlights available to the public (see the American University Budget—Fiscal Years 2014 and 2015 at <http://www.american.edu/finance/budget/universitybudget/upload/Budget-Report-FY2014-and-FY2015.pdf>).

## The Operating Budget

The university has made great strides toward advancing its financial position during the past two decades. Strategies such as careful enrollment planning and resource allocations, disciplined financial planning strategies, and identification of new ways to conduct business and achieve operating efficiencies have all played critical roles in helping the university fulfill its mission, goals, and strategic plan.

During the period FY2003 through FY2015, the university’s operating budget will more than double from \$290.5 million to \$615.1 million—or a 212 percent increase. As depicted in figure 2.2, the university maintained balanced operating budgets in each of those years with positive net income at the end of the year. Over an 11-year period from FY2003 to FY2013, unrestricted fund balances have grown 250 percent—from \$72 million to \$181 million. Our net asset has also grown 160 percent—from \$336K to \$876K.

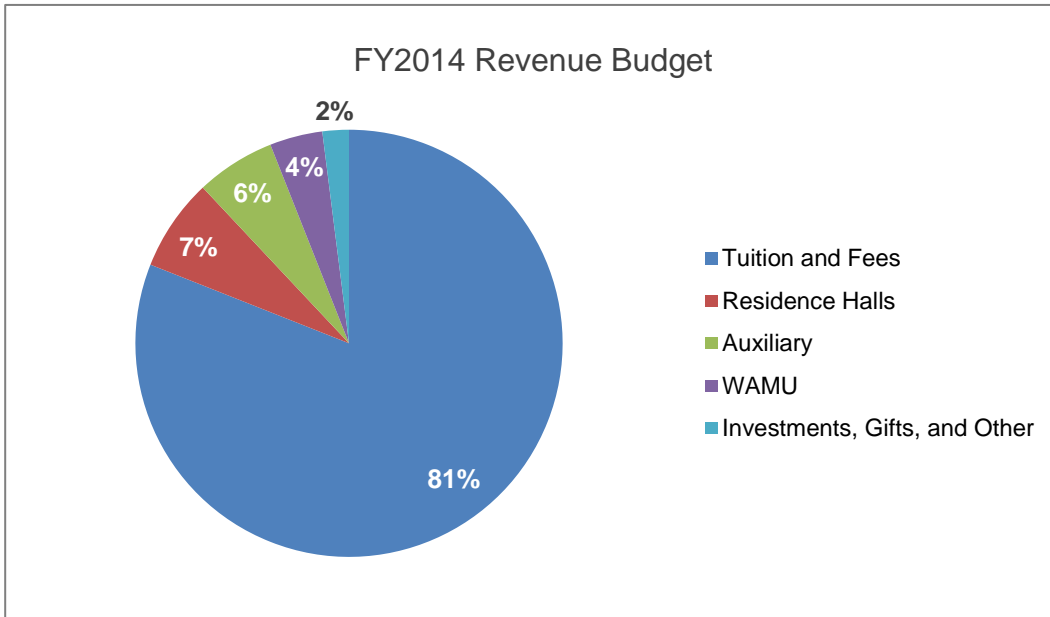
**Figure 2.2: Operating Revenue and Expenditures Summary**



Source: Year-End Review Summary, AU Budget.

American University depends primarily on tuition and other student-generated income. Figure 2.3 illustrates the revenue mix for FY2014. Tuition and fees represent roughly 81 percent of revenue, followed by 7 percent from residence halls, 6 percent from auxiliary services, 4 percent from WAMU-FM, and 2 percent from investments and gifts.

**Figure 2.3: FY2014 Revenue Budget**



Source: University Budget Office.

Much of the expenditure budget is dedicated to personnel. Salaries and benefits for full-time and part-time personnel represent nearly 50 percent, followed by 25 percent for supplies and other categories, 19 percent for financial aid, 4 percent for debt service, 3 percent for technology and capital equipment, and 2 percent for utilities.

### Capital Budget

American University's capital budget is a multiyear financial plan to support the institution's long-term capital development goals, which include new construction, major renovations, and facility improvement of university buildings and campus infrastructure.

AU's operating and capital budgets were successfully integrated effective FY2012. Integration of these budgets provides a linkage between the campus master plan and academic priorities, helping university administrators focus on the up-front resource allocation that is aligned with the university's strategic plan. The capital budget also is important, because it serves as an effective tool in communicating the university's priorities and funding strategy to the university community.

The updated [capital budget](#) which was approved by the Board of Trustees in February 2013, totals \$416 million for the five-year period FY2014 through FY2018. The capital budget summary is classified into five categories: new construction, acquisitions, new projects under consideration, major renovation, and annual departmental requests for small facility improvement projects.

In terms of funding sources, approximately \$227 million (or 55 percent) of the capital budget is funded by borrowing (issuing debt); \$45 million (or 11 percent) is funded by fundraising; \$34 million (or 8 percent) is funded from the Facilities Modernization Fund as part of the operating budget; \$85 million is funded from designated reserve funds; and the remaining \$25 million in FY2017–18 will be funded from a combination of internal reserve funds and external funding.

Should the condition of the university’s operations and facilities change, future capital projects (for example, for FY2016–17 and FY2018–19) will be modified to reflect those changes.

### **Fiscal Discipline, Credit Ratings, and Assessment of Financial Management**

AU’s fiscal discipline has been very successful. In the depth of the recession and throughout the entire period of the crisis and downturn, the university never laid off or furloughed a single colleague due to budget constraints, never stopped hiring, and continued to give annual merit-based pay increases.

The budget methodology for American University includes financial safeguards or budget line items that can be pulled back, if needed, to absorb some extraordinary enrollment loss. This prudent practice has received high marks from the rating agencies in prior years and will be continued.

The budget for contingency financial safeguards represents 6–7 percent of the operating budget. Even in stable years, the operating budgets include contingencies and safeguards to provide a cushion should unforeseen events arise. Unexpected enrollment shortfalls or other funding needs can be accommodated through operations, budget contingencies, and designated reserves.

Throughout the year, several procedures ensure sound budget management and measure progress towards meeting the university’s goals. Examples include:

- periodic budget-to-actual performance reviews completed each semester
- Sarbanes-Oxley self-audit requirements
- annual performance and five-year historical trend reviews
- quarterly budget forums for unit budget managers

Unit managers and division heads review data and use it to make resource allocation decisions in all of their areas of responsibility. Trend data are also used to make decisions regarding unit reorganizations, program reviews, and program development initiatives.

### **Voluntary Sarbanes-Oxley**

In fall 2004, the Audit Committee of the Board of Trustees agreed that the American University should be proactive in applying rigorous standards of internal control across the enterprise. Protiviti, the internal audit team, reviews, documents, and performs detailed testing of the university’s internal controls. Protiviti is aware of only a few not-for-profit organizations that have proactively taken such a review.

Examples of the university's disciplined financial planning strategies include:

- balanced budgets every year—Despite the economic turmoil of the past several years, the university has had balanced budgets for 30 years, as shown earlier. This is a result of strict adherence to budgetary guidelines and effective resource management.
- annual and multiyear funding strategies used to support the strategic plan—The university moved to a two-year budget cycle to align more closely with the development of multiyear initiatives to support the strategic plan. These initiatives include increasing the number of full-time faculty and staff; developing new undergraduate programs, including three-year BA programs; strengthening enrollment from high-quality graduate programs; reducing teaching load to enhance research and scholarly activities; and expanding AU's breadth in international affairs and technology. At the same time, the university will become more selective, recruit high-quality students, work to streamline operations, reduce costs, and increase operational efficiency.
- enrollment contingency reserve established in the event of an enrollment shortfall—An enrollment contingency was established in 1994 to serve as a reserve in the event of an enrollment shortfall. Currently 1.5 percent of tuition revenue is set aside each year with the goal of reaching and maintaining a reserve equal to 5 percent of tuition revenue; this goal was reached in FY2012, and as of April 2013 the tuition management reserve stood at \$22 million.
- annual fund transfer to quasi-endowment funds—The university enhances its endowment balance by transferring funds from the operating budget. This strategy has been implemented over the last 10 years. Currently 1 to 2 percent of the gross revenue is transferred to the quasi-endowment.
- pre-fund faculty and staff salary increases—The university's operating budget includes a provision for pre-funding merit-based salary increases for faculty and staff for the next fiscal year. This strategy ensures sufficient resources are available, prior to authorizing such increases, and helps maintain a compensation structure consistent with market.
- multiyear funding strategies to bring faculty and staff salaries and benefits to market—Since FY1997, the university has pursued a multiyear funding commitment to bring faculty and staff salaries and benefits to a level that is competitive with market rates. Average faculty salaries are benchmarked against

### AU's Ratings

A testament to AU's sound budget processes, fiscal policies and procedures is the institution's strong credit rating. In October 2009, Standard and Poor's (S&P) upgraded the university's credit rating from A to A+. This was particularly significant in an economic climate where most institutions' ratings remained constant and many were downgraded. At the time of the upgrade, AU was one of only two private institutions to receive an upgrade from S&P that year. In November 2011, Moody's Investors Service affirmed the university's A2 rating and upgraded the outlook from stable to positive. The rating agencies' analysts indicated that the upgrades resulted from the university's impressive financial management, budgeting and planning process, improved selectivity, and strong market niche.

level 1 standards set by the Association of American University Professors (AAUP) for full-time tenure and tenure-track faculty. Staff salaries have been brought up to market median. In addition, the benefits plan for faculty and staff was enhanced to remain market-competitive. Staff market position was 3.3 percent above median in 2012.

- bond financing and effective debt management—Nearly all of the university’s outstanding debt portfolio has either been issued as fixed-rate obligations or fixed through synthetic interest rate swaps. In this way, rates have been locked at attractive rates, and debt service payments are predictable and steady. To take advantage of the current short-term interest rate environment, the university has established a \$125 million commercial paper (CP) program. This will provide flexibility and funding during the current capital expansion program now underway.

The university has a number of policies and procedures in place to ensure that its financial health is reviewed and measured against its goals and objectives. Methods to assess the level and efficient utilization of financial resources include the following diverse strategies:

- approval of the university’s two-year operating budget and five-year capital budget by the Board of Trustees Finance and Investment Committee and the full Board of Trustees
- annual financial audit performed by an external audit firm and reported to the Board of Trustees Audit Committee
- annual internal audits performed by internal auditors and reported to the Board of Trustees Audit Committee
- annual benchmarking study to compare AU’s financial and qualitative indicators with those of competitor institutions
- annual benchmarking of endowment performance via NACUBO Endowment Study Cambridge Associates

In order to measure the five-year capital budget impact on the operating budget, a five-year operating budget projection is performed and presented to the Board of Trustees.

## Endowment

Building a strong endowment is a top strategic priority for American University. Although the institution will continue to be largely tuition dependent for the foreseeable future, efforts to increase other revenue sources are essential for lessening this dependence on tuition in the long run. This is one reason that the first enabling goal of the strategic plan is “diversify our revenue sources.”

The Finance and Investment Committee of the Board of Trustees takes an active role in overseeing the university’s endowment by developing the asset allocation policy and spending rule, approving investment managers, and monitoring the managers’ performance.

The current asset allocation is broadly diversified as follows: large cap equities, 27 percent; small cap equities, 3 percent; international equities, 15 percent; emerging market equities, 5 percent; real assets, 5 percent; hedge funds, 20 percent; private equity/venture, 10 percent; real estate, 5 percent; and fixed income, 10 percent.

Less than 1 percent of the university's operating budget is dependent on endowment income. It has been a financial strategy over many years to avoid the temptation to balance the operating budget simply by increasing the use of endowment income. While forcing the university to make hard choices during the budget formulation process, this strategy helped to insulate AU from the problems many institutions faced when all endowments declined significantly in 2009. Those with 20–30 percent of their operating budgets reliant on endowment income were forced to make significant spending reductions, while AU experienced little budget impact. This endowment strategy stands as a main reason for the university's continued growth during the economic crisis.

AU has made a concerted effort to transfer funds annually from current operations to the quasi endowment as a way to build endowment balances. Between FY2009 and FY2013 the endowment has grown approximately 210 percent, from \$163 million to \$505 million, primarily because of top-tier investment returns and because of these annual operating budget transfers to the endowment. Over a 10-year period, AU's endowment return has been 8.8 percent, exceeding S&P 500 and other industry measures.

## Development

Development activities also enrich revenue sources and the university's overall financial health. On December 31, 2010, the university concluded the *AnewAU* capital campaign after raising \$214.1 million, which exceeded the original \$200 million goal. The campaign, the largest in the history of the institution, was ultimately successful despite vacancies and transitions in institutional leadership, including a three-year period without a permanent vice president of development. Progress during this time may be attributed to the continued excellence in AU's academic profile, as well as in the investment and commitment of institutional leaders (governing, administrative, and academic), alumni, and development professionals to the campaign's success.

In addition to the campaign, development has focused its effort with an eye to increasing the overall return. Actions have included the following:

- focus on principal gift fundraising to support the president, trustees, university officials, and high-ranking development officers to cultivate and solicit gifts in the \$1 million-plus range
- creation of a regional advancement program, which allows AU to maximize travel dollars to deploy four professionals in U.S. regions for the purpose of efficient

identification, qualification, and stewardship of donors and prospects for alumni leadership and philanthropy

- creation of an alumni outreach program, which seeks to engage alumni through various activities, including admissions volunteering and professional networking
- emphasis on cultivation and solicitation of high-capacity parents
- growth and investment in planned giving with increased professionalization and marketing, as well as opportunities to expand gift annuity marketing with the outsourcing of the management of these funds to PNC Bank in the fall of 2012
- utilization of a lockbox for direct mail gifts, enabling reduced staff time for gift entry and more rapid depositing of gifts
- investments in annual giving, allowing for more analysis and segmentation of the prospect pool to focus resources on effective tactics and receptive constituencies
- significantly improved investments in professional development and training
- improved evaluation resources in the form of AU's prospect management system, APEX, which allows for better tracking of individual officer activity as well as performance of prospect pools and the donor pipeline

Overall, the university's development effort has shown revenue growth from FY2009 to FY2013. In addition to the strong total dollar support, the university has had an overall increase of alumni donors who have made philanthropic gifts to the institution (see figure 2.4).

Alumni donors increased from FY2009 to FY2012, yet decreased in FY2013. Decreases relate in part to catch-up time from the effects of Hurricane Sandy in key geographic regions and general rates of decline that reflect national trends. With our tremendous growth in alumni programming, however, strong returns for FY2014 are anticipated in alumni donor counts.

Development activities overall have been enhanced by a tenfold increase over three years of alumni engagement activities and threefold increase in donor outreach. Development activities have also resulted in continued growth of multiyear major gift commitments that will continue to support annual revenue growth over the mid- and long-term. These gains are reflected in the measure of total progress (new outright gifts plus new major gift pledges). In sum, the key highlights and indicators for continued growth include:

- cash up 47.8 percent from FY2009 to FY2013
- progress up 65.5 percent
- a tenfold increase in the number of alumni events
- a twofold increase in event attendance



**Figure 2.4: Development Total Revenue and Alumni Donors**

Measure	FY2009	FY2010	FY2011	FY2012	FY2013
Total Revenue	\$15.7M	\$27.4M	\$18.6M	\$22.6M	\$23.2M
Alumni Donors	9,898	9,998	10,520	11,122	10,409

Source: Office of Development and Alumni Relations

Some of the more significant commitments reflected in these total progress figures include gifts that support the university’s strategic academic and financial priorities, including the following:

- a \$3 million gift for the School of International Service building; also a \$1,000,000 gift annuity (realized at \$400,000) for the same
- a \$2 million gift to endow a chair in Russian history and culture
- a \$2 million gift to support athletics, Israel studies, and the Kogod building expansion
- a bequest intention of \$2 million to endow a chair in opera studies
- a \$1.5 million gift to name the theatre in the School of Communication building
- a \$1 million gift to establish an undergraduate scholarship in the Kogod School of Business
- a bequest intention of \$1 million to endow a professorship in the School of Public Affairs

## **OTHER RESOURCES: PERSONNEL, TECHNOLOGY, AND FACILITIES**

### **Human Resources: Faculty and Staff**

AU’s faculty and staff are critical to advancing the institution’s mission. The strategic allocation of faculty lines is discussed in chapter 4, the faculty chapter. Here the self-study will specifically address the issue of staff resources. Two of the major drivers behind the university’s human resource allocation decisions are commitments to (1) advance the university’s strategic plan goals and (2) effectively respond to external environmental challenges and assessments of internal needs.

When the university’s strategic plan was implemented to coincide with the FY2010–11 budget, several new practices were put into place to link human resource allocation decisions to the university’s strategic goals. This link was first established in the budget requests submitted by the provost and vice presidents; this practice was initiated with the FY2010–11

budget and has continued with the FY2012–13 and FY2014–15 budgets. Unless a requested position is intended to meet an essential ongoing university activity, requests for new full-time staff positions must be specifically linked to the strategic plan goal(s) that the investment in such hiring intends to support. The [University Budget Office](#) (UBO), the unit responsible for university-wide position control, monitors progress made in fulfilling approved requests. The UBO also provides data on new strategic plan–funded positions when reporting on the university’s investment in strategic plan initiatives over the course of each fiscal year. The outcomes achieved as a result of these new human-resource allocations are reflected in the president’s annual report to the Board of Trustees on progress made toward strategic plan objectives.

Since the last periodic review report, the university has been fortunate to be able to invest in a number of critical staffing areas necessary to fulfill the strategic plan and the mission of the institution. Full-time faculty size has increased by 22.4 percent, from 2008 to 2012. (Details about the growth in the number of full-time faculty are provided in chapter 4, faculty, table 4.1.) Full-time staffing has increased by approximately 16 percent over five academic years, from 1,344 to 1,564 full-time staff between fall 2008 and fall 2012. The number of part-time staff and student full-time employees increased by 10.7 percent (504 to 558) during the same time period.

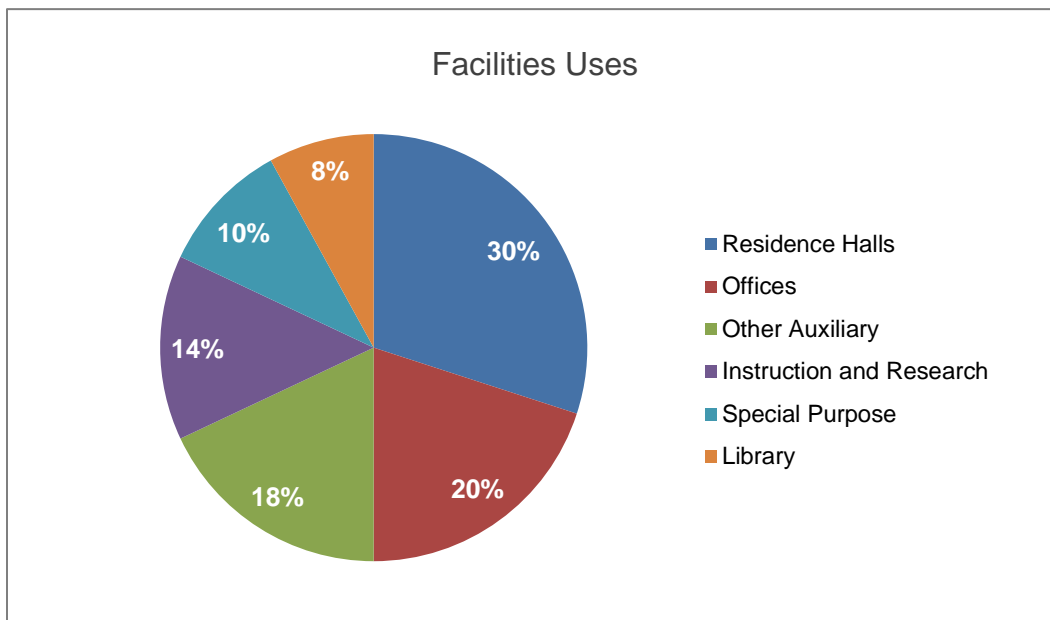
The supporting document Human Resource Allocations highlights select strategic initiatives on which the university has embarked since the strategic plan was implemented in FY2010, citing new staff resources allocated to support the effort. A few examples are:

- a total of 50 tenure-track faculty and 80 term-faculty positions from FY2010 to FY2015 to implement a variable teaching load and to support faculty research endeavors (goal 1)
- new student retention and service positions created in the office of vice provost for undergraduate programs and the academic units (goal 2)
- two new staff positions to support the launch of a new Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI) in 2012 to advance the university’s commitment to respecting and valuing diversity, with the center serving as a resource and liaison for students, staff, and faculty on issues of equity through education, outreach, and advocacy (goal 5)
- additional staff positions created to augment alumni and regional advancement activities, including academic projects, capital projects, and support for student scholarships and awards (goal 8)
- digital media and marketing positions in the University Communications and Marketing unit to support a new branding campaign and ongoing web content management system (goal 10)

## Current Facilities

American University grew very rapidly in the post–World War II era, but for a long time afterward its physical facilities lagged behind the growth of its student body, faculty, and staff, leading to a very undersized physical plant and severe space shortages in everything from residence halls to offices and classrooms. For the past three decades, AU has been working diligently to overcome this handicap and to create a more adequate set of facilities for both academic and other activities. As noted earlier in the chapter, the campus plan outlines future initiatives, many of which are already under way, to improve campus facilities. AU’s facilities as of fall 2013 comprise almost 4,000,000 square feet of area, in 54 buildings, and in several individual off-campus buildings. The facilities are comprehensive and represent typical university uses, as shown in figure 2.5. They include 140 instructional spaces, housing for 3,500 students, libraries, a student center, athletic and recreation facilities, a theatre, an art museum, and many other specialized facilities.

**Figure 2.5: Facilities Uses**

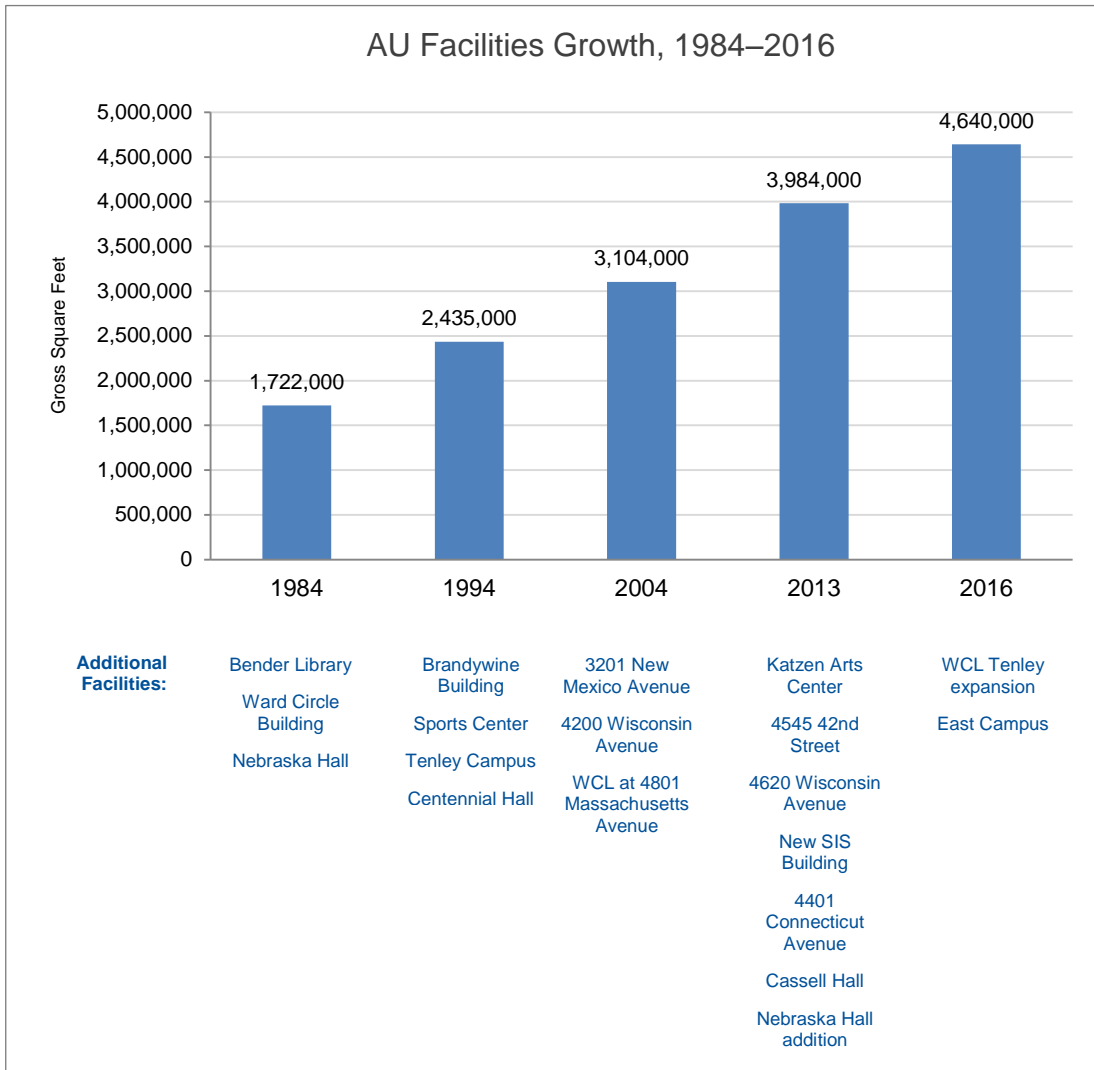


Source: Office of Finance and Treasurer.

The facilities available to support the university’s mission have grown by approximately 900,000 square feet (28 percent) between 2004 and 2013, as shown in figure 2.6. The total number of gross square feet is expected to grow from 3.984 million in 2013 to 4.640 million in 2016. Inadequate facilities for the arts programs was a significant problem until the completion of the Katzen Arts Center in 2005, which opened up modern space designed to meet the specific needs of arts programs (both fine arts and performing arts) and their students and faculty. The School of International Service had outgrown its original building many years ago, so the completion of the new SIS building in 2010 had a transformational impact on the school.

These new facilities have created opportunities for both expanding and enriching academic programs. Additionally, moving administrative offices to off-campus buildings has created additional main campus space (20,000 square feet) that has been repurposed for academic uses.

**Figure 2.6: AU Facilities Growth, 1984–2016**



Source: Office of Finance and Treasurer.

In 2013, the addition of housing for 510 students on the main campus was the first step in expanding the availability of undergraduate housing and in modernizing housing options, so that they are more attractive to students. Housing for approximately 600 more students will be added by 2016, supporting the strategic plan goal of an unsurpassed undergraduate experience.

The School of Communication (SOC) will move into an expanded state-of-the-art facility in the McKinley Building in 2014. In 2016, the Washington College of Law (WCL) will move to a new facility constructed at Tenley Campus, resulting in a 50 percent expansion from the current facility. In 2017, we will complete construction of our new East Campus project, which will accommodate the current and strategic growth of enrollment, faculty, and staff for new academic and innovative programs.

In addition to new facilities, there have also been adaptations of existing facilities to meet the university's evolving needs. New research labs for biology and behavioral neuroscience have been created in existing buildings to support the increased emphasis on research and science education. Faculty offices have been added to support the significant growth in faculty over the last five years. The library has undergone a series of renovations to adapt to its modern role as a center for research and information of all forms. Planning and renovation for science facilities will occur in 2017 as funding sources become solidified.

The university assesses its facilities in a number of different ways, including internal quality assessments and benchmarking against higher education peers. These assessments generally indicate that the university has high-quality facilities but is lacking in the quantity of facilities it has available in certain areas. Plans for new facilities and renovations of existing facilities will address these shortages, with the most critical needs being addressed by 2016. The specific needs for improving AU's science facilities and the assessments and plans related to this issue are addressed in chapter 8.

## **Information Technology**

As mentioned in chapter 1, one major challenge that institutions face is the demand and cost of technology. Information technology (IT) resources have improved significantly in the past few years in direct response to the growing demand for technological infrastructure and services. In 2008, a multiyear strategic roadmap was outlined for IT. The roadmap targeted building out key infrastructure and competencies, focusing on systems, processes, and people. Since then, numerous key processes have been instituted internally, such as change management, asset management, project management, service management, incident management, and problem management. Much of the infrastructure has been consolidated and standardized, resulting in a more stable and manageable architecture. Legacy systems have been replaced with industry-recognized enterprise-level systems. The campus now has adopted many new enterprise systems, including a robust content management system, a portal, a collaboration platform, enhanced administrative and student information systems, a business intelligence platform, an integrated messaging system, a storage area network, a firewall, and a network access control system.

The campus network infrastructure has been upgraded and modernized, along with campus wireless. The Office of Information Technology has reached and even exceeded the goal to maintain at least a 99.9 percent average for up time and reliability of core services, largely through the virtualization of servers and also the establishment of a second data center to

address continuity of operations. Critical university management processes—such as degree audit, advising, student billing, retention, grants management, performance-compensation-talent management—have been automated through implementation of state-of-the-art systems. Imaging and document management capabilities have been extended to the admissions, financial aid, and accounts payable areas to streamline work.

American University has created a high-performance computing cluster to support advanced computing applications and will eventually link to a larger grid of university research computers. Virtual computing desktops and labs now provide campus users with access to important software from anywhere, without needing to go to a computer lab or to install it on a PC.

Professional development is a key focus for all OIT staff. Staff members engage strategically with vendors and service providers participating in user committees and advisory groups. Service availability reflects predefined service levels agreements (SLAs) that are negotiated with various campus stakeholders. The IT priorities and budget are developed in alignment with the university's strategic plan. The budget processes distinguish the operating budget from investments in life cycle replacement and net new technology. Information technology planning and governance are facilitated by a cross-divisional steering committee, the [Enterprise Systems Project Team](#), comprised of divisional representatives, who review information technology project proposals in light of strategic needs and, in turn, make recommendations to university leadership.

Looking forward, a number of important initiatives are being planned, including the development of a new roadmap for IT, support of the new partnership with DeITak, and the modernization of AU's admissions processes and systems. Continued improvements to student business services also are being planned. There are planned improvements to AU's security systems to address compliance with Payment Card Industry regulations. OIT will raise greater awareness around sensitive data in all systems so that the risk around sensitive data exposure continues to be mitigated.

## INSTITUTIONAL-LEVEL ASSESSMENT

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American University views assessment as a critical tool in ensuring institutional effectiveness. Assessment at AU is outcomes-focused and therefore sets clear goals that are then assessed. Most importantly, AU fosters a culture that encourages careful reflection on assessment information and the use of that information to drive institutional change. As stated in AU's assessment plan, Assessment Processes and Procedures, the university's assessment approach is characterized by:

- a solid foundation in AU's overall mission, goals, and objectives
- centralized support with decentralized ownership of assessment

- a commitment to assessing all aspects of the university, including student learning, student experiences, and overall institutional effectiveness
- a recognition of the importance of using a combination of formative and summative approaches to assessment
- incorporation of assessment at different levels of the university (such as individual courses, specific programs, and institution wide)
- support for using a wide range of data-gathering techniques, including both qualitative and quantitative assessment measures
- an emphasis on finding ways to capture direct evidence of success
- a recognition that successful assessment requires wide participation by students, faculty, staff, and administrators

Assessment Processes and Procedures documents major university processes for assessment. It includes information on how the university assesses the strategic plan and unit plans, as well as the regular tools typically used for assessment. It also outlines the processes that the institution uses for assessment of student learning.

### **Assessment Resources**

Members of the AU community have access to a wide array of assessment data that can be used to help with evaluating goals and understanding program success.

#### ***Institutional Data***

Like most institutions, American University produces an annual book of facts, called the [\*Academic Data Reference Book\*](#), which includes a wealth of information about the institution's enrollments, admissions, courses, faculty, and retention and graduation rates. The book is made public and posted on AU's website, available for use by prospective and current students as well as faculty and staff.

Since 1999, university managers have had a web-accessible source for university statistics and reports. The system, called [EagleData](#), includes a vast array of data on enrollments, courses, faculty, students, housing, and more. The system is far reaching in its scope. It includes everything from retention reports that enable schools to track students who withdraw to student evaluation of teaching reports that enable administrators to better understand the relationship between course characteristics and student satisfaction measured by teaching evaluations. Over the years, the system has been modified to add new reports that help the university track its goals. Most importantly, these reports are used in decision making. For example, enrollment reports are used in budget projections, course enrollment reports are used to manage decisions about course offerings, retention reports are used by the Undergraduate Experience Council, and faculty reports are used to analyze faculty load.

In 2008, the university began implementing a business intelligence (BI) system that provides even more robust data-analysis capabilities for senior managers. The project began with a dashboard of key indicators for senior leadership. Since then, dashboards for undergraduate and graduate admissions have also been created. Dashboards are created collaboratively with stakeholders. The goal is to add dashboards each year, increasing the capability for managers to create customized reports. By putting analytic capabilities in the hands of decision makers, the BI system is making even more targeted analysis possible.

### ***Benchmark Data***

American University relies on various kinds of benchmark data to assess most aspects of its mission and goals. Comparison data enable the university to better understand the degree to which it is living up to standards of academic excellence. AU does not have one set of benchmark institutions. Rather it adapts its benchmark lists to the question under review. As noted earlier, overall institutional quality has been benchmarked to a set of college-centered research universities. Issues related specifically to undergraduate education and admissions, however, are typically compared to institutions where there is the most overlap in undergraduate applications. Survey results are often compared to other private doctoral institutions. Scholarly productivity is usually benchmarked using faculty from similar academic departments or schools. Benchmarking is commonly used for in-depth research, such as recent analyses of general education programs, honors programs, and graduate education programs, as well as those to which the institution aspires. Some important examples of how benchmark data is typically used include the following:

- academic program reviews—Periodic reviews require units at AU to assess how a particular degree program, department, or school compares to peer and aspirational programs at other universities.
- *U.S. News and World Report* data—Rankings data provided by *U.S. News* each year, including the specific data points, are used to compare ourselves to competitors.
- National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and other student surveys—Survey results provide data for point-by-point comparisons on student expectations for college, educational experiences, and satisfaction—among other variables.
- faculty and staff surveys—Surveys give insight into how AU’s faculty and staff measure up in terms of attitudes about diversity and inclusion, the work environment, and other aspects of university life.
- Education Advisory Board data—Best practices, trends data, and custom research reports are available to adopt ways to achieve greater efficiencies and institutional effectiveness.
- Academic Analytics data—Data are used to benchmark faculty levels of scholarship, grants, and awards against peers from similar disciplines.



## Survey Data

American University makes extensive use of survey data, integrating survey results with the AU data system in a way that enables it to analyze survey results by program (for example, honors), major, school/college, race/ethnicity, transfer student status, retention status, and more. Students are surveyed during all stages of life at AU, from prospective student, to incoming freshmen, to graduating senior. They are also surveyed as alumni. Whenever possible, AU student responses are compared to similar measures at other institutions. Examples of national surveys used include the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) First Year Survey, the NSSE, and the EBI survey.<sup>2</sup>

The university uses internally developed surveys in order to assess institution-specific learning outcomes and goals. For example, the undergraduate version of the [Graduation Census](#) asks students to rate their own progress toward AU's specific general education learning outcomes. The census also gathers data on how students rate their student internship and volunteer experiences. The [Campus Climate Survey](#) collects feedback about AU services, and it asks questions directly related to the mission. These responses enable the university to gain insight into the degree to which students feel that the university is committed to mission-related goals. For example, the survey asks students whether the university is committed to creating an inclusive campus community.

As part of the survey process, the university collects a combination of quantitative data and qualitative answers. Researchers use the survey results as a jumping off point to further research, typically involving focus groups or analysis of other university data that may include direct indicators of learning or program success.

In addition to student surveys, AU has regularly participated in the UCLA faculty survey and the *Chronicle of Higher Education's* survey on great colleges to work for. A number of campus offices use point-of-service surveys as a way to understand and refine services. Examples of assessment resources, and their tie to the Middle States standards, are listed on the AU Middle States website. AU has assessment mechanisms to cover every standard; in most cases, the assessment resources are used for analysis that is relevant to multiple standards.

## Unit-Level Assessments

American University's assessment procedures place an emphasis on ensuring that individual units use assessments that enable them to evaluate progress toward goals and on using results to improve programs and services. In addition to making institution-wide assessments, most units develop their own assessment plans. Summaries of assessment processes are collected periodically by the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, using the template Understanding Assessment and Institutional Improvement at AU. This template,

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<sup>2</sup> The full name for the EBI survey is the ACUHO-I/EBI Resident Assessment Survey. The survey is a joint effort between the Association of College and University Housing Officers International (ACUHO-I) and EBI Benchmarking Assessments, the latter an operation of Educational Benchmarking Inc. (EBI).

available on the university's assessment website, gathers information such as unit goals, learning outcomes for students (if applicable), data or information collected on a regular basis (including how it is used), information on one-time assessments conducted in the past two to three years, examples of how assessment has been used, and contact information for the assessment point person.

Examples of unit-level assessments include the following:

- The library conducted the Libqual survey, finding that students were dissatisfied with library space. As a result, the library added a research commons space. It also conducted ethnographic interviews with students, and called design workshops, which have been used to understand student space needs. Plans for renovating library space are being finalized.
- [The International Student and Scholar Services](#) (ISSS) office solicits feedback from international students who participate in the office's orientation events, asking them if the learning outcomes of the orientation were met. ISSS used the results to change the content and presentation style for the sessions related to health insurance and wellness.
- Based upon survey feedback, the Office of Information Technology implemented procedures to standardize the procurement and distribution cycle of new desktop technology throughout campus. Additionally, OIT launched a walk-in service inside the University Library to address student technology questions and concerns, after receiving student suggestions. Most recently, survey feedback prompted an effort to simplify the end-user experience for connecting to AU's wireless infrastructure.
- The [Office of Finance and Treasurer](#) (OFT) surveys its customers every other year to gain insights into the strengths and opportunities for improvement of operations within the division. As a companion to the student Campus Climate Survey, the OFT Customer Satisfaction Survey is for faculty and staff. Survey results led to innovations such as customer service training for all staff in the finance division, expansion of online services and resources, and alignment of individual and department goals with customer needs and expectations. Increasing customer satisfaction has been incorporated into the performance management program target for every department, manager, and staff within the Finance Division.

## Sharing Assessment Results

Assessment results are shared in a number of venues. The university makes a significant amount of information available via the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment website. This includes the [Academic Data Reference Book](#) (AU's fact book), the [College Navigator](#) (a web-based database containing specific information about universities nationwide), and AU's [Common Data Set](#). Details of surveys, institutional data, and studies from special task forces are discussed and used by a number of different organizations, including the following:

- Collaborative Leadership Network (CLN)—Participants in a series of think-tank sessions to identify opportunities for improvement in AU’s budget and financial processes, identified a need to “enhance cross-divisional collaboration and decision making to achieve strategic goals and objectives.” To help meet this need, the Collaborative Leadership Network—composed of all faculty administrators and staff who report directly to members of the president’s cabinet—came together in September 2011. The group identified improving AU’s faculty-staff workplace as its first priority initiative and, after reviewing data, is formulating action steps to advance that goal.
- the [president’s council](#)—The president’s council, which regularly uses university data and survey results, is composed of members of the president’s cabinet (senior university administrators), the academic deans (academic leadership), the university librarian, and the director of athletics and recreation. The president’s council meets once a month to discuss issues of importance to the university community. A copy of the AU organizational chart is available online.
- the provost’s operational council—The provost’s operational council is made up of the associate deans and administrative direct reports to the provost, as well as others who lead efforts in administrative effectiveness. The council is one of the primary venues for reviewing survey results and other institutional data.
- directors’ meetings—Other divisions have directors’ meetings during which university data and survey results and reports are considered on a regular basis. The Office of Campus Life has retreats that are very data driven and used to orient new staff and identify division priorities.

Most opportunities to discuss and share assessment results occur within divisions and in committees that are responsible for using the data. Data at AU are readily available to decision makers. There are fewer venues to discuss assessment results across divisions and with broader audiences, such as groups of students and faculty. Assessment is so widespread that the university might also benefit from finding ways to share best practices in assessment. Currently, dissemination of best practices in assessment occurs organically, not intentionally.

### Internal Program Reviews

Academic program reviews for programs without accreditation requirements were first established at AU in 2008. All programs that do not undergo an official external accreditation review are required to participate in this review process, which includes both an internal self-study and an external evaluation. In announcing the program review process, Provost Bass said, “It is important to see the self-study as an opportunity for self-reflection and candor, and it certainly ought not to be viewed as a threat. The objective of program review is improvement, striving for excellence and improved practices.” To that end, approximately three departments (or schools) undergo program review each year, with all units cycling into review every seven years. The specific requirements of the program review are available on the provost’s website: <http://www.american.edu/provost/unit-reviews.cfm>.

Program review is data driven and focused on outcomes. As part of the review, the unit conducts a self-study to “assess how the unit is doing in fulfillment of its academic mission and objectives, how it operates organizationally, and how it promotes an inclusive and supportive environment for all of its members” ([Academic and/or Teaching Unit Review Overview September 2010](#)). The review includes benchmarking against peers. As part of the process, the review uses a wealth of assessment data, including retention and graduation rates; survey data (using the NSSE, the Campus Climate Survey, the Graduation Census, and other resources); and learning outcomes and assessment plans and reports. External reviewers assess the unit’s future directions and make recommendations for improvement. The recommendations are followed up through regular meetings with the dean of the academic unit. However, some units have commented that they did not feel that they had received a sufficiently clear statement of the outcomes of their reviews.

Program reviews have led to improvements in faculty allocations, educational offerings, and services provided. The reviews have allowed the Office of the Provost and the relevant deans to prioritize faculty lines within the units. For instance, the recent Department of Anthropology review recommended that the department seek an outside chair. A full-professor tenure-track line was allotted and a new chair has been hired. Several departments and schools were authorized following review to receive new tenure lines, at either junior or senior rank, in order to fill voids that were noted during the review process. The School of International Service review served as an important motivator for a complete revamping of the SIS curriculum. As a result of the review, SIS also reorganized its administration to have separate academic associate deans designated for undergraduate and graduate programs and implemented a new undergraduate curriculum in fall 2013.

### External Accreditation of Specific Programs

A number of programs are accredited by their respective professional associations and use the accreditation process as a way to assess their academic offerings and improve their programs. AU has had several major accreditation reviews in the past few years, including re-accreditations by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC), the American Psychological Association (APA), and the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA). Examples of the findings of outside accreditors include the following:

- **Kogod School of Business.** AACSB extended accreditation of the Kogod School of Business for another five years, as is the practice for institutions doing well in the accreditation process. The team found that the mission of KSB has been carefully and deliberately articulated in concert with the positioning of American University (2013).
- **School of Education.** NCATE found that AU’s teacher education program met all six standards for accreditation, including the standards on (1) candidate knowledge, skills,

and dispositions; (2) assessment system and unit evaluation; (3) field experiences and clinical practice; (4) diversity; (5) faculty qualifications, performance, and development; and (6) unit governance and resources. The visiting team reviewed assessment instruments and data which showed “evidence that candidates and graduates possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions identified in professional, state, and institutional standards.” Candidates, faculty, employers, and alumni interviewed expressed confidence in and satisfaction with candidates’ preparation.

- **School of Communication.** ACEJMC found the School of Communication’s mission statement to be “eloquent, well-informed, and inspiring. It readily recognizes the challenge of the rapidly changing media and communication landscape and places it in the larger context of a global, interactive, and diverse society” (2008–09).

### Using Assessment Results to Advance Institutional Effectiveness

On any given day, numerous task forces, committees, departments, and divisions are undertaking major projects designed to assess effectiveness and improve programs and services at American University. The use of assessment to effect change is ingrained in the everyday work of the institution. Many of the improvements to the university have come about as a result of effective institutional assessments. Examples of the use of assessment are integrated within this self-study. In fact, the self-study itself is designed to demonstrate the many ways that the university uses assessment. An example of one major initiative illustrates AU’s culture of assessment. It demonstrates how institutional assessment usually involves multiple constituencies, uses multiple data points, and can have a significant impact on institutional effectiveness.

#### *The Baldrige Higher Education Initiative*

In 2010, AU secured a Lumina-funded NACUBO Challenge 2010 grant to assess and improve the university’s budget and finance processes in an effort to advance strategic plan goal 9, “encourage innovation and high performance.” The grant provided resources to support the university’s application of the Baldrige-based Excellence in Higher Education (EHE) assessment framework developed by Brent Ruben, executive director of the Rutgers University Center for Organizational Development and Leadership. The objectives of AU’s Baldrige in Higher Education Initiative include the following:

- enhance institutional performance by improving the effectiveness of budget and financial managers
- improve staff and user satisfaction levels in budget and financial management areas
- enhance professional development for budget and financial managers
- explore an alternative organizational model to create a network of financial managers with central training and coordination
- maximize resources by redirecting potential long-term savings to strategic investments

- become a model within the AU community and the broader higher education community through the application of the Baldrige-based EHE approach

The focal point of the assessment process was a series of think-tank sessions held in December 2010 in which participants identified strengths and areas for improvement in AU’s budget and finance processes. Seventy-five campus leaders, managers, and student representatives attended the sessions, and the feedback they offered provided a strong foundation for the subsequent prioritization process.

The information collected during the think-tank sessions resulted in the identification of areas for improvement and creative solutions organized by EHE category. The themes evident in the 26 solutions that span all six EHE categories included communication, training and education, institutional culture, collaboration, technology, accountability, and operating efficiency. The projects that make up the project implementation plan were not limited to budget and finance processes due to the broad spectrum of ideas generated during the think-tank sessions. The project has led to a number of important improvements at the university, including the following:

- fiscal management basics—Enhancing budget and financial management training opportunities was one of the highly ranked projects resulting from the assessment and subsequent priority-ranking processes, as well as from focus groups. As a result of assessment activities, Human Resources developed a plan for a new, comprehensive budget and financial-management training program in collaboration with directors of budget and finance offices. The introductory course, Fiscal Management Basics, was launched in June 2012; more than 60 faculty administrators and staff had completed the course as of April 2013.
- workplace initiatives—A second priority project identified during the think-tank sessions aims to “enhance cross-divisional collaboration and decision making to achieve strategic goals and objectives.” The university convened the Collaborative Leadership Network, composed of staff who report directly to members of the president’s cabinet. The network has identified ways to improve AU’s faculty-staff workplace as the first initiative CLN would undertake. The selection of this goal was based in part on areas for improvement identified through AU’s Campus Climate Survey and through the *Chronicle of Higher Education’s* Great Colleges to Work Survey.

## CONCLUSIONS

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In adopting its new strategic plan in 2008, American University reaffirmed its mission. The strategic plan in turn was developed through a collaborative process involving the entire campus community in the articulation of specific objectives that are consonant with the mission and that are intended to advance the university to new levels of recognition and accomplishment, following upon a process of benchmarking to comparator and aspirational institutions.

The strategic plan marries ambitious goals of institutional distinction and increased inclusivity with pragmatic implementation steps and realistic budgetary allocations and solidifies the vision of AU as what may be called a college-centered research university. Moreover, strategic planning at AU is defined as an ongoing process in which the plan becomes a living document that evolves in response to regular, institutionalized assessments of achievements and challenges in particular areas. While some major initiatives, such as AU Project 2030, are not specifically mentioned in the formal strategic plan, they are a direct outgrowth of the plan's goals. While the mission statement may not specifically emphasize current priorities, such as research or diversity, as much as some would like, it is flexible enough to facilitate AU's growth. The university would benefit from continuing to find ways to embody the very best qualities of college-centered research universities and build upon its multidisciplinary and integrative approach to education.

Budgeting is driven by strategic plan implementation goals, and outcomes of resource allocations are assessed in an ongoing manner. The plan provides an ongoing guide to further refine where the university's resources can best be directed. Decisions about everything from new facilities to financial aid allocations to new faculty lines (and much more) are made in concert with this ongoing planning process. On the academic side, AU Project 2030 allocates faculty resources in directions that align with emerging niches of interdisciplinary inquiry in which AU expects to achieve global leadership in the foreseeable future.

Overall, the university has entered into what may be deemed a “virtuous circle” of assessment and planning, in which feedbacks and metrics from various assessments are used to inform the implementation of the strategic plan and the deployment of financial, human, and other resources. Further assessments are used to evaluate the success of such efforts and the need for refinements in the strategies and allocations adopted. Assessments are numerous, and it has sometimes been difficult to fully share results across divisions and with broad constituencies. Venues such as the town halls, websites, and the Collaborative Leadership Network have been important ways to communicate information, but even more could be done to ensure that the success of programs, models of institutional effectiveness, and the use of assessments are shared broadly.

That said, American University is acutely aware of the many ongoing challenges that it faces. AU's budget has long been highly tuition dependent, and although the university is continuing efforts to diversify revenue sources, the likelihood is that the university will remain largely tuition dependent for the foreseeable future. In some respects, AU's tuition dependency has been a strength rather than a weakness during the economic troubles of the past several years, as AU did not suffer the sharp reductions in government funding or endowment revenue that many other institutions experienced. Moreover, the university's fiscal responsibility has meant that it did not have to make any painful budget cutbacks during the economic crisis and instead has been able to move forward with its strategic plan objectives in a careful and deliberate manner. Nevertheless, the need to keep tuition increases moderate—while meeting increasing demands for academic, administrative, and support services—will constrain the pace at which AU can move forward toward its ambitious strategic goals, unless further progress can be made in leveraging other sources of revenue. The goal of reducing tuition dependency will not be achieved before the next Periodic Review Report. However, the strategic plan calls for diversifying revenue and more could be done to further that goal.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. Deepen and widen the academic culture to reflect a college-centered research university and incorporate the very best of a multidisciplinary and integrative approach that builds on the strengths of AU's liberal arts tradition.
2. Build on financial success and address the challenges of tuition dependency by diversifying revenue sources.
3. Communicate assessment results and the use of those results more broadly and share best practices in programs and assessment.

## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

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Academic Data Reference Book

<http://www.american.edu/provost/oira/Academic-Data-Reference-Book.cfm>

Academic Program Reviews

<http://www.american.edu/provost/unit-reviews.cfm>

Academic Unit Review Schedule

<http://www.american.edu/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&pageid=3122877>

American University Assessment Processes and Procedures

[http://www.american.edu/provost/assessment/upload/American\\_University\\_Assessment\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.american.edu/provost/assessment/upload/American_University_Assessment_Plan.pdf)

American University Assessment Report Template

<http://www.american.edu/provost/assessment/upload/Assessment-Report-Template-3.pdf>

American University Budget Fiscal Years 2014 and 2015

<http://www.american.edu/finance/budget/universitybudget/Budget-FY-2014-2015.cfm>

AU Common Data Set

[http://www.american.edu/provost/oira/upload/CDS\\_2012-2013-American-University\\_Final.pdf](http://www.american.edu/provost/oira/upload/CDS_2012-2013-American-University_Final.pdf)

AU Tuition and Mandatory Fees 2013–14

<http://www.american.edu/finance/studentaccounts/Tuition-and-Fees-Information.cfm>

Bond Ratings

<http://www.american.edu/finance/Bond-Ratings.cfm>

Campus Plan Executive Summary

<http://www.american.edu/finance/fas/upload/Executive-Summary.pdf>

Campus Plan Website

<http://www.american.edu/finance/fas/2011-Campus-Plan.cfm>

EagleData Website (About page)

<http://www.american.edu/oit/software/EagleData.cfm>

External Accreditation

<http://www.american.edu/about/accreditation.cfm>

Human Resources Newsletter for Performance Management Program

<http://www.american.edu/hr/newsletter/HR-Newsletter-2012-August.cfm#top>

Memorandum to Faculty from the Provost—Announcement AU2030 February 2012

<http://www.american.edu/provost/communications/February-6-2012.cfm>

Memorandum to Faculty from the Provost—AU 2030 Project Updates March 2012

<http://www.american.edu/provost/communications/March-29-2012.cfm>

Office of Information Technology (OIT) 2012–2013 Annual Report

<http://www.american.edu/oit/ExcellenceEmpoweredOnline.pdf>

President’s Announcement Related to the 2013–2015 Objectives of the Strategic Plan

<http://www.american.edu/president/announcements/archive/April-1-2013.cfm>

President’s Campus Letters

<http://www.american.edu/president/Presidents-Announcements.cfm>

President’s Council

<http://www.american.edu/president/PresCouncil.cfm>

Statement of Common Purpose

<https://www.american.edu/president/Statement-of-Common-Purpose.cfm>

Strategic Plan—*American University and the Next Decade: Leadership for a Changing World*

<http://www.american.edu/strategicplan/upload/AU-Strategic-Plan-adopted-Nov-2008.pdf>

Strategic Plan Development Timeline

<https://www.american.edu/strategicplan/Development.cfm>

University Budget Resource Center

<http://www.american.edu/finance/budget/universitybudget>

## Limited Availability to Some Members of the AU Community

Business Intelligence\_BI\_Website

[https://myau.american.edu/groups/Committee/adhoc/MSSS/Supporting%20Documents/Business%20Intelligence\\_BI\\_Web%20link.aspx](https://myau.american.edu/groups/Committee/adhoc/MSSS/Supporting%20Documents/Business%20Intelligence_BI_Web%20link.aspx)

Strategic Plan Progress Report, November 2009

[https://myau.american.edu/TS/strategicplan/Shared%20Documents/November\\_20\\_2009\\_BOT\\_Report.pdf](https://myau.american.edu/TS/strategicplan/Shared%20Documents/November_20_2009_BOT_Report.pdf)

Strategic Plan Progress Report, September 2010 (Strategic Plan Measurements Project Team)

[https://myau.american.edu/TS/strategicplan/Shared%20Documents/September\\_16\\_2010\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_Implementation.pdf](https://myau.american.edu/TS/strategicplan/Shared%20Documents/September_16_2010_Strategic_Plan_Implementation.pdf)

Strategic Plan Progress Report, September 2010 (President)

[https://myau.american.edu/TS/strategicplan/Shared%20Documents/September\\_27\\_2010\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_Update.pdf](https://myau.american.edu/TS/strategicplan/Shared%20Documents/September_27_2010_Strategic_Plan_Update.pdf)

Strategic Plan Progress Report Year 3 and 4, September 2012

[https://myau.american.edu/TS/strategicplan/Shared%20Documents/September\\_2012\\_Progress\\_Report.pdf](https://myau.american.edu/TS/strategicplan/Shared%20Documents/September_2012_Progress_Report.pdf)

# LEADERSHIP, SHARED GOVERNANCE, AND ADMINISTRATION



# Leadership, Shared Governance, and Administration

## INTRODUCTION

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This chapter examines American University's leadership, governance, and administration as these elements support and advance AU's mission while observing principles of participation, openness, and transparency.

While every university's leadership and governance structures evolve over a time, AU made substantial adjustments to leadership structures over the past decade following a purposeful analysis during the presidential transition of 2005–06. During this time, governance structures were thoroughly assessed internally; publically critiqued externally; compared with best practices nationwide; and altered to become more effective, transparent, and participatory. The results of these processes brought about a new era of fiduciary responsibility and commitment for AU's board, a stronger emphasis for university administration on collaborative strategic planning tied to biannual budgeting, and increased openness and participation opportunities for campus constituents in all areas of university governance.

The leadership of American University has gone through a steady and evolutionary transformation, both at the senior administrative (President's Cabinet) level and within the senior academic (provost) areas. The renewed focus in both leadership areas is strategic, the work is collaborative, and the achievements are held to high standards of accountability.

American University takes pride in a strong leadership and governance team that is dedicated to fully realizing the university's stated mission. This chapter examines and assesses the extent to which the university's leadership, governance structure (standard 4), and administrative organization (standard 5) support and advance AU's mission. This chapter also high-

lights the ways in which AU's leaders exemplify within their own working environment the qualities that they expect from students, faculty, and staff. It highlights best practices associated with integrity (standard 6).

The previous chapter described how AU had defined its mission and future direction, demonstrating that the university has processes and resources in place to realize its goals. Success depends on having a team of administrators, faculty, staff, and governing bodies work together to advance the university's goals. By examining standards 4 and 5 together, this chapter will examine how well the university's leadership meets its goals.

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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### Structure, Size, and Composition

The board appoints the president, who serves as the chief executive officer and has primary responsibility for leading the university and overseeing the administration. [The board](#) currently consists of 30 members (with a minimum of 25 required). Governance changes made in 2006 recommended that the preferred size of the board not exceed 40 and that “at this time, the optimal size of the board is not less than 30 nor more than 35 trustees.”

According to the bylaws, trustees, other than ex officio members, are divided into three classes with each appointed for three-year terms. Each May, one class is up for review by the board, and individual trustees are reappointed, not reappointed, or voluntarily leave board service.

Given AU's historic ties to the Methodist Church at its founding, the general secretary of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of the United Methodist Church holds an ex officio seat on the board, as does the bishop of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church.

In 2006, the AU Board approved the inclusion of two faculty trustees and one student trustee (all nonvoting), believing that the “addition of faculty and student perspectives in board deliberation can enrich analysis of issues and bring useful insights on the university's condition into the board room.” The two faculty trustees are nominated by the Trusteeship Committee, after they receive recommendations from the Faculty Senate; the student trustee is nominated by the Trusteeship Committee, after receiving recommendations from the three principal student government organizations (representing undergraduate, graduate, and law students). In 2013, the board voted to add a new position of student trustee-elect to serve as a “shadow trustee” for the year preceding his or her term to more effectively foster full student participation and assist with a smoother annual transition for the student trustee.

Currently, 20 of the 30 trustees are alumni of American University, nine are female, and five are members of U.S. minority groups. A statement and description of board commitments and responsibilities are outlined in a board book produced for each quarterly meeting, as are desirable selection criteria.

The board meets quarterly (September, November, February, and May) with the September meeting organized as a topic-driven retreat.

The work of the board is conducted by 12 committees that reflect primary university business endeavors: executive, compensation, academic affairs, alumni affairs and development, athletics, audit, campus life, communication, finance and investment, real estate, trusteeship, and WAMU. Each committee operates under an approved charter, included in each board book, which outlines each committee's purpose, organization, roles and responsibilities, committee administrators, and campus representatives for each committee.

### **Governance Reform, 2006**

Following the presidential transition of 2005–06, American University's Board of Trustees undertook a thorough examination of its fiduciary responsibilities and practices. This examination was precise and public, conducted with considerable campus community involvement. The board created a special committee on governance on October 10, 2005, and charged it with conducting a self-critical review and identifying fiduciary best practices both for AU trustees individually and for the board as a whole. The committee met formally 18 times from December 2005 through May 2006, in person and via conference call. Dozens of meetings and other communications were conducted with an array of university constituencies.

The committee conducted a comprehensive review of pertinent literature and comparative data on university governance at institutions across the nation. Members reviewed board policies, bylaws, board practices, committee structures, campus involvement, trustee qualifications, trustee selection process, and other facets of responsible governance. Assisting the university in its self-assessment were external consulting experts, including Richard "Tom" Ingram, former president of the Association of Governing Boards (AGB), and Martin Michaelson, a nonprofit governance expert from the law firm Hogan & Hartson.

"Report and Recommendations of the Special Committee on Governance" was presented, discussed, and unanimously accepted by the Board of Trustees on May 19, 2006. A special board meeting was held on June 9, 2006, to formally enact policy revisions to the bylaws.

**AGB President Emeritus Tom Ingram predicted that AU's governance committees report and recommendations (adopted):**

"... will be studied intensely by the trustees and governing boards everywhere for many years to come. These governance reforms go beyond what was probably necessary to begin the healing process at the university and to restore trust and genuine communication among all who care deeply about its future. Although not all of the reforms will fit all universities, most of them will serve as solid benchmark policies and practices."



These changes included, among a number of additions, adoption of a university-wide whistleblower policy and the adoption of a policy on trustee conflicts of interest.

The full report and changes are publicly posted on the AU Board of Trustees website. The adopted recommendations included matters such as the following, listed by topic:

- **Trustees.** Expectations for performance; mechanisms for assessment; orientation of new members; conflict of interest policy
- **Board.** Composition; leadership; size; staffing; diversity; committee functions and charters; interaction with the president; interaction with constituencies; meeting frequency
- **President.** Employment contract and compensation; interaction with and role on board; expenditure review; performance review

This was the most comprehensive review of governance in the history of American University and had as its goal greater transparency and stronger communications with faculty, students, alumni, and all AU constituencies. A key addition was that of the three new (nonvoting) trustees—two faculty members and a current student member.

While 85 percent of independent colleges and universities do not include faculty and students on their boards of trustees, the AU board endorsed this concept as appropriate for American University. In addition to adopting the formal report and recommendations in 2006, the board's practice in the years that have followed has indicated vigorous follow-through. The board embarked in 2006 on a program of dedicated openness and accessibility, with greater campus representation in board and committee discussions and with improved communications and stronger trustee presence on campus. The board authorized the creation of a governance website so that AU constituencies and the public were able to track the progress on governance reforms, and the board's own website was reinvigorated. The board chairman now periodically communicates with campus on issues or after board meetings. At least twice yearly, the chair and university president host a campus forum to provide public access to key decision makers in a town hall meeting format.

## Assessment

As previously mentioned, the Board of Trustees put in place new provisions for assessing itself and for assessing individual trustees. At the individual level, trustees now engage in annual self-assessment in a process overseen by the Trusteeship Committee.

In addition to online assessment, the board also conducts comprehensive reviews of its effectiveness. As a self-evaluation, the AU Board of Trustees devoted its September 2012 meeting and retreat to reexamine the changes implemented in 2006 and to take a fresh look at both itself and its ongoing performance as an effective governing board. Prior to the meeting, the board conducted a self-assessment survey (of 50 questions) as a constructive critique of performance, which was reviewed at the retreat. The stated objectives for the

retreat were to review AU governance progress since 2006, consider board accountability and how to create a high performing board, review implications from results of the board performance assessment, and develop a governance action plan.

Rick Legon, AGB president, was an invited guest and discussion facilitator for the retreat. He reviewed with the board the results of a self-assessment survey completed a few weeks before the retreat. Following this presentation, the trustees and cabinet members divided into small groups to discuss five governance topics and report back to the whole group. Topics included the effectiveness of the board structure, leveraging trustee engagement, making committee meetings more effective, strengthening the board's fundraising capacity, and reviewing the role of the Executive Committee. The groups made specific observations and recommendations on how to further improve board performance. Among the recommendations for improvement were the following, listed here by topic:

### **Structure**

- Review the mission statement of all Board of Trustees committees to ensure they are consistent with institutional needs and board interest.
- Work with committee chairs to increase student representation and attendance at committee meetings.

### **Trustee Engagement**

- Develop a more robust process of trustee evaluation that includes more rigorous criteria for assessment of trustee engagement and performance.
- Promote board engagement in activities in the Washington, D.C., area and within the university community.

### **Committee Meetings**

- Focus committee meetings more on strategic issues and less on routine and operational issues.
- Use ad hoc committees to discuss current issues which may sunset over time.
- Use new electronic tools to increase meeting effectiveness.

### **Role of the Executive Committee**

- Promote greater focus on the university's strategic issues when choosing agenda items for board meetings.

### **Moving to a Higher Level of Board Performance**

- Continue to rotate committee membership to give trustees more exposure to the various areas of the university.

Implementation of these recommendations is monitored on an ongoing basis. In discussions of the self-study, those commenting on the report felt that finding ways to assist and support the trustees in their role as donors and enablers of potential donors is particularly important, given the university's tuition dependence (discussed in the previous chapter), the increasing needs of AU's student population (discussed in chapter 6) and other important initiatives.

### Participatory Governance

The board is committed to fostering and enhancing its outreach and interaction opportunities with campus constituencies, and trustees are regularly informed of issues, challenges, and campus opinion through a variety of means.

In addition to having a student and faculty trustees who participate fully in board meetings, constituents also attending include the student leadership (undergraduate Student Government Association president, Graduate Leadership Council president, and Student Bar Association president); faculty (Faculty Senate chair); staff (Staff Council chair); and alumni (Alumni Council president).

Also attending and participating are the President's Cabinet and university administrative leadership team, which includes the provost, chief financial officer and vice president and treasurer, vice president of communication, vice president and university counsel, vice president of development and alumni affairs, vice president of campus life, director of athletics and recreation, and chief of staff.

Each of the aforementioned representatives submits a written report that is part of the board book, and each also gives an oral report in the open session. The trustees can ask questions of all campus representatives and the administrative leadership team.

The administrative leadership team (provost, vice presidents, director of athletics and recreation, and chief of staff) works closely with the board committee leadership in organizing committee business, identifying issues and compiling materials for committee discussion, and assisting the trustees in reporting out from committee as part of the open session.

### Communication and Interaction with Campus Constituents

While the president is the key link between the board and administration and other constituent groups, the 2006 governance report emphasized that the board must be aware of and sensitive to the concerns of constituent groups and ensure these groups regard the board as accountable and engaged—and not merely as an executive authority. To achieve this, a number of efforts have been incorporated into normal practice:

- **Committees.** In addition to having faculty and student trustees, participation by university constituencies on board committees is very important. Committees with constituent representation now include academic affairs, audit, alumni affairs and development, campus life, finance and investment, trusteeship, and athletics.

- **Forums.** Two open forums are held each year—once in fall semester and once in spring semester—for the entire campus to participate in an open discussion and to ask questions of board members and the university leadership. The forums are unscripted and anything of interest or concern can get asked of trustees and reviewed in open public discussion. A fall 2013 forum provided an opportunity for students and others to discuss divestment in fossil fuels.
- **Website.** The board has a publicly accessible website that identifies the trustees and lists committee assignments, bylaws, policies, meeting dates, trustee communications, and contact information.
- **Letters from and to the Chair.** The board chair periodically communicates with campus (as a whole) on issues of campus-wide importance. On occasion, individuals or interest groups contact the board chair via letter or email, and responses are delivered in turn.
- **Informal Gatherings.** At least one of the quarterly board meetings is preceded by a breakfast to enable trustees to mingle with student leaders in an informal setting. As needed or helpful, other meetings and briefings can be held to address specific issues of campus interest, such as the budget forum held with students, staff, and faculty prior to the February 2013 trustee meeting to approve the budget. The board dinner held the night prior to the full meeting includes the university senior administrative team (cabinet and athletics director) and the senior academic team (deans, librarian, and senior associate provost).
- **Mailings from Campus.** As an ongoing means of keeping trustees informed, campus periodicals are mailed weekly to the trustees from the president’s office.

## OTHER GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

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In addition to the Board of Trustees, other governance structures exist to ensure that faculty, staff, and students have methods of participating in decisions that impact the life of the institution.

### Faculty Senate

The AU Senate has 24 voting senators. There is a senate chair and the past chair. Colleges are represented as follows: Four members from the College of Arts and Sciences and one each from the Kogod School of Business, the School of Communication, the School of International Service, the School of Public Affairs, the School of Professional and Extended Studies, the Washington College of Law, and the University Library. All are elected by secret ballot within each unit. In addition, full-time faculty will elect five full-time at-large faculty members by secret ballot; at least two must be tenure-line faculty and at least one must be a term faculty member (eligible term faculty must have a contract that will accommodate a

two-year term). The university faculty shall elect, annually, in the spring, approximately one-half of the faculty membership of the senate for terms of two years. The provost, as the chief academic officer, is the official leader of the faculty and an ex officio member of the senate but does not vote. He or she has all other privileges of senate membership. The dean of academic affairs will serve as an ex officio member of the senate but does not vote. He or she has all other privileges of senate membership.

Since the arrival of Provost Scott Bass, the university senate and academic leadership have worked collaboratively to:

- **Overhaul of the Faculty Manual.** Through the provost's urging, a Faculty Manual Working Group was elected by a vote of the Faculty Senate in 2008. This group worked for 18 months to create language for the manual that was approved by the senate after many meetings of line-by-line examination and debate. After senate approval, the revised manual received an 82 percent campus-wide faculty vote of approval (cited by the Chronicle of Higher Education, June 17, 2011, p. A15). This manual has become an exemplar for other universities.
- **Revise the Academic Regulations.** Along with changes to the faculty manual, the senate initiated extensive revisions to the existing academic regulations both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The changes initiated by the provost reflected his philosophy of empowering faculty and moving decision making to the appropriate level. These groups worked for 18 months to rewrite the academic regulations. The undergraduate regulations were completed and approved by the senate in the spring of 2011, with the graduate regulations being approved by a vote of the senate in April 2012.
- **Establish Senate-Deans Roundtable Discussions.** To help open channels of communication between deans and faculty, the provost brings the deans of the seven colleges, the dean of academic affairs, and the librarian together with the Senate Executive Committee for a closed door, roundtable discussion three times each semester. The senate chair and the provost choose the topic for discussion prior to these meetings. The closed-door nature of this forum provides a safe venue for contentious topics to be aired in a frank and honest atmosphere.
- **Increase Interaction Between Faculty and the Board of Trustees.** The senate invites members of the board to key events, such as the faculty recognition dinner and the faculty retreat. By increasing the board's visibility to the faculty, board members have gained increased knowledge of the real issues that faculty face.
- **Articulate Tenure and Promotion Guidelines.** To facilitate a culture of transparency in the tenure-and-promotion process, the provost asked every department in the university to discuss and formulate written guidelines for tenure and promotion of their faculty. Because of this initiative, the tenure-and-promotion policies of each department are clear, consistent, and impartial throughout the university.

- **Acknowledge Contingent (Term) Faculty.** Recognizing term faculty as an essential cohort within the AU faculty, the Faculty Senate set new policies for term faculty as part of its revision of the faculty manual. As a result of these changes, one senate seat (of 24), can now only be held by term faculty, and term faculty can seek other seats that were once unavailable to them. The Faculty Senate formed an ad hoc Committee on Term Faculty University Policies in spring 2011. After receiving the report from the committee, the senate elected a senate term faculty working group to address recommendations involving issues of reappointment of term faculty and grievance procedures. The senate also changed its policies to allow term faculty to hold executive senate positions. In 2013, the senate elected a term faculty member (Lacey Wootton) as vice chair of the senate. She will ascend to chair of the senate in 2014 and will become an AU faculty trustee for a two-year term.

The chair of the Faculty Senate attends the open session of the Board of Trustees meetings and provides both a verbal and written report at each meeting.

(<http://www.american.edu/facultysenate/index.cfm>.)

### Staff Council

The Staff Council's mission is to serve the interests and needs of the American University staff pertaining to their daily activities and work conditions as they strive to support the university's goal of quality education. Toward this effort, the Staff Council promotes understanding and cooperation by facilitating communication among campus constituencies and by serving as an advocate for staff issues which affect them. In an effort to enhance the quality of the American University work environment, the Staff Council provides leadership and support to work together with all members of the university to enrich community spirit.

(<http://www.american.edu/staffcouncil/Index.cfm>)

The Staff Council chair attends the open session of the Board of Trustees meetings and provides both a verbal and written report at each meeting.

### Student Governance

Student governance organizations are strong advocates for students. The AU student body is known as one of the most politically active in the country. Thus, Student Government (SG) involves wide and active participation from its constituents. A 2012 news article points out that the groups empower students in many ways. (<http://www.american.edu/ocl/news/SG-and-GLC-Leaders-Follow-Student-Voice.cfm>)

There are three major student government organizations designed to provide students with an opportunity to be involved in university decision making. The Student Government, an undergraduate organization of officials elected by the student body, serves students by acting as an advocate for students and organizing programming. Issues that the SG president plans to address in the 2013–14 academic year include streamlining financial aid appeal decisions, creating an association of AU parents, developing a student bill of rights, diversifying dining

options, and reviewing best practices in student governance. One issue on its agenda, related to divestment in fossil fuels, was addressed by the Board of Trustees in May 2013.

(<http://www.american.edu/trustees/upload/051713.pdf>)

The Student Bar Association regulates student organizations and programs, distributes funds to organizations, and addresses concerns of the law school student body.

(<http://www.wcl.american.edu/sba/>) The Graduate Leadership Council brings together the leaders of the five graduate student councils at AU to advocate for student concerns, provides networking and social events, and discusses issues that are relevant to the graduate population. (<http://www.american.edu/provost/grad/glc.cfm>) The head of each student organization—Student Government, Student Bar Association, and Graduate Leadership Council—attends the open session of the Board of Trustees meetings and provides both a verbal and written report at each meeting.

While there are many opportunities for students to use governance channels to voice their opinion about issues, some students prefer to use other methods, such as protests, as a way to influence policy. This is not surprising, since AU has one of the most politically active student bodies in the country. The key is to continue to ensure that students have a voice in decision-making and to encourage them to participate in shared governance.

## UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION

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### Structure, Size, and Composition

The president is appointed by the Board of Trustees and works closely with a seven-member cabinet as his senior team. The current cabinet officers (identified below) include the provost, chief financial officer and vice president of finance, vice president of development and alumni affairs, vice president of campus life, vice president of communication, vice president and general counsel, and chief of staff and secretary to the Board of Trustees. The seven-member cabinet currently includes three females and one domestic minority.

Reporting to the provost is a senior vice provost, four vice provosts, eight deans, and university librarian, described later in this chapter. Of these 14 senior academic officials, 12 are new to their positions in the last five years and three are in newly created positions.

Overall, the current structures reflect many changes made since the last self-study. (See the flow chart that shows the administration's structure.)

## President and Current Leadership

The senior administrative and academic leadership teams have the background and qualifications necessary to advance the university's mission:

- **President.** [Cornelius M. Kerwin](#) became AU's 14th president in September 2007, after serving as interim president from 2005 to 2007. He has deep knowledge of AU based on his long association in several different capacities. He earned his BA from AU; an MA from the University of Rhode Island; and his doctorate in political science from Johns Hopkins University. Kerwin returned to AU in 1975 as a faculty member; he subsequently served as dean of the School of Public Affairs, provost, and interim president. Currently, he is a member of the Board of Directors of the American Council on Education (ACE), the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU), and the Greater Washington Board of Trade. He is chair of the Council of Presidents for the Patriot League athletic conference and of the Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan Area.
- **Provost.** [Scott A. Bass](#) became American University's provost in 2008. As chief academic officer, Bass provides leadership for AU's seven schools and colleges, the University Library, professional development, enrollment management, and other academic affairs units. He was formerly vice president for research and dean of the Graduate School at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), where he oversaw a more than doubling of external grants and contracts and a tripling of federal research and development funding. He also held an academic appointment as a distinguished professor of sociology and public policy. Prior to that, Bass served at the University of Massachusetts Boston in a number of positions, including professor in the College of Public and Community Service, director of the Gerontology Institute, and head of the Gerontology Center. A nationally known gerontologist, Bass has written or edited eight books and 45 articles, earned a Fulbright Research Scholarship to Japan, and is a fellow of the Gerontological Society of America. He earned a combined doctorate in psychology and education from the University of Michigan, where he also earned an MA in clinical psychology and a BA in psychology.
- **Chief Financial Officer, Vice President and Treasurer.** [Donald L. Myers](#) was named CFO, vice president and treasurer of American University in 1982. He oversaw the overall financial and investment management of the university, and his executive responsibilities included controller and treasury operations, student accounts, budget and payroll, capital planning and development, facilities administration, facilities planning and development, facilities operations, auxiliary services, public safety, risk management and transportation services, human resources, the Child Development Center, and information technology. He received a BS and BA in accounting and economics from Shepherd College in 1968 and an MBA in finance from American University in 1978. He completed the International Senior Managers Program of the Harvard Business School's Advanced Management Program in 1997. In July 2013, the *Washington Business Journal* named him CFO of the Year and gave him a lifetime



achievement award for his accomplishments in building the financial health of the university as well as developing its facilities to meet academic needs.

(<http://www.bizjournals.com/washington/print-edition/2013/07/19/cfo-of-the-year-2013-lifetime.html>) Sadly, Don Myers' extraordinary career at AU, which lasted four decades, ended with his untimely passing on January 6, 2014, after a long struggle with cancer. He is currently succeeded by Doug Kudravetz, interim CFO, vice president and treasurer.

- **Vice President of Campus Life.** [Gail Short Hanson](#) has been AU's vice president of campus life since 1997. She provides senior executive leadership for 13 departments that support student learning and development and currently represents AU on the Policy Committee of the Patriot League athletic conference. She is a past president of the National Association for Women in Education (NAWE) and recipient of the association's awards for educational leadership and distinguished service. She was named Pillar of the Profession by the NASPA Foundation, the professional association of student affairs administrators in higher education, in 2011, and also has served on the editorial board of the *NASPA Journal About Women in Higher Education*. She earned her BA from the University of Wisconsin and holds an EdM, MPhil, and PhD in sociology from George Washington University.
- **Vice President and General Counsel.** [Mary Kennard](#) has been AU's vice president and general counsel since 1995. Kennard was the 2008-2009 president of the National Association of College and University Attorneys (NACUA), which has more than 3,000 attorney members nationally. She earned her undergraduate degree in applied science from Boston University, a JD from Temple University's Beasley School of Law, and an LL.M. in international and comparative law from the George Washington University National Law Center.
- **Vice President of Development and Alumni Relations.** [Thomas J. Minar](#) has been AU's vice president of development and alumni relations since October 2008. He oversees a staff of 40, comprising AU's central school and college development staff, alumni programs, annual giving, development communications, information services, planned giving, university-wide initiatives, and research and stewardship divisions. He earned a BA from Pomona College, an MMgt from Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, and a PhD in political science from Northwestern University.
- **Vice President of Communication.** [Teresa Flannery](#) became AU's first vice president of communication in 2011; she came to AU as executive director of communications and marketing in 2008. Her responsibilities include management of publications, media and public relations, web communications, and digital media. Flannery holds a BA in English and an MA and a PhD in college student personnel administration, all from the University of Maryland.
- **Chief of Staff.** [David E. Taylor](#) became chief of staff to American University's president in 2000, having served as special assistant since 1995. Taylor is responsible for

presidential communications, issues resolution, community outreach, and other duties on behalf of the president. He oversees special events and WAMU 88.5 and is the president's liaison to on- and off-campus groups and constituencies. He earned a BA in journalism from the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill and an MA in journalism from the University of Georgia.

Also reporting directly to the president is director of athletics and recreation [William Walker](#). He was formerly deputy director of athletics at the United States Air Force Academy, where he was also appointed by President Bush as the first Permanent Professor of Athletics and Physical Education (a position created by Congress) in 2001. He received a BS from the United States Air Force Academy, an MA from California State University and a doctorate in physical education and sports administration at the University of Northern Colorado.

### **Provost, Academic Affairs and Current Leadership**

As the chief academic officer, the provost has organized his area to raise the academic profile of American University and to emphasize academic primacy and faculty involvement in institutional decision making. Reporting to the provost is a senior vice provost, four vice provosts, eight deans, and the university librarian, most of whom serve as part of the President's Council. The [organizational chart](#) shows the relationship to the provost and the current areas of responsibility under each dean or vice provost.

To support the faculty and enhance the academic enterprise, the provost has strengthened his leadership team and more clearly defined their mission:

- **Washington College of Law.** [Claudio Grossman](#) has been dean of the American University Washington College of Law since 1995 and is the Raymond Geraldson Scholar for International and Humanitarian Law. He also serves as chair of the United Nations Committee Against Torture. Grossman received his Licenciado en Ciencias Jurídicas y Sociales degree from the University of Chile in 1971 and a doctorate in de Rechtsgeleerdheid (doctor of the science of law) from the University of Amsterdam in 1980.
- **College of Arts and Sciences.** [Peter Starr](#) joined American University as dean in July 2009. Previously, he was a professor of French and comparative literature at the University of Southern California where he served as interim dean of USC's College of Letters, Arts, and Science. Dean Starr received his AB from Stanford University and his MA and PhD from the Johns Hopkins University.
- **Kogod School of Business.** [Michael Ginzberg](#) became dean in July 2011. Previously, he served as dean of the Sy Syms School of Business at Yeshiva University. Dean Ginzberg earned his PhD and BS at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and his MBA from Iona College.
- **School of Public Affairs.** [Barbara Romzek](#) became dean in 2012. Previously, she held various academic leadership positions at the University of Kansas, including department

chair, associate dean for social and behavioral sciences, interim dean of arts and sciences, and interim senior vice provost. She received her BA from Oakland University, her MA from Western Michigan University, and her PhD from the University of Texas.

- **School of International Service.** [James Goldgeier](#) became dean in 2012. Previously, he was a professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University. He received his AB from Harvard University and his MA and PhD in political science from the University of California–Berkeley.
- **School of Communication.** [Jeffrey Rutenbeck](#) became dean in July 2012. He was the founding dean of the Division of Communication and Creative Media at Champlain College in Burlington, Vermont. He received his BA from Colorado College, his MA from the University of Missouri–Columbia, and his PhD in communication from the University of Washington.
- **School of Professional and Extended Studies.** [Carola Weil](#) was named the inaugural dean of this newly established school in 2012. Previously Weil held multiple appointments with the University of Southern California (USC) Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. She holds an AB in history from Bryn Mawr College, and an MA in public management from University of Maryland–College Park, where she also earned her PhD in political science.
- **University Librarian.** [Nancy Davenport](#) became University Librarian in 2012. She held several leadership roles in the Library of Congress from 1971 to 2004, where she served in various capacities in the Congressional Research Service and in Rare Books and Special Collections and as director of acquisitions. Davenport has a BA in political science and economics from West Virginia University. Her MA in library science is from the University of Pittsburgh.

The team of vice provosts include:

- **Senior Vice Provost and Dean of Academic Affairs.** [Phyllis Peres](#) is senior vice provost and dean of academic affairs. She oversees faculty hiring, reappointment, and retirement processes; interviews every finalist for tenure line positions; is the Title IX officer for faculty; is responsible for new faculty orientation; oversees the junior faculty teaching release program; and provides support for international conference presentations and short-term international research. The Career Center and Study Abroad report to her. She earned her BA in English from the City University of New York (Brooklyn College), MA in comparative literature from the University of Iowa, and PhD in Spanish and Portuguese from the University of Minnesota.
- **Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies.** [Lyn Stallings](#) is vice provost for undergraduate studies and an associate professor in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics at American University. She served as chair of the Faculty Senate in 2009 and as past chair in 2010. She received her PhD from the University of Southern Mississippi.

- **Vice Provost for Research and Dean of Graduate Studies.** [Jonathan Tubman](#) is vice provost for research and dean of graduate studies. He is a professor of psychology in the College of Arts and Sciences. He works with departments and the schools and colleges to develop new graduate programs and to ensure excellence in graduate education at AU. He also works with students, faculty, centers, institutes, and external research partners to promote a culture of discovery, critical inquiry, and creative activity on campus. The Office of Sponsored Programs reports to him. Tubman received his MS and PhD in human development and family studies from Penn State University.
- **Vice Provost for Academic Administration.** [Violetta Ettle](#) oversees financial and administrative activities for the provost and is his liaison on issues regarding information technology, facilities planning, risk management, and human resources. She supervises the Office of the Registrar and AU Central (One Stop Student Service Center) and administers the Online Learning Program and Summer Sessions. She works with the deans and unit heads on program development matters, contracts, process improvements and organizational change management. She holds a BS in accounting from the Polytechnic University of the Philippines and an MBA in finance from American University.
- **Vice Provost for Undergraduate Enrollment.** [Sharon Alston](#) oversees the recruitment, admission, and enrollment of first-year and transfer students to American University, as well as providing financial support for AU students. She oversees the offices of admissions, administration and fiscal affairs, enrollment marketing (including the Admissions Welcome Center), financial aid, and systems. Alston earned a BA in psychology from Franklin and Marshall; an EdM in urban education from Temple University; and a PhD in education policy, planning, and administration from the University of Maryland.

### *Changes—Tied to Mission and Strategic Priorities*

Since his arrival in 2008, Provost Bass has structured academic affairs to support the university’s mission, strategic plan, and the pursuit of AU as a “college centered research university.” This concept blends the best of a research university and that of a small liberal arts college, emphasizing the importance of liberal arts as a central foundation for the educated citizen; the creation of knowledge and contribution to truth, art, and the creative spirit at its core; and an unshakable commitment to the integration of teaching and scholarly activity. AU students and faculty are the center of this focus.

In this pursuit, AU has done exceedingly well in its strategic planning and investment in the faculty. This has been demonstrated with outstanding new hires with competitive packages, an enhanced infrastructure of support, higher academic standards with greater refinement of expectations for tenure and promotion, enhanced support for research and scholarship, and enhanced support for outstanding instruction.

There has been a concerted effort in the provost's area to delegate the decision-making authority to the appropriate level and to clarify or create policies and procedures. The faculty manual was updated and revised to make it a contemporary document. Also updated were bylaws for the academic units, standards for tenure and promotion, and the effort to reengage faculty in appropriate areas for involvement in running the university.

In collaboration with the faculty and working with the Faculty Senate, the provost has built a solid foundation and hired a leadership team to support this effort. AU has updated its faculty policies and procedures, improved faculty hiring, benchmarked competitive programs with others, and clarified AU's academic mission and purpose in an effort to provide intellectual leadership and creative energy. The result has been new collaborative alliances forming among faculty while garnering prestigious awards and national recognition. The objective is to have a talented and confident faculty who feel supported and attract more of the same in a continuing cycle, further enhancing the university and its stature.

The Office of Sponsored Programs was restructured, a new director appointed, and an electronic proposal submission process implemented. Compliance was strengthened with the creation of a compliance council to improve communication between campus compliance bodies, and the Institutional Bio-Safety Commission was established.

A number of student-serving entities also were upgraded or created. AU Central was created as an interface with the registrar, financial aid, and accounts payable to streamline these intertwined processes that previously existed independently. To provide stronger focus, the vice provost for undergraduate studies and the vice provost for graduate studies and research were created from responsibility areas previously overseen by one individual—the dean of academic affairs.

An initiative to better coordinate graduate student recruitment was launched for efficiencies and effectiveness among the schools and colleges. A new school was created—the School of Professional and Extended Studies (SPEX)—to better coordinate these academic programs, certificates, and education opportunities and to better reach the professional and continuing education communities. SPEX includes the Washington Semester Program, the Mentorship Program, and a host of university and training initiatives.

## ASSESSMENT

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### President

In 2006 as part of its comprehensive governance report, the board put in place new procedures for the president. This included guidance on board and president interaction, the role of the president as a trustee, presidential compensation, and role of the full board and Executive Committee in evaluating the president's performance.

Assessment of presidential performance is a core responsibility of the board, which has approval authority over the appointment, reappointment, and compensation of the president (which is linked to performance). The Executive Committee holds responsibility for presidential performance and its findings are subject to board review.

Compensation recommendations come from the Compensation Subcommittee (a subcommittee of the Executive Committee). This subcommittee develops specific procedures to assess the president, which is submitted to the Executive Committee for comment and further development as needed, and then shared with the full board.

The president's performance is assessed periodically, with interim reviews conducted annually (as part of the compensation review) or as specified in the president's contract. Assessments of the president's performance include structured input from university senior management, including the vice presidents, deans, faculty, staff, alumni, and students, and are based largely on progress toward fulfilling strategic plan goals. Input from trustees is sought for these assessments.

The most recent periodic and comprehensive review of the president was conducted in 2010. Kenneth A. Shaw, former president of the University of Wisconsin system and former chancellor of Syracuse University, facilitated this process, which included interviews with more than 50 faculty, staff, student, and external stakeholders. The results of this review were communicated to the entire campus community in a memorandum from AU Board Vice Chair Jeffrey A. Sine on November 30, 2010.

(<http://www.american.edu/trustees/upload/113010.pdf>) Sine summarized the outcome of the review as follows:

Since receipt of the report, its contents have been discussed with the full board. Conversations with the president were constructive and straightforward. While specific details of the report will remain confidential, we want you to know that we are very pleased with the president's

#### **The Conclusion of the Shaw Report:**

“. . . will be studied intensely by the trustees and governing boards everywhere for many years to come. These governance reforms go beyond what was probably necessary to begin the healing process at the university and to restore trust and genuine communication among all who care deeply about its future. Although not all of the reforms will fit all universities, most of them will serve as solid benchmark policies and practices.”

performance as well as the campus community's active participation in this critical aspect of AU's governance process.

### **Provost, Vice Presidents**

The provost and vice presidents are reviewed annually by the president. In consultation with each, the president develops and proposes a set of annual goals for the provost and each vice president. Each, in turn, uses these goals as the basis for charting their executive objectives for the coming year, and at the end of the year, submits a self-assessment of objectives sought, goals achieved, and any areas that fell short or need improvement. The president prepares an independent assessment of the provost and vice presidents, and all assessments are forwarded to the board for their evaluation and to factor in regarding compensation and salary adjustments.

### **Selecting, Training, Supporting, and Evaluating the Leadership**

Searches to fill leadership positions are conducted in an open, inclusive, consultative way:

**President.** Selection of the president, the President's Cabinet, and deans is through a formal search process. President Kerwin was appointed by the board after recommendations from a 15-member search committee representing all of the major constituencies and consisting of trustees, a dean, faculty, staff, alumni, and students. Some committee members (for example, three faculty) were chosen by vote of the constituency from which the search committee members were selected. An executive search firm (Edward W. Kelley & Partners) was hired to assist with this national search. Open forums were held during the search to solicit community feedback. Finalists were interviewed by select campus constituents, including faculty, students, staff, alumni, and trustees.

**Cabinet.** Recent cabinet hires (for the past five years) were for the provost, executive director (now vice president) of communication, and vice president of development and alumni affairs.

The hiring of the provost (2008) is an example of the selection process for a senior hire or cabinet member. Search committee members included a dean, faculty, and staff. Three of the faculty members were elected by the faculty. The university hired an executive search firm to assist with the search and advertised the position nationally. Open forums were held to solicit input from the community. Finalists were interviewed on campus and these interviews included a question-and-answer period open to anyone in the community. The final decision was made by President Kerwin, who received a report from the search committee, as well as input from the trustees.

**Deans.** Since the Periodic Review Report (PRR) to Middle States, the Faculty Senate has passed new regulations to govern senior administrative hires. One example of these Faculty Senate regulations in action is the recent search for a new dean of the School of Communication. This search committee included faculty, students, staff, and a dean.

Isaacson Miller was hired to assist with this search and the position was advertised nationally. Finalists were interviewed on campus, and the appointment was made by the provost after hearing the recommendations of the search committee which, in turn, had received feedback from the campus community.

## STAFF

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The strategic goal “encourage innovation and high performance” provides a strong focus on administrative staff development objectives with the stated intent to build a culture of innovation. It also promises that AU will reward high performance and provide opportunities for professional development and advancement and will train, inform, and empower its staff, faculty, and administrators to make those decisions for which they are best qualified. The goal calls on the administration to do this in an atmosphere of campus diversity and collegiality and to involve staff in shared governance and participatory opportunities. As an indication of AU’s support of staff, even during the recent national economic malaise, AU did not face staff reductions in force and continued to establish a merit pool for staff salary increases.

AU has made tremendous progress in recent years in developing staff in ways that help AU fulfill its mission. It has developed training, improved the Performance Management Program PMP process and enhanced career opportunities.

### Development and Training

Within Human Resources, the Workplace Learning and Development (WLD) team oversees learning and development, organization development, and performance management for 1,600 staff members. Oversight for faculty development and performance is provided by the Office of the Provost. (<http://www.american.edu/training/index.cfm>)

In January 2010 a position of chief learning director for staff was added to provide direction and oversight of innovation, professional development, and performance management improvements. The team seeks to develop a dynamic learning community for staff that encourages high performance by providing training programs that build staff competency, developing customized interventions (that is, training, facilitation, coaching, design, problem solving, etc.) to increase departmental effectiveness, and managing a people development framework for clarifying, communicating, monitoring, and rewarding high performance.

Beginning in 2010, the team implemented a suite of 17 managerial courses and six certificates to support manager development. Participation in the managerial courses increased by more than 100 percent from AY2008–09 to AY2013–14 (to date). Some 3,170 course modules have been delivered to managers since the new courses were introduced. These include training that was required of each manager when the university revamped its



performance management program during AY2012-13. Nearly 280 managers have received certificates since the program's inception.

Similar training for nonmanagerial staff increased by more than 100 percent from AY2008–09 and AY2011–12. There are additional courses and programs to ensure compliance with policies and university standards of behavior. These are offered several times during the year and are required for all staff.

Starting in January 2013, a one-day overview course, Financial Management Basics, was included in required courses for all new managers. This provides new managers with an understanding of the financial process at AU, including accounting, accounts payable, procurement and contracts, IT financial reporting, and the budget process.

Training is also available from other departments. Free technical workshops are sponsored by the Center for Teaching Research and Learning, the Office of Information Technology, the University Library, and others. All courses are open to staff, faculty and students. Topics include everything from Excel training to web design.

<http://www.american.edu/training/tech.cfm>

## Performance Management

To more effectively link annual performance review with achieving strategic plan objectives, the Office of Human Resources undertook a review of its Performance Management Program. A revamped program for staff was introduced in the fall 2012 and will be phased in fully over the next couple of years. The improved PMP results from an effort to create a simpler, more transparent, and relevant program for some 1,600 full-time staff at the university.

Performance management and staff development are highly valued by AU and its leaders. Its purpose is to clarify expectations and establish high standards of performance for staff and to motivate them to do their best and ensure that they have the skills to contribute fully. The changes made to the PMP were based on the feedback received from AU staff, managers, and administrators and best practices in human resources.

AU's performance management program for staff includes three distinct phases: planning, managing, and appraising. Staff members utilize the university strategic plan, division, and department goals to create six to seven personal goals for the performance period. This cascade of goals encourages staff to identify ways to best contribute to the attainment of the university goals. Through this process they understand where the university is headed and what must happen at the department and individual level to support the university's goals.

The PMP process includes one formal mid-year feedback session as well as a year-in-review discussion during which each goal and competency is assessed on a new five-point scale. An

overall performance rating is derived from the assessments of each goal and competency and is the primary factor in determining pay increase decisions for staff.

## Professional and Career Development

Staff development plans are a newly-added program at the university to address a stated goal in the university strategic plan to improve professional and career development activities for staff. Exit interview data from staff indicated low levels of satisfaction with questions related to career progression opportunities at the university.

Beginning in spring 2013, staff are now asked to create achievement plans which are optional, personal action plans, jointly agreed to by a staff member and their manager that identify short- and long-term career goals, as well as the training and other developmental experiences needed to achieve those goals. The university benefits from having a competent and engaged workforce, capable of continuous learning in order to meet the demands placed on it by constant market, organizational, and technological changes. A staff member may have a desire to grow into other jobs at the university, or beyond the university, and may utilize the achievement plan to identify the specific developmental experiences necessary to fulfill those goals.

Achievement plans will typically span two to three years and be uniquely tailored to meet the needs of the staff member and the university. The achievement plans are not rated during the year end performance appraisal; however, attainment of new skills or improving others may reflect in higher levels of performance over time.

Managers will be encouraged to work with their staff to develop achievement plans. To that end, managers will be evaluated in their performance appraisals on the degree to which they successfully develop talent of their direct reports. This includes helping to advance the personal career goals of staff in their units.

## Staff Grievance Policies

Any employee, job candidate, student, contractor, or visitor to campus who feels that they have been subject to either discrimination or harassment related to a protected Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) classification can file a complaint under the university's [discrimination and sexual harassment policy](#). The grievance policies for staff have broad implications for all associated with AU.

The university maintains a [whistleblower policy](#) and procedure to encourage and enable good-faith reports by university employees and others of observed or suspected misconduct or noncompliance with law or other university policies and procedures. A formal complaint under these policies is investigated by the university. Investigations are conducted without bias and retaliation is prohibited.

The university also maintains a [complaint policy](#) and procedure for staff that provides formal and informal forums for staff to express their concerns about matters affecting a staff member's relationship with the university and which are not attributed to discrimination or harassment on account of a protected class.

Staff members may appeal an involuntary termination through the Staff Personnel Review Board (SPRB), a peer hearing panel that examines the issues of fact related to the employee's separation and determines if university policy and procedures have been followed.

Throughout the various processes and procedures, the human resources office provides guidance and direction to employees and managers to ensure the university's policies are followed. These offices also assist faculty, staff, and managers with advice and coaching on resolving workplace matters. The human resources office liaises with the [Faculty/Staff Assistance Program](#) (FSAP) to help individuals with personal matters that may be affecting the workplace. Human Resources provides regular trainings on the aforementioned where policies and procedures are discussed in great detail.

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

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American University is committed to maintaining an educational and working environment that reflects a diversity of views, cultures, and experiences. Diversity includes people of different races, ethnicities, cultures, genders, religions, national origin, age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, marital status, as well as individuals with diverse opinions, perspectives, lifestyles, and ideas; it also includes individuals with disabilities and veteran status. AU prides itself on the diversity of its staff and faculty, which is essential for the support of a student body that represents approximately 150 foreign countries.

Fifty-five percent of American University staff are female. This is higher than the national average of 47 percent for all U.S. workers.<sup>1</sup> AU has achieved an average of 38 percent ethnically-diverse staff employed in its workplace, which is greater than the national average of 33 percent (again for all U.S. workers).<sup>2</sup> The university has continued to increase minority representation in managerial staff level positions which currently stands at 20 percent—on par with the current availability of 19 percent in the local, D.C.-area job market.<sup>3</sup> Minorities hold 51 percent of AU's technical positions, which is greater than the current (local) availability of 38 percent.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Women in the Labor Force: A Databook*, 2011 Edition, December 2011, [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *The Editor's Desk*, Racial and Ethnic Characteristics of the U.S. Labor Force, 2011, [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov).

<sup>3</sup> American University Affirmative Action Plan, 2012–2013.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

The university annually conducts an in-depth analysis of diversity in personnel matters and reviews the work force composition by organizational unit and job group to determine if there are areas of minority or female underutilization or concentration. AU also examines personnel activity over the prior year including applicant flow, hires, terminations, promotions, and other activity to determine if there are selection disparities; analyzes compensation to determine any gender, race, or ethnicity-based disparities; and reviews selection, recruitment, referral, and other personnel procedures to assess any disparities in the employment or advancement of minorities or women.

AU regularly evaluates techniques for improving employee recruitment and retention and strives for increased diversity and opportunities for all groups of people employed with the university. In 2013, the turnover rate for full-time staff at the university was 17.7 percent. There is a continuing effort on the part of the university to ensure communication of a positive attitude toward equal employment opportunity and diversity.

American University recruits and draws a diverse talent pool from the D.C. metropolitan area and successfully attracts and recruits applicants of diverse backgrounds at different levels of university employment. It also makes good faith efforts to hire D.C. residents.

The university prohibits discrimination and discriminatory harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, sexual orientation, disability, veteran status, and any other protected bases under federal or local laws with regard to recruitment or recruitment advertising, hiring, training, promotion, and other terms and conditions of employment. All personnel actions or programs such as employment, upgrading, demotion or transfer, recruitment, advertising, termination, rate of pay or other forms of compensation, and selection for training are made without discrimination.

American University annually reviews its practices to determine whether personnel programs provide employment and advancement of qualified individuals with disabilities, disabled veterans, and veterans of all other categories. A current review reveals that the university employs many individuals with disabilities, disabled veterans, and other veterans in a variety of jobs. American University continues to make reasonable accommodations to the physical and mental limitations of employees and job applicants.

The university recognizes that however strong its outreach program, internal support from supervisory management and other employees is necessary to ensure maximum effectiveness and commitment for employment of diverse individuals throughout the university. Many programs and services available to the campus community are committed to increasing awareness and education:

- **The Center for Diversity and Inclusion.** Serves as a resource for students, faculty, and staff interested in diversity issues and cross-cultural involvement. The center includes the services to many different aspects of diversity and inclusion. Its mission

includes enhancing LGBTQ, multicultural, first generation, and women’s experiences on campus. (<http://www.american.edu/ocl/cdi/index.cfm>)

- **The Academic Support and Access Center.** Provides consultation and in-service training for faculty, staff, and students to help establish a campus environment that is welcoming to all. (<http://www.american.edu/ocl/asac/Resources-Homepage.cfm>)
- **The Kay Spiritual Center.** Fosters a climate of interfaith understanding and openness in matters of faith and value that are recognized as an important part of university life.
- **Project Teams.** Faculty and staff work collaboratively on many university committees or project teams to support and value the differences of the campus community. The Disability Compliance Project Team provides guidance to the university regarding issues related to individuals with disabilities. The International Campus Life Project Team fosters intercultural awareness, understanding, and appreciation of American University’s diversity and monitors the system and services to ensure they are sensitive and respectful to the needs of international students, faculty, and staff. The Harassment Prevention Team raises awareness and provides guidance to the university’s commitment regarding issues related to harassment prevention.

AU is committed to supporting its diverse employees with a well-rounded and intensely engaged community and continues to explore programs and services that encourage work-life balance. The university currently offers leave sharing, benefits for same-sex domestic partners, flexible spending accounts, emergency loans, a child development center, and other benefits for faculty and staff. All employees are afforded the opportunity to continue their professional and personal development by participating in university-sponsored training opportunities or academic courses offered through the university’s tuition remission program. Under the staff performance management program, American University identified “supporting diversity and inclusion” as a core competency required of all staff, stressing the importance and expectation of all staff to uphold the university’s commitment to diversity.

Additionally, human resources has continued to promote the importance of diversity, inclusion, and innovation at the university by offering new training courses in unconscious bias and diversity and building trust and navigating conflict. The university has added front-line staff members to more project teams (benefits advisory, harassment prevention, performance management) to ensure that their input is incorporated into related policies and programs.

## CONCLUSIONS

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In the past decade, American University made substantial adjustments in both the expectations and practices of its Board of Trustees, as its governance structures were thoroughly reviewed, publically critiqued, compared with best practices nationwide and altered to become more effective, transparent, and participatory. This ushered in a new era of fiduciary responsibility and commitment by AU's Board of Trustees, new leadership at the presidential and provost levels, a renewed emphasis by the administration on collaborative strategic planning tied to biannual budgeting, and greater openness and participation by campus constituents in university governance. The university's goal is to continue to be a model in shared governance.

The university's leadership has gone through a steady transformation, both at the senior administrative (President's Cabinet) level and within the senior academic (provost) areas. Its focus is strategic, its work collaborative, and its achievements held to standards of accountability. Through collaboration, collegiality, and openness, AU's senior administrative team has worked to improve the working environment and make clear the quality-based expectations of students, faculty, and staff.

In sum, indicators of strength in AU's leadership, shared governance, and administration have included:

- a period of stability at the president, provost, and cabinet level
- a creative and beneficial blending of considerable AU-focused experience, along with new perspectives from cabinet officials with valuable experience from other prominent institutions
- periodic reviews conducted of board performance as a board as well as individual trustees, and improved board visibility through campus communication and trustee presence on campus and at AU events
- workplace improvements through concerted efforts to build effective structures for annual PMPs and HR-sponsored programs for personal and professional development
- a strong culture of integrity

If this success trajectory is to continue some challenges for AU's leadership, shared governance, and administration include:

- ensuring that board effectiveness and openness continues through its periodic assessments, communications, and enhanced awareness of governance concepts and constituent and campus-wide participation opportunities—especially for students
- pursuing the ideal of being a great place to work, with focus on professional development and the work-life balance as technology alters traditional work patterns

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. Serve as a model for faculty and student participation in shared governance consistent with the University by-laws.
2. Further assist and support the trustees in their role as donors and enablers of potential donors.
3. Advance employee innovation and identify strategies to promote high performance management in the context of the challenges of the twenty-first century workplace.

## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

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Board Meeting Summaries

<http://www.american.edu/trustees/Meeting-Summaries.cfm>

Board of Trustees Website

<http://www.american.edu/trustees>

President's Campus Letters

<http://www.american.edu/president/Presidents-Announcements.cfm>

Faculty Senate Website

<http://www.american.edu/facultysenate/governance.cfm>

Faculty Manual

<http://www.american.edu/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&pageid=1660808>

Academic Regulations

<http://www.american.edu/provost/undergrad/undergrad-rules-and-regulations-toc.cfm>

Staff Council

<http://www.american.edu/staffcouncil/Index.cfm>

SG and GLC Leaders Follow Student Voice

<http://www.american.edu/ocl/news/SG-and-GLC-Leaders-Follow-Student-Voice.cfm>

Student Government

<http://ausg.org>

Action on Proposals Related to Socially Responsible Investment

<http://www.american.edu/trustees/upload/051713.pdf>

Student Bar Association

<http://www.wcl.american.edu/sba>

Graduate Leadership Council

<http://www.american.edu/provost/grad/glc.cfm>

Administrative Structure and Organizational Chart

<http://www.american.edu/president/Org-Chart-Text-Only.cfm>

<http://www.american.edu/president/upload/AU-Org-Chart.pdf>

Biography of Senior Officers

<http://www.american.edu/president/Cabinet.cfm>



Performance Management Program

<http://www.american.edu/hr/newsletter/HR-Newsletter-2012-August.cfm>

Professional and Career Development

<http://www.american.edu/hr/ProfDev-Education.cfm>

The Center for Diversity and Inclusion

<http://www.american.edu/ocl/cdi/index.cfm>

The Kay Spiritual Center

<http://www.american.edu/ocl/kay/index.cfm>

# FACULTY



## 4

## Faculty

INTRODUCTION

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Over the course of a decade and on numerous fronts, American University has endeavored to advance the conditions, incentives, and expectations for its faculty to align them with those of comparator and aspirational institutions among the top 50 universities in the United States. The university has also embraced a strategic approach to hiring with a focus on interdisciplinarity and developing talent in the cutting-edge fields of coming decades. This has been a relatively propitious time for such an undertaking. The university's sound financial position during a time of widespread austerity in U.S. higher education has enabled it to recruit the very best junior and senior faculty, which in the past had often been out of reach, and to undertake new initiatives to stimulate scholarly output among the existing faculty. Of course, the concerted effort to enhance faculty performance as both scholars and teachers is a long-term investment.

This chapter provides information describing the presence of a high-quality faculty involved in instructional, research, and service activities (standard 10).<sup>1</sup> Most importantly, it describes and assesses the efforts of the university to advance significantly the quality of the faculty over the past 10 years, specifically with reference to the ability of faculty members to make important scholarly contributions to their fields. The university's strategy for doing this has taken the following form: reduce the teaching load for tenure-line faculty to allow more time for scholarly work, increase the size of tenure-line faculty to compensate for reduced teaching loads, increase the number of term faculty for the same purpose, decrease the role of adjunct faculty, reinforce the new expectations through aggressive recruiting, and carefully

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter also covers standard 6 (integrity) as it relates to hiring, promotion, and tenure.

select new faculty at all ranks. Concurrently, the university has addressed related factors including faculty diversity, teaching expectations, the assessment of scholarship, external funding, salaries, and workload distribution. The faculty has changed substantially since the last self-study in 2003-04. The current self-study process provided an opportunity to assess these developments, and the results of that review are reported here.

## STRATEGIC GOALS AND CHANGING EXPECTATIONS FOR FACULTY

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The strategic plan has led to important changes in AU's goals for its faculty and the expectations placed on faculty members, especially those in tenure-line positions. The new demands are best expressed in the commitment of the strategic plan to “epitomize the ideal of the scholar-teacher by blending research, teaching, and service into an inspiring whole.”<sup>2</sup> The result has been rising expectations for faculty members to produce more high-quality, high-impact scholarly, creative, and professional work, while maintaining excellence in teaching.

AU has sought to promote scholarship and creative work for a long time. However, numerous factors had hindered success. Until 2008, course loads were high (that is, an average of five per academic year for tenure-line faculty), there was little emphasis on external funding, and most departments had not fully articulated their expectations for scholarship. Furthermore, the heavy teaching load, as well as salaries often lagging below offers from peer institutions, made it difficult to attract top junior candidates or established leaders in their fields to join the AU faculty. While the previous strategic plan had a goal that “faculty teaching, research and service will have added meaning and resources,”<sup>3</sup> the expectations for outcomes—excellence—were less clear. Faculty with modest scholarly productivity occasionally were rewarded as long as they demonstrated strength in teaching and service. The issue of scholarly impact was not always prominent in evaluations of faculty research and creative activity.

A new emphasis on high-impact research began with the development of the current strategic plan and the appointment of Scott A. Bass as provost in 2008. Not only did the strategic plan emphasize outcomes, such as strong teaching and productive scholarship, it also stressed the importance of external funding in appropriate fields of study. In one of his first speeches to the Faculty Senate, Provost Bass judged AU's external funding record to be inadequate compared to other similar doctoral institutions. He also raised concerns about faculty scholarship, as demonstrated in National Research Council rankings. As mentioned

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<sup>2</sup> “Ten Transformational Goals,” *American University and the Next Decade: Leadership for a Changing World*, American University Strategic Plan, adopted November 2008.

<sup>3</sup> See “Ideas into Action, Action into Service: Fulfilling the American University Paradigm,” address to the campus by President Benjamin Ladner, October 3, 2001.

in chapter 3, Provost Bass has led several initiatives to improve performance in this area, including:

- institutionalizing a general norm of a four-course teaching load for tenure-line faculty who are active in scholarship, with variability around this norm in light of research productivity and other workload issues, to attract high quality scholars and improve opportunities for scholarship and creative activities by current faculty
- reorganizing the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and expanding the mission of the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) to become the Center for Teaching Research and Learning (CTRL)
- expanding the focus of faculty recruitment beyond newly-minted PhDs to include early and mid-career scholars with a proven track record of teaching and research excellence
- setting higher standards for tenure and promotion, with explicit expectations for external funding appropriate to the various disciplines and excellence in scholarship, creative activity, or professional accomplishments
- launching a new initiative in AY2013–14 to focus on the development of high-impact scholarship and to assist faculty in identifying opportunities for broader public dissemination of their research products.

Three important initiatives have also shaped the development of AU's faculty over the past several years. First, in two stages during 2010 and 2011, the Faculty Senate wrote a new faculty manual that covers most university faculty (Bender Library, Washington College of Law (WCL), and Pence Law Library have separate manuals, which, as of fall 2013, were being revised). The Faculty Senate took the lead in writing the new manual. The process was inclusive and transparent. It included several university-wide town hall gatherings, numerous meetings with individual teaching units and faculty constituencies (for example, term faculty), a Blackboard site for suggestions and comment, and a faculty vote on the final text. The new faculty manual expressly incorporates the new expectations and strategic goals for faculty and also updates and rationalizes the regulations and procedures governing faculty ranks, appointments, promotion, and tenure. Second, as required by the new manual, explicit guidelines for tenure and promotion were prepared by each department or school and approved by the provost. The new guidelines provide greater transparency to faculty about the expectations for reappointment, promotion, or tenure in their respective fields. Third, in 2012, the provost launched the AU2030 initiative, which is intended to focus AU's hiring efforts on clusters of interdisciplinary teaching and scholarship that are likely to be important intellectual niches in future decades and which are fruitful areas in which AU can specialize by building on existing strengths and interests of the faculty. As described in more detail in chapter 2 on mission and goals, proposals that are consistent with the areas of focus identified in the AU2030 process heavily influence the allocation of new and replacement tenure lines among teaching units.

Embedding the new expectations about the scholar-teacher ideal and high-impact scholarship into the academic community is still a work in progress. Nevertheless, the changes mentioned here, and others discussed throughout the chapter, have already had a significant impact on AU’s ability to recruit, retain, and support high-quality faculty. They have also led to changes in the overall composition and productivity of the faculty. The rest of this chapter analyzes how these changes are transforming the faculty as well as helping to fulfill the university’s mission and enhance the educational experience of AU students.

## FACULTY PROFILE

### Size and Composition of the Faculty

As of fall 2013, the university’s mission was carried out by 848 full-time faculty and 621 adjuncts. Ninety-four percent of full-time faculty held the highest degree in their field. Among the adjunct faculty, many are experienced policy makers, diplomats, journalists, artists, writers, scientists, and business leaders. AU met the challenge of reducing the designated course load for tenure-line faculty without hiring more adjuncts or increasing class sizes to unacceptable levels by increasing the size of the full-time faculty, both tenure line and term, by more than one-quarter. Between AY2007–08 and AY2013–14, the total full-time faculty increased by 27 percent (from 649 to 848), but most of this growth was in term lines (48 percent or from 223 to 353), while tenure-line positions increased by 16 percent (from 426 to 495), as shown in figure 4.1. Several factors led to the relatively greater increase in term lines, including the need for flexibility in case of future fluctuations in enrollments (either overall or among teaching units) and a desire to build up the tenure-line faculty more gradually and in line with long-term strategic objectives.

**Figure 4.1: Full-time Faculty by Tenure or Term Status, AY2007–08 to AY2013–14**

	2007–08	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14
<b>Tenure</b>	295	303	323	335	341	354	366
<b>Tenure Track</b>	131	129	131	139	149	141	129
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>432</b>	<b>454</b>	<b>474</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>495</b>
<b>Term</b>	223	242	235	276	308	330	353
<b>Total Full-Time Faculty</b>	<b>649</b>	<b>674</b>	<b>689</b>	<b>750</b>	<b>798</b>	<b>825</b>	<b>848</b>

Source: *Academic Data Reference Book*, various years, table 41.

Note: Prior to AY2009–10, term faculty were designated as “temporary.”

Figure 4.2 gives more detail on full-time faculty composition by ranks and schools. As of AY2013–14, the full-time faculty consisted of 121 (14.3 percent) tenure-line assistant professors, 173 (20.4 percent) associate professors, 201 (23.7 percent) full professors, and 353 (41.6 percent) full-time term faculty of various ranks (discussed further below).

**Figure 4.2: Full-time Faculty by School and Rank for Tenure and Term Lines, AY2013-14**

School	Assistant Professors	Associate Professors	Full Professors	Tenure Line	Asst, Assoc & Full Term Faculty	Instructors	Lecturer & In-Residence	Non-Tenure Line	Total Faculty
CAS	67	80	66	213	32	24	94	150	363
KSB	11	20	19	50	5	0	21	26	76
SIS	19	20	24	63	16	6	33	55	118
SOC	6	15	10	31	7	2	13	22	53
SPA	13	17	24	54	12	3	16	31	85
WCL	3	8	54	65	8	6	17	31	96
UNIV & WCL LIB	2	13	4	19	8	0	0	8	27
SPEXS	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
Other	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>353</b>	<b>848</b>
% of Total	14.3%	20.4%	23.7%	58.4%	12.7%	5.3%	23.6%	41.6%	100.0%
% of Tenure Line	24.4%	34.9%	40.6%	100.0%					
% of Non-Tenure Line					30.6%	12.7%	56.7%	100.0%	

Source: Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

By increasing the number of full-time faculty, AU hoped to reduce the institution's reliance upon adjunct or part-time faculty. This goal goes back to the time of AU's previous Middle State self-study, which noted that, "more full-time faculty are being hired, in large part, to reduce the number of adjuncts teaching general education courses."<sup>4</sup> For the fall 2006 semester, tenure-line faculty taught 37 percent of all course sections offered, term (then called "temporary") faculty taught 26 percent, and adjuncts taught 37 percent. The proportions shifted when (starting around 2007–08) the university began to take in larger undergraduate classes, implemented reduced teaching loads for research-active tenure-line faculty, and adopted a more liberal policy regarding the retention of term faculty (discussed further below). These policy changes contributed to a reduction in the share of sections taught by adjuncts, but also reduced the proportion taught by tenure-line faculty, with the balance being taken up by the increased cadre of term faculty. By the fall 2013 semester, tenure-line faculty taught 32 percent of the sections offered, term faculty taught 37 percent, and adjuncts taught 31 percent.<sup>5</sup>

### Tenure-Line Faculty: Recruitment and Retention

A critical component of advancing AU's mission and building a college-centered research university is the ability to recruit and retain faculty who can conduct internationally-recognized research, while at the same time providing interactive teaching experiences that offer the challenges and opportunities often associated with liberal arts institutions. AU has done an excellent job of building on the strength of its existing faculty by hiring and retaining distinguished faculty.<sup>6</sup> The new baseline of a four-course teaching load for research-active, tenure-line faculty (with flexibility around that baseline as discussed below), along with greater encouragement to buy out courses via external grants and more competitive salary offers and start-up funds, have helped to facilitate this success in new hiring. The certainty that the faculty position (line) remains with the unit, even if searches are not successful in a given year, enables units to maintain high standards and hold off on hiring until the right person is identified.

Consistent with the goals of cultivating promising junior faculty at the start of their careers and selectively hiring highly productive senior faculty from other institutions who can significantly advance the reputation of existing programs and mentor junior faculty, the majority of tenure-line faculty hired between AY2006–07 and AY2013–14 are assistant professors, followed by associate and full professors respectively, as shown in figure 4.3 (which gives the tenure-line hiring distributions by rank and school).

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<sup>4</sup> American University, *American University Self-Study, 2003*: 58.

<sup>5</sup> Source: EagleData *Sections Taught by Faculty Status* report fall 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Based on data from the provost's office on individual faculty hiring activity, along with retention, turnover, and outcomes from files for action, and on data published in *Academic Data Reference Book* (ADRB) <http://www.american.edu/provost/oira/Academic-Data-Reference-Book.cfm>.



**Figure 4.3: Tenure Line Faculty Hires 2006–13**

School	Assistant Professors Hired	Associate Professors Hired	Full Professors Hired	Other FT Rank Hired	Total Tenure Line Hired
CAS	82	12	9	3	106
KSB	16	3	4	1	24
SIS	19	2	5	1	27
SOC	6	3	2	0	11
SPA	18	3	5	0	26
WCL	10	7	4	0	21
LIB	2	0	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>217</b>
<b>% of Total Hired</b>	<b>70.51%</b>	<b>13.82%</b>	<b>13.36%</b>		

Source: Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

Tenure-line (including both tenure-track and tenured) hires attest to Academic Affairs’ intentional planning in coordination with planning in other AU divisions. The recent, ongoing AU2030 initiative is just one example but also clearly demonstrates how cross-disciplinary academic planning can take place “from the bottom up.” Faculty input defined programmatic areas as well as the hiring needs to develop and support these interdisciplinary areas.

Previously, other faculty-led initiatives for cross-campus programmatic development served as de facto models for AU2030. These initiatives included Behavioral, Cognitive and Neuroscience (BCAN), the Center for Latin American and Latino Studies (CLALS), and the Center on Health, Risk, and Society. Recent key hires in these three areas have been instrumental to their development and importance.

These hires include Eric Hershberg (2010), professor of government in the School of Public Affairs (SPA) and inaugural director of the Center for Latin American and Latino Studies (CLALS). The initiative to form the CLALS came from a campus-wide competition launched by the provost in AY2008–9 to identify the best area for a new university-wide research center. Although CLALS was created because AU had a large cadre of faculty in this field, its creation has led to the recruitment of additional senior faculty including Jonathan Fox, a prominent scholar of Latin American politics with a PhD from MIT, who was hired from the University of California–Santa Cruz, in 2013 and is now a professor of international relations in the School of International Service (SIS).

The BCAN initiative began within the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) Department of Psychology in the 1990s—the so-called “Decade of the Brain”—as a purposeful faculty-led effort to develop cross-unit expertise. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, at least 15 faculty members in diverse units such as psychology, biology, world languages and cultures (linguistics), and performing arts (music) were affiliated with the BCAN program. In fall 2012, Terry Davidson, a leading scholar in the field, was hired from Purdue University to establish the Center for Behavioral and Neuroscience and to lead the BCAN initiative across campus. Davidson, who has a long history of funded research and, indeed, brought funding to American University at the time of his fall 2012 appointment, already has attracted new faculty members in computer science, mathematics and statistics, and the School of Education, Teaching, and Health (SETH).

Directed by Kim Blankenship, also the chair of sociology, who was hired expressly to develop health and risk-related programs and initiatives, the Center on Health, Risk, and Society (CHRS) has approximately 20 faculty affiliates from CAS, SIS, SPA, WCL, and Kogod School of Business (KSB). New faculty hired within the past five years in the area of health and risk include Nina Yamanis (SIS), Taryn Morrissey (SPA), and Cristel Russell (KSB).

There are other areas where strategic hiring is important. The university is sensitive to the need to strengthen the science, technology, and mathematics (STEM<sup>7</sup>) fields within CAS. Although these subjects are represented by 35 percent of the departments in CAS, those departments contain only 22 percent of its faculty. These departments have not benefited as much from the overall growth in faculty—they contain 21 additional faculty (a growth of 35 percent) as they did 14 years ago. Three of the STEM departments currently have fewer than 10 faculty members.<sup>7</sup> By comparison, the overall growth of teaching faculty during the same period is 54.3 percent. AU has historically attracted students interested in the liberal arts and social sciences. Given the importance of technological innovation in the current century, AU continues to emphasize enrollment and faculty growth in STEM areas, and these enrollments are on the rise. (See chapter 8 on the assessment of AU’s needs for improved science facilities.)

The new faculty hires appointed in AY2013–14 illustrate the success of AU’s hiring efforts. The group includes faculty with degrees from top institutions such as Harvard Law School, University of Toronto, University of London, University of California–Berkeley, Columbia Law School, Yale University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Stanford Law School. Many come with established grants and are the recipients of fellowships and awards. They already have track records of scholarly publications and excellence in teaching. The

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<sup>7</sup> As usually defined, STEM also includes engineering, but AU does not have an engineering school.

<sup>8</sup> The departments and numbers of full-time faculty for 2013 were biology (15), chemistry (11), computer science (5), environmental science (7), mathematics and statistics (34), physics (9). Source: Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

new faculty also have been selected for their expertise in important and emerging areas of scholarship. (See the provost’s [Annual Address to the Faculty, March 28, 2013](#), for details.)

With respect to retention, AU has a strong record. During AY2006–07 to AY2013–14, 17 faculty members resigned, some of whom decided not to be reviewed under the current tenure standards. Nine were turned down for tenure, 16 were granted tenure with promotion to associate professor, and 6 were promoted to full professor. Of the total body of tenure-line faculty hired during or before this period, 87 resigned, 31 were turned down for reappointment or tenure, 97 were granted tenure with promotion to associate professor, and 38 were promoted to full professor (see figure 4.4).

Faculty may resign for various reasons, including the expectation of tenure denial, a shift to a nonacademic job, or a move to another academic institution. However, the 87 faculty who resigned in the six and one-half-year period from fall 2006 to fall 2013 represented only 14.1 percent of the total tenure-line faculty as of the end of AY2011–12. This represents an annual resignation rate of approximately 2.2 percent. Thirty-one faculty (or 5.0 percent total) were turned down for tenure, for a total annual turnover of about 3 percent. In contrast, 97 faculty (15.7 percent) were granted tenure and 38 (6.1 percent) were promoted to full professor.

**Figure 4.4: Full-Time Faculty Actions 2006–13**

School	Resignations	Not Tenured/ Not Reappointed	Granted Tenure	Hired w/ Tenure	Promoted to Full Professor
CAS	42	9	52	2	6
KSB	9	2	10	3	6
SIS	10	5	5	0	6
SOC	3	4	6	0	3
SPA	12	6	7	0	4
WCL	7	2	14	4	13
LIB	4	3	3	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>38</b>

Source: Office of Academic Affairs.

## Term Faculty

With a new emphasis on scholarship and a reduction in the course load for most tenure-line faculty, it was important that students continue to engage with faculty who were on campus full time and dedicated to the overall mission of the institution. A barrier that stood in the way of this goal was a policy that limited term faculty service to five years. As a result, some highly effective teachers were prohibited from continuing on the faculty. Also, there were few career opportunities for advancement for term faculty.

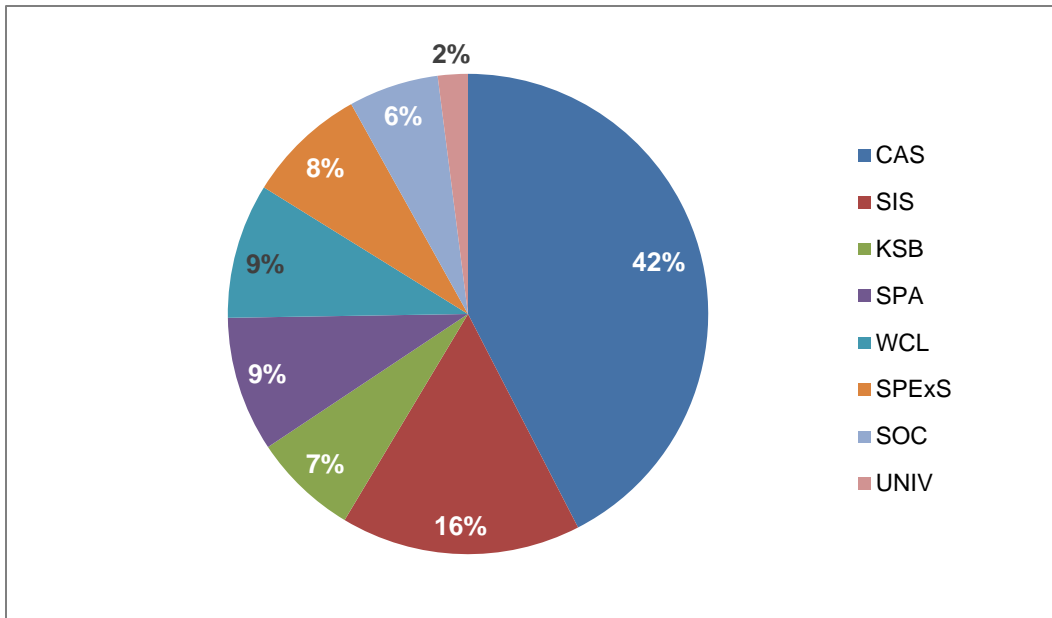
Term faculty include diverse groups of people, such as accomplished scholars, recent PhDs with a strong interest in teaching, and established professionals who can bring significant nonacademic experience into the classroom in their areas of specialization. In order to attract and retain high-quality term faculty of these various types, the university has made a number of changes in its policies and procedures. In 2007, AU first allowed for the hiring of “temporary” faculty on multiyear contracts and for retaining them beyond five years of service.<sup>8</sup> In 2010, the new faculty manual retitled temporary faculty as “term” faculty and streamlined the procedures for their reappointments (either one-year or multiyear contracts), subject to meeting the performance criteria of their teaching units. The 2010 revisions also created a structure for promotion of term faculty through two categories of ranks: professorial lecturer/senior professorial lecturer/Hurst senior professorial lecturer and assistant professor/associate professor/professor. The first category is intended for term faculty whose sole responsibilities are in teaching and service; the second category is for those whose responsibilities also include research. (Existing term faculty were also allowed to keep their former titles prior to the manual revision; the most common such title was assistant professor.) In addition, many term faculty who have distinguished professional records are appointed with the rank of “in-residence” scholars in their fields. Although there is no scope for promotion in this rank, these in-residence faculty are often relatively well remunerated and may be hired on multiyear contracts.

The new faculty manual dedicates several sections to term faculty in order to give these colleagues clear guidelines regarding their responsibilities and privileges and a career ladder that rewards excellence. The manual devolves primary responsibility for hiring, retaining, and promoting term faculty to the teaching units within the separate schools and colleges. Figure 4.5 indicates how term faculty are employed across the schools and colleges. The relative proportions of term and tenure-line positions vary by academic unit, but, in general, most schools and colleges are fairly close to the average of about 40 percent of full-time faculty having a term contract.

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<sup>9</sup> An exception to allow multiyear contracts and renewal past a fifth year had already been instituted in 2000 for college writing faculty and in what is now SPEX (formerly the Washington Semester Program), but in 2007 this provision was extended to all schools and colleges.

**Figure 4.5: Full-Time Term Faculty by School, AY 2013–14**



Source: Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

Another purpose of the changes to the manual was to create greater stability for term faculty. The new rules allow the university to attract and retain high-quality faculty on term contracts by offering them the possibility of greater employment stability through multiyear contracts and career advancement through promotion in rank. In fact, the greatest expansion in term faculty has been in faculty on multiyear contracts. By 2013, 36 percent of term faculty (127) were on multiyear contracts, with 80 percent of multiyear faculty (102) having contracts of three years or longer. The present two-year budget cycle includes a goal of increasing the number of term faculty on multiyear contracts, which is intended to enable more term faculty to have stable employment at AU and thereby to be positioned to take advantage of the possibilities for promotion if they meet the performance standards articulated by their teaching units.

Whereas the vast majority of term faculty (93 percent) remained at the lowest ranks within their respective tracks in 2013, 25 term faculty have received promotion or appointment to higher ranks (one to professor, one to associate professor, two to assistant professor, four to senior professorial lecturer, and 17 to professorial lecturer). These provisions for promotion in rank represent a substantial improvement compared to the previous regulations in terms of creating meaningful opportunities for term faculty to advance their careers at AU. However, it is too early to evaluate how well the provisions for promotion in rank are working, and the university will assess how well these provisions are fostering long-term career paths for term faculty.

The use of term faculty in teaching varies across the departments and schools. In many cases, they primarily teach introductory, general education, and intermediate-level undergraduate courses. However, those term faculty who have the proper qualifications, as determined by their department chairs, division directors, and deans, may teach advanced undergraduate and graduate courses in their areas of specialty if the teaching units have needs in those areas. Teaching performance of term faculty in all levels of classes is closely monitored by the units and the deans, and is usually the primary factor in their reappointment.

Term faculty have gained a greater voice in faculty governance. The new faculty manual created an at-large seat on the Faculty Senate reserved for a term faculty member. In fact, the current vice chair and future chair of the Faculty Senate is a term faculty member (Hurst Senior Professorial Lecturer Lacey Wooton of the Department of Literature, CAS). Since 2011, the Faculty Senate has twice created ad hoc committees to consider issues related to the new categories of term faculty in the manual and the integration of these faculty into departmental and university governance structures. These committees have identified some omissions and points of needed clarification in the manual and have proposed various changes in response.

Although the environment for term faculty has improved considerably in recent years, there are still many challenges. In 2013 the College of Arts and Sciences created a task force to assess the status of term faculty and to offer recommendations. The task force analyzed interviews, surveys, university and college demographics, scholarship, and other data. The report offered five recommendations. During the Middle States self-study comment period, one of the recommendations, that of increasing salaries to competitive levels, came up in several venues. The administration is aware that this is a challenge and is looking at ways to address the issue.

### **Adjunct Faculty**

Because of its premier location in Washington, D.C., AU is able to employ highly-qualified professional and scholarly adjunct faculty on a part-time basis. Adjuncts have either the highest degree in the field or relevant professional experience and achievement. In doctoral-granting units, some advanced PhD candidates are allowed to teach undergraduate courses as adjuncts, under the supervision of full-time faculty.

Adjunct faculty may serve without limit of time through successive reappointment, but these appointments carry no implications of, nor credit toward, tenure. Adjunct faculty members have access to various AU facilities to support their teaching, such as the AU network, Blackboard, and the library. Many adjunct faculty bring specific expertise into the classroom and help connect the university to the larger Washington, D.C., community. Some adjuncts are particularly useful in helping teach units to experiment with new courses and learn from that experience before the respective schools commit to making such courses permanent. In other cases, the use of adjunct faculty allows for flexibility in varying the number of sections offered of various core courses depending on student enrollments.

In 2012, adjunct faculty at AU voted in favor of having the Service Employees International Union serve as their collective bargaining agent. In May 2013, the university signed a two-year collective bargaining agreement with the union, which now represents most adjunct faculty who work on AU's Washington, D.C., campus or reside in the District of Columbia. (The agreement excludes some individuals, such as adjuncts whose employment ended prior to fall 2013, current graduate students who are teaching courses, and individuals whose other employment precludes union membership, for example, embassy personnel.) One of the main results of this contract will be to increase salaries for the formerly lowest-paid adjuncts. In addition, the agreement clarifies many work rules, working conditions, and regulations governing adjunct reappointments. It also grants compensation for adjuncts taking on additional roles, such as grading comprehensive exams.

<http://www.american.edu/provost/communications/June-20-2013.cfm>

### **Procedures and Expectations for Reappointments, Promotions, and Tenure**

The new faculty manual reflects the goals of AU's strategic plan to support high-impact scholarship and to actively recruit and retain talented and diverse faculty.

<http://www.american.edu/provost/academicaffairs/faculty-manual-toc.cfm>) Additional objectives were to delegate decision making to the lowest effective level and to make criteria and procedures clearer and more flexible. The most significant changes to the manual were:

- revising and clarifying the responsibilities of the university-wide promotion and tenure committee (that is, the Committee on Faculty Actions [CFA], formerly the Committee on Faculty Relations) to make decisions more efficiently and to clarify the relationship between the committee and the Faculty Senate
- streamlining the process for hiring senior faculty to increase the number of faculty with well-established research agendas
- specifying that “generally tenure-line faculty members active in scholarship teach four courses per academic year; however, this may vary by teaching unit”; also allowing for variations based on national norms in particular fields, individual scholarly performance, and other workload considerations
- providing a transparent separate structure for appointment, evaluation, reappointment, and promotion of term faculty with two tracks, one with teaching and service responsibilities and the other with expectations of research activity

The new faculty manual also requires all units to develop written guidelines, approved by the provost, regarding the criteria and processes for evaluation of tenure-line and term faculty. All units completed these guidelines for tenure-line faculty in 2010–11 and most have also completed these guidelines for term faculty. Guidelines for promotion from associate to full professor have also been completed. These guidelines are available on the [dean of academic affairs website](#).

In a survey of department chairs,<sup>9</sup> the respondents generally agreed that the standards for tenure and promotion are clear in terms of expectations. A few respondents expressed concern that the standards are clearer for tenure-track faculty and less clear for term faculty. Similarly, a few respondents expressed concern that the expectations are very clear for pretenure faculty but are vaguer for tenured faculty, especially for promotion from associate to full professor. The few instances where concerns were expressed seem to center on specific cases. More detail on AU's reappointment, promotion, and tenure is available in American University's faculty manuals.

(<https://myau.american.edu/groups/Committee/adhoc/MSSS/Supporting%20Documents/American%20University%20Faculty%20Manual%20SD10.pdf>)

The faculty manual and unit guidelines set high standards for AU faculty. However, the standards are relatively new and the level of rigor of the review is not yet consistent across all units. More progress needs to be made in teaching units taking “ownership” of these standards and applying them rigorously in evaluations of individual candidates.

### Diversity of Faculty

The university strives to hire faculty that bring diverse perspectives to the classroom and to the academy's scholarship and creative works. Diversity takes on many forms and has often been broadly defined. In AY2009–10, the university hired a consultant to examine the issue of diversity and faculty views on diversity.

Two areas of diversity that can be tracked by statistics are figures on underrepresented minorities and gender. The number of full-time underrepresented minority faculty has increased by 41 percent between 2008 and 2013. In 2008, 80.7 percent of AU full-time faculty were white, 3.3 percent were international, and 9.1 percent were underrepresented minorities (6.3 percent were other minority). By 2013, the percentage of white full-time faculty dropped to 77.5 percent, with international faculty rising to 4.5 percent and underrepresented minorities faculty increasing to 10.1 percent (7.9 percent are other minority or provided no response). The change in the racial and ethnic composition of AU's faculty is positive, but small. Given that AU's student population will continue to become more diverse, it is important that faculty hiring processes continue to be designed to recruit and hire faculty who reflect the changing nature of higher education.

With respect to gender, women represent 46.1 percent of the university's full-time faculty. Figure 4.6 expresses AU full-time faculty by rank and gender over time showing modest overall increases in women faculty since AY2007–08. A concern, from looking at the data, is the small percentage of women at the professor rank versus the associate professor or assistant professor rank. If one goes back to the time of the last self-study, 40 (23 percent)

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<sup>10</sup> At a December 7, 2012, meeting with the provost, 47 department chairs, division directors, and program directors were asked to complete a written questionnaire by members of the Middle States Steering Committee, and 27 (57.5 percent) responded.



of the 172 full professors were women. Today, the percentage has improved only slightly to 26.4 percent. This issue is addressed more extensively later in the chapter, in the section “Adapting to Changes in Workload and Expectations”.

**Figure 4.6: Full-Time Faculty by Rank and Gender, 2007-08 through 2013-14**

	2007-08		2008-10		2009-10		2010-11		2011-12		2012-13		2013-14	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
<b>Professor</b>	132	43	134	45	132	44	137	47	141	48	149	52	156	56
<b>Associate Professor</b>	71	73	75	80	76	93	74	102	79	98	77	98	76	103
<b>Assistant Professor</b>	103	124	104	122	112	131	121	134	121	131	115	121	107	105
<b>Instructor</b>	27	25	25	34	26	29	32	34	32	42	25	36	20	25
<b>Lecturer</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	6	17	29	36	49	60	76
<b>In-Residence</b>	26	25	28	27	32	29	32	26	33	27	34	33	38	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>326</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>436</b>	<b>389</b>	<b>457</b>	<b>391</b>

Source: Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

Women are well represented in fields traditionally dominated by men, such as the math and science fields. For example, according to the National Science Foundation, women represented only 29.6 percent of the doctoral degrees earned in mathematics in 2006. At AU, 35.3 percent of full-time faculty in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics are women. The Biology Department at AU is 46.7 percent women, compared to 51.8 percent of degrees earned in the life sciences nationally in 2006. In AU’s physics department, 33.3 percent of faculty are women compared to 29 percent of degree earners in the physical sciences nationally. (<http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/infbrief/nsf08308/>) The challenge for many of the STEM-related departments is not the number of women, but rather the overall size of the departments, which tend to be much smaller than at universities of a similar size.

## ENSURING EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING

The university uses multiple methods to assess the quality of teaching. According to the new faculty manual, “Each teaching unit or academic unit establishes guidelines for evaluating teaching by members of that unit. In each case, these evaluation metrics must extend beyond Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) scores. Faculty may demonstrate effective teaching in a variety of ways, including course design, development of new

curricular initiatives, up-to-date course content, student engagement and achievement outside the classroom, and adherence to evaluation procedures that accurately reflect student accomplishments. Teaching units or academic units may also view publication and presentation of teaching materials and methodologies as a contribution to teaching.” The guidelines developed by each department are public and accessible on the dean of academic affairs website for both tenure-line and term faculty (<http://www.american.edu/provost/academicaffairs/unit-guidelines.cfm>)

The teaching standards for biology can be used as an example of the types of criteria used by other departments to evaluate teaching. The department includes teaching evaluations, engagement with students outside formal classes, teaching materials, and classroom visits and peer evaluations from colleagues. Unit-developed criteria have had the added benefit of enabling faculty to tailor the standards to their discipline. Performing arts, for example, includes a criterion that states: “Because productions and performances that involve students require a good deal of teaching both inside and outside of the rehearsal hall, faculty members should include descriptions of how the production or performance interfaced with teaching activities. This kind of experiential teaching should be well documented and the faculty member should be specific in articulating the nature of the work, the time commitment, and the outcomes.” By contrast psychology faculty, who often mentor doctoral candidates, have the following criterion: “Classroom activities alone do not suffice for the teaching portion of the portfolio. Our department places particular value on supervision of undergraduate and graduate student research.... Among the factors we consider are the number of undergraduate and graduate research supervises, whether the faculty member serves as chair or in another role on the thesis or dissertation committee, students’ feedback on the quality of the professor’s supervision, timeliness of students’ completion of their degree program, and number and quality of publications and conference presentations with students.”

All units use student evaluation of teaching (SET) data as part of their reviews. SETs provide insight into student views of teaching. The SET forms include questions common to all courses, as well as the opportunity to include department-wide or instructor-specific questions. In addition to the questions that students respond to on a scale of 1–7, there are also free-form comment sheets on which students can write, and that are given only to the instructors in sealed envelopes (whereas the results of the answers to the questions are posted on the Eagedata website which is password protected for faculty, staff, and administrators). For the most part, student feedback on teaching is very positive at AU. For example, spring 2013 SET results show that 85 percent of students agreed that “the instructor provided useful feedback on tests and papers,” 95 percent agreed that “the instructor was open to questions and comments,” 90 percent agreed that “the instructor returned work in a timely manner,” and 91 percent agreed that “the instructor used class time productively.” Historically, satisfaction has increased on the three questions that are most often tracked to determine quality, which are shown in figure 4.7.

**Figure 4.7: Student Evaluation of Teaching—Historical**

	Instructor Required High Levels of Performance	Instructor Is One of the Best	Course Is One of the Best
Fall 2012	6.12/7	5.94/7	5.69/7
Fall 2011	6.07/7	5.92/7	5.66/7
Fall 2010	6.04/7	5.87/7	5.63/7
Fall 2009	6.02/7	5.82/7	5.57/7
Fall 2008	5.99/7	5.82/7	5.55/7

Source: EagleData reports.

As figure 4.8 demonstrates, students judge tenure-track faculty to be the most effective, but the differences among different categories of faculty are not very large. The growth in term faculty has not led to diminished satisfaction, as can be seen from the fact that average scores for all faculty have been rising during a time period in which the proportion of term faculty has increased very rapidly. Nevertheless, on average, adjunct and term faculty score slightly lower on the question about requiring high levels of performance. This phenomenon is a concern given the university’s strategic goal of increasing academic rigor. Nevertheless, it should be noted that all of the average ratings shown in figure 4.8 are relatively close (the biggest difference is 0.27 points out of 7). Furthermore, there is strong selection involved insofar as term and adjunct faculty who do not demonstrate good teaching performance are not renewed. Teaching performance is also an important factor in tenure and promotion decisions for tenure-line faculty.

**Figure 4.8: Student Evaluation of Teaching by Faculty Type (Spring 2013)**

Faculty Type	Number of Faculty	Instructor Required High Performance	Instructor Is One of the Best	Course Is One of the Best
Adjunct	423	6.00/7	5.88/7	5.69/7
Term	220	6.14/7	5.99/7	5.69/7
Tenure Track	110	6.27/7	6.21/7	5.96/7
Tenured	205	6.21/7	5.89/7	5.64/7

Source: EagleData reports.

Although student evaluations are generally positive and improving, some faculty express concern that they weigh too heavily in evaluations of individuals’ teaching. Term faculty in particular have often complained about excessive reliance on SETs in reappointment

decisions. There is a new initiative (as of 2012) of the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTRL) to review the weight given to SET scores within the overall evaluation of teaching. A CTRL survey of department chairs and program directors confirmed that student evaluations are often the most important factor used in promotion and merit reviews. By contrast, the survey found that fewer departments use peer reviews on a regular basis compared to the use of SETs. To this end, the CTRL is exploring ways to help departments use peer review and other effective practices to advance and evaluate teaching. It sponsors meetings and training opportunities on the theme “Beyond SETs” to help faculty think more broadly about metrics for evaluating teaching.

Beyond the evaluation of individual faculty, the university also monitors teaching quality by how it compares to that of its peer institutions. Surveys such as the National Survey of Student Engagement confirm that AU faculty, as a whole, provide engaging academic experiences. Both AU freshmen and seniors are more likely than their counterparts at peer institutions to say that they discussed ideas from their readings or classes with faculty members outside of class. While freshmen are similar to their peers, seniors are more likely than their peers to point to positive relationships with faculty members. The engaging aspect of teaching at AU has been recognized in other ways. Organizations that provide AU faculty with external recognition for their teaching often cite the enriching ways that faculty bring “real world” experiences into the classroom. The following are just a few of the faculty who have received awards for teaching in recent years.

- Patrick Jackson (SIS) was named the 2012 U.S. Professor of the Year for the District of Columbia by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- David Rosenbloom (SPA) and Robert Durant (SPA) received the Leslie Whittington Award for Excellence in Teaching presented by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA). The award, which went to Durant in 2007 and Rosenbloom in 2012, honors those who make outstanding contributions to public service education through excelling in teaching over a sustained period of time.
- Todd Eisenstadt (SPA) received the 2011 American Political Science Association Distinguished Teaching Award.

### **Support for Teaching and Learning**

Since 1989, CTRL has run an annual faculty conference on teaching and learning. Now known as the Ann Ferren Conference on Teaching, Research, and Learning, the 2013 event attracted more than 450 participants who shared their experience and expertise with colleagues. CTRL serves as a catalyst for inspiring, mentoring, and celebrating faculty in their roles as teachers and researchers. CTRL collaborates with the campus community to create opportunities for faculty to re-envision and strengthen their teaching and research practices and to help prepare the next generation of college faculty. Organizationally, CTRL contains three groups. The Teaching and Learning Resources Group works with faculty to enhance student learning, to provide training in pedagogical uses of digital media, and to promote

environmental sustainability in the classroom. This group also runs the aforementioned Ann Ferren conference (held each January) and the annual fall teaching, research, and technology workshops (which attracted more than 220 faculty in fall 2013). In addition, it organizes a series of noontime conversations, the yearlong AU Entrée Program (for orienting new faculty members), the three-year Greenberg PhD Seminars Program (which trains doctoral students to become members of the professoriate), and the Greenberg MA seminars.

The Research Support Group assists faculty and doctoral students in teaching and research involving quantitative or qualitative data and applications. The group partners with colleagues across campus in evaluating, implementing, and supporting new teaching and research platforms (for example, high-performance computing and virtual computing). It also organizes faculty users groups and facilitates teaching and research collaboration. The Online Learning Group offers pedagogical consulting and training for teaching online or hybrid courses. The group also shares alternative teaching models for continuing classes when inclement weather or other circumstances preclude meeting face-to-face.

### **Pedagogical Uses of Technology**

The role of technology in teaching continues to expand nationally. From its earliest days, CTRL reached out to faculty through workshops or individual training on such tools as PowerPoint, email, Blackboard, and website development. In 2004, the provost's office initiated a program for training faculty on how to develop online courses. As of spring 2013, 198 faculty members have received this training. In addition, CTRL offers training for faculty developing hybrid courses (partly face-to-face, partly online). At the Washington College of Law, a technology committee hosts meetings on use of technology in the classroom.

A new initiative as of fall 2012 was campus adoption of Panopto, a video capture system that faculty can use to create short lecture videos and students can use in preparing video-based assignments. As of spring 2013, over 150 faculty members had received Panopto training. The University Library continues to train faculty on Blackboard and Collaborate (AU's learning management systems) and Panopto. Over the past academic year, more than 260 faculty members received such training. This technology has been used successfully in programs such as Kogod's Professional MBA Program, which delivers courses in hybrid mode for working professionals. The University Library faculty also provides information literacy sessions for students. The information literacy program has been very well utilized, averaging

### **AU's Certification for Online Teaching**

AU's online certification ensures that faculty are prepared to teach in an online environment. The certification, required for those teaching online, has three milestones.

1. Preparing a revised syllabus that reflects the online nature of the course being taught.
2. Creating a Blackboard course site with one full week of content and discussion.
3. Under goal peer review by colleagues and by CTRL online learning trainers.

The four-week faculty course for certification has been well received by participants.

452 classes serving 8,835 students over the past three years alone. In addition, AU teaches a course each semester on digital citizenship as part of its General Education Program.

AU has undertaken a university-wide mobile pedagogy initiative. In fall 2012, AU collected input from faculty on the kinds of mobile functionality they might like to use in their classes. In spring 2013, more than 125 students were surveyed through a questionnaire and focus groups. A team of faculty (along with CTRL, the Office of Information Technology, the University Library, and University Communications and Marketing) met in spring and summer 2013 to strategize options. In fall 2013, the university will launch a series of pilot projects for incorporating mobile devices and applications into classrooms, building on many of the faculty's existing individual initiatives.

Overall, much progress has been made with respect to pedagogical uses of technology. However, technology is dramatically changing the nature of education delivery and much remains to be done. In recognition of the importance of this, the university informally created an Academic Technology Steering Committee (ATSC) a few years ago as a grassroots effort to bring together all of the key decision makers from the Office of Information Technology, administration, library, CTRL, and faculty from all schools. In recognition of the importance of academic technology in the future of education, the provost formally recognized this committee. The committee brings together various stakeholders to provide input into the decision making and budget processes associated with academic technology decisions. In addition, the Faculty Senate has the Committee on Information Services (CIS), which meets regularly to address and study information and technology issues brought up by the Faculty Senate or to bring to the Faculty Senate's attention key issues and recommendations affecting faculty.

### ***Recognition of Accomplishments***

The university has several awards to recognize excellence in teaching (as well as scholarship). The annual Faculty Recognition Dinner is an opportunity for the university to come together to celebrate excellent faculty. Awards include outstanding teaching awards for those in an adjunct appointment, a term appointment and for tenure-line faculty.

(<http://www.american.edu/universityawards/List-of-Faculty-Awards.cfm>)

Each year, CTRL also recognizes faculty accomplishments through a set of awards: the Milton and Sonia Greenberg Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Award, Teaching with Research Award, Jack Child Teaching with Technology Award, Green Teacher of the Year Award, and Ann S. Ferren Curriculum Design Award (a new award to be given for the first time in January 2014). CTRL also has two grants programs (Teaching Enhancement Program and Ideas Incubator Program) that support innovative teaching projects. The Washington College of Law also sponsors an additional set of initiatives to encourage pedagogical innovation and exchange of ideas among the faculty. These involve informal luncheons and workshops, including a January 2013 workshop on innovation in experiential legal education.

## ENSURING EXCELLENCE IN SCHOLARSHIP

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AU has long considered itself a research university, and under the new strategic plan, expectations for scholarly output and impact have increased notably. The available data confirm that AU faculty are, in fact, productive scholars. According to a report from the Faculty Activity Reporting System, over 2010 to 2012, AU faculty published approximately 55 books, 300 articles in refereed academic journals and law reviews, and 150 chapters in edited books per year, among other publications and accomplishments. However, simple counts of scholarly works do not suffice as a measure of quality, influence, or significance. This section, therefore, discusses the processes that AU has in place to evaluate the level and quality of faculty scholarship, broadly defined to include all sorts of publications and creative activities (for example, in performing arts or fine arts) that do not fit within more conventional academic boundaries, at both the individual and institutional level.

All units put primary weight on discipline-specific scholarly productivity in tenure-and-promotion decisions for tenure-track faculty and for associate professors seeking promotion to full professor. Moreover, progress in scholarship has a large weight in the reappointment of pretenure faculty (along with progress in teaching) and is also considered as a factor in reappointment decisions for research-active term faculty. For all tenure-line faculty and those term faculty with research expectations, scholarly output is also an important factor in the annual merit evaluations for salary increases (which are conducted at the teaching-unit level, by merit pay committees and department chairs, and then sent as recommendations to school or college deans and the Dean of Academic Affairs (DAA)/provost).

The evaluation of individual faculty members' scholarship begins with (senior) faculty colleagues in individual teaching units. Department or school-level rank and tenure committees, along with the chair or dean, are responsible for judging the scholarly output and impact of the work of each candidate for reappointment, tenure, or promotion and for making the case to the CFA, DAA, provost, and Board of Trustees that the individual's performance meets the standards set by that teaching unit. Many indicators and criteria are used, including evaluations of the ranking and impact of the journals or other publishing outlets, as well as citation counts or book reviews (as appropriate). In promotion and tenure decisions, the views of the external reviewers weigh heavily in the evaluation. Those doing the evaluations must judge the importance of the types of venues in which the work was published, such as top-tier journals versus specialized field journals, niche journals, or interdisciplinary journals. They must judge the overall impact of the publication. Some units have very explicit criteria (such as premier and high-quality journal lists by field used by the Kogod School of Business), but, for the most part, the analysis of individual cases is more discretionary and based on evaluations of each candidate's specific type of work. In those fields in which it is appropriate, external grants are also taken into account in evaluations of scholarship.

The CFA and DAA ensure that standards are applied evenly and fairly across diverse teaching units, and that unit-level judgments about individual candidates are well documented and

supported. Ultimately, responsibility for final decisions lies with the provost and Board of Trustees, who are especially concerned that the lifetime commitments of employment implied in tenure decisions are based on the solid indicators of future scholarly trajectories as well as current and past performance.

Beyond evaluating individual scholarship, it is important for AU to assess how well the efforts to improve faculty research envisioned in the strategic plan are working. Are faculty having visible impact on their respective fields? Are lower teaching loads and other incentives helping tenured faculty as well as junior faculty to be more productive in scholarship? And are various programs, departments, and schools improving their academic reputations and rankings, to the point of achieving greater national or international recognition?

In 2009, the university adopted the Faculty Activity Report System (FARS), which is a variant of the Digital Measures program, to enable faculty to submit annual reports for merit pay evaluations online. The purpose of the system was to make it possible for individual faculty to document their scholarly and creative works, teaching, and service activities.

Although FARS can be used to generate aggregated information, the university recognizes that merely counting publications and other forms of faculty scholarship and creative activity does not yield useful metrics of the quality and influence of faculty research and scholarly contributions, especially at the unit level. Therefore, in 2008 the university began subscribing to Academic Analytics as a way to evaluate faculty scholarly productivity in particular departments and programs compared to comparable units in other institutions. The Academic Analytics reports are available for all doctoral programs and for all departments (except Washington College of Law), regardless of whether they offer graduate degrees. The latest report is for 2011 scholarly output.

Comparisons from year to year are difficult, given that Academic Analytics often changes its data collection methods. However, with these limitations in mind, one may still find useful information that indicates success. Many AU programs improved their ranking between 2010 and 2011 (the latest years in which data are available). Several programs are in the top 20 percent of their field on certain criteria, and a few are in the top 10 percent (see figure 4.9).



**Figure 4.9: Summary of Academic Analytic Results for Programs by Key Indicators**

	<b>Programs Improving (2011 Compared to 2010 Faculty)</b>	<b>Programs in Top 20% of Discipline</b>	<b>Programs in Top 10% of Discipline</b>
<b>Faculty with a Book Publication</b>	Anthropology, Chemistry, Communication, Education, International Business, International Relations, Mathematics and Statistics, Sociology, and World Language and Cultures.	Environmental Science, Finance, History, Information Technology, Philosophy and Religion	Chemistry, Computer Science, Justice, World Language and Cultures
<b>Faculty with a Journal Publication</b>	Education, Government, Marketing, Mathematics and Statistics, Sociology and World Language and Cultures	Environmental Science, Marketing, International Relations	Finance and Real Estate
<b>Faculty with a Citation</b>	Accounting, Communication, Economics, Education, Finance, Government, History, Justice, Marketing, Mathematics and Statistics, Physics, International Relations, Sociology, and World Language and Cultures.	World Language and Culture, Marketing, International Relations	Finance and Real Estate, Management
<b>Overall Ranking</b>	Accounting, Communication, Economics, Education, Finance and Real Estate, Government, International Business, International Relations, Literature, Management, Marketing, Mathematics and Statistics, Philosophy and Religion, and Physics.	Marketing, World Languages and Cultures	Finance and Real Estate

American University has some strong PhD programs (for example, in psychology and SIS), but the National Research Council doctoral rankings are not strong for many others. Similarly, despite some exceptions, the overall academic reputation of many AU departments and programs falls short of the top.

The challenge with most of these data is that they do not tell the whole story of AU's success. For example, much of the funding that faculty receive as individual scholars is not recorded in award data, but this is also true of other university academic units. Moreover, they do not capture all the goals and aspirations of departments. For example, many departments have more recently articulated goals for publishing in high-impact journals. The change in

the culture in these units is significant. Further, with so many new high-performing faculty, a lag of two years in the Academic Analytics data is significant, and many units are expected to improve in citations in the near future.

Examples of specific faculty distinction in scholarship and creative work are numerous. The provost's 2013 annual address to the faculty points to many examples, including the following accomplishments:

- H. Kent Baker (KSB) is recognized by the *Journal of Finance Literature* as among the top 1 percent of the most prolific authors in finance
- W. Joseph Campbell (SOC) received the National Society of Professional Journalists Sigma Delta Chi award for research and Journalism.
- Robert F. Durant (SPA) received the 2012 Dwight Waldo Award from the American Society for Public Administration for distinguished contributions to research in public administration over an extended career and the 2013 John Gaus Award from the American Political Science Association for exemplary scholarship in the joint traditions of political science and public administration.
- Robert Dinerstein (WCL) received the American Bar Association's (ABA) Paul G. Hearne Award for Disability Rights.
- Michelle Egan (SIS) has been selected as the Jean Monnet Chair by the Commission of the European Union.
- Todd Eisenstadt (SPA) received the Van Cot Award from the Political Institutions Section of the Latin American Studies Association.
- Mary Gray (CAS) has been elected a fellow of the American Mathematical Society.
- Claudio Grossman (WCL) has been recognized as one of the 25 most influential persons in legal education.
- Donald Williams (KSB) has been recognized as the 2013 Person of the Year by Tax Notes, a leading publication for tax professionals.

### **Support for Research and Creative Work**

AU has given much attention to improving the research and grants infrastructure. This has been a response in part to concern over the university's Carnegie Classification. American University is listed as a doctoral-research university, the base category of a research university in the classification system. By comparison, most of AU's peers are categorized as research universities (high research activity). A major factor in the categorization has been AU's level of research and development (R&D) expenditures. The university recognized the need to improve its support of activities related to funded and unfunded research.

In 2010 Provost Scott Bass and Vice President Don Myers convened a Research and Grants Infrastructure Task Force. The purpose of the task force was to gather information across campus about issues associated with the infrastructure needed to most effectively support activities related to both funded and unfunded research, scholarly and creative activities, and training programs. The task force assessed the current environment for research, studied best practices from other institutions, and offered recommendations for improvement. As part of its work, it collected extensive information about the research and grants infrastructure. It conducted a survey of faculty and held seven town hall meetings from January to March 2010. A consulting group helped it to examine best practices. The group made more than 90 recommendations related to:

- improving the ability of faculty to implement programs of research, scholarship, professional, and creative activities
- enhancing the project- and grant-management structures
- improving the physical, library, and information technology structures that strengthen the university's capacity to support faculty research

Individual academic units have also taken steps to facilitate faculty applications for fellowships and grants. In January 2011, the School of Public Affairs established the Washington Institute for Public Affairs Research to provide faculty with staff support to pursue funding. In September of that year, the School of International Service added its backing to the initiative. In March 2013, SIS established a separate International Affairs Research Institute, which allowed both schools to focus on their areas of expertise for funding. The staff of these institutes provide a range of services, including identifying funding opportunities, engaging with faculty to develop their research agendas, identifying potential collaborators both inside and outside of the university, as well as assistance in preparing narratives and budgets. They also help to disseminate faculty research. These institutes have facilitated an increase in faculty applications for funding.

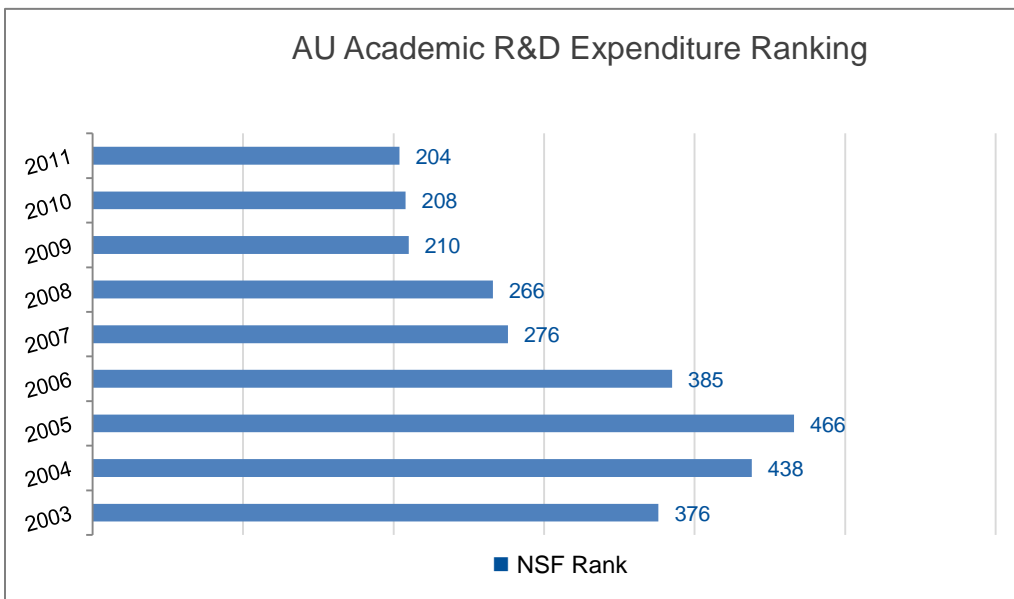
Tenured faculty are eligible for a single fully paid semester sabbatical or a year at half pay once every seven years of service (after accruing the equivalent of six years of service). For AY2013–14, 37 faculty members took a sabbatical. This represents 10.1 percent of the tenured faculty. Tenure-track assistant professors are eligible for the Junior Faculty Teaching Release so long as they apply for external funding. (Receipt of external funding is not necessary to receive the released time.) This award enables a semester's concentrated focus on research without teaching responsibilities prior to tenure review. The revised faculty manual also increases support for research leave. A faculty member who receives funding through a prestigious award for scholarship may apply for research leave. Recipients receive at least 10 percent of their university salary plus benefits. If an award plus the 10 percent of salary does not equal a recipient's AU salary, the recipient may negotiate with the unit dean and the dean of academic affairs for supplementary funding to make up the difference. This flexibility is another way in which the university is supporting faculty research. New tenure-

line faculty can negotiate start-up funds to support their research and the university offers internal grants to support faculty research. All of these measures are forms of support to assist tenured and tenure-line faculty complete scholarly work.

The support is expected to lead to increases in external funding in the long run. However, the short-term results are mixed. The total number of projects awarded in FY2013 is up from 2009 but down slightly from 2011. While the actual number of awards increased in CAS from 69 to 77, the dollar value for that school decreased from \$11.5 million to \$7.2 million. For the year ending in April 2010, the university received \$19.7 million dollars for sponsored research. Faculty managed to increase awards in the subsequent two years to \$29.5 million and \$26.9 million respectively. For 2013, however, external awards fell to \$20 million. Of course, external funding flows are rarely smooth, and the last few years have seen budget cutbacks at many funding agencies, but the university still expects to see a payoff from its efforts to enhance external funding over the next several years.

While sponsored research funds are not showing steady quantitative increases from 2009 to 2013, AU's ranking for total National Science Foundation R&D expenditures (a ranking that includes university expenditures) has improved dramatically. In 2003, AU ranked 376th (see figure 4.10). By FY2011, AU ranked 204th. This was due to a combination of investment in AU expenditures, improvements in sponsored funding, and improved methods for tracking research expenditures. While this improvement is not expected to lead to a change in AU's Carnegie Classification, AU is satisfied that progress is being made and that AU's rank is more in line with a stronger cohort of comparator institutions.

**Figure 4.10: AU's Academic R&D Expenditure Ranking (NSF)**



Source: NSF Academic Institutional Profile (<http://webcaspar.nsf.gov/profiles/site?method=view&fice=1434>).

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Offering Competitive Salaries and Benefits

AU has continued to add positions (both tenure line and term) and to award faculty salary increases despite difficult economic times. AU salaries for full and associate professors are comparable to peer institutions and reach established internal targets. The same cannot be said about the salaries for assistant professors and instructors. The university has recognized this shortcoming, but progress in resolving it has been slow.

The AU Board of Trustees has a long-standing policy that the university should pay faculty commensurate with the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) 1 rate for private nonunionized universities. AU has neither a medical school nor an engineering college, but it does have both a business school and a law school. It is also located in an urban, relatively high-cost region of the country. AU uses a peer group of universities that comes closest to being comparable to evaluate salaries. The set of peer institutions listed below in figure 4.11 have no medical school or engineering college, but they do have either a business school or both a business and a law school. They are all located in the northeastern United States.

**Table 4.11: Average Faculty Salaries by Rank Fall 2012 (AAUP)**

	Full Professors	Associate Professors	Assistant Professors*	Instructors*
American University	\$159,400	\$102,300	\$76,600	\$51,200
Boston College	\$159,200	\$103,400	\$88,300	\$73,200
Brandeis University	\$131,400	\$93,400	\$83,400	\$59,000
Clark University	\$105,000	\$81,700	\$70,000	NA
Fordham University	\$149,800	\$106,600	\$93,900	\$83,000
Syracuse University	\$122,800	\$87,700	\$75,500	\$68,000

Source: “2013 AAUP Faculty Salary Survey Interactive Data Tool,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

\*Note that these categories include many term faculty. See the discussion in the text regarding how AU’s use of these ranks, especially for term faculty, pulls down the averages for these ranks relative to other institutions.

Average salaries for full professors at AU slightly exceed the AAUP 1 target (\$159,400 versus \$143,125 for 2012). Salaries for associate professors also exceed the AAUP 1 objective (\$102,300 versus \$101,072 for 2012), but associate professor salaries among the peer group institutions that have both business and law schools were quite close in 2012. AU's relative salary performance weakens in the lower ranks. The average salary for an assistant professor in 2012 was \$76,600, which is 12 percent below the university's AAUP 1 goal, yet less than \$150 below AAUP 2. AU also placed fourth within its peer reference group of six for assistant professors. AU placed fourth among the five comparator universities that use the instructor category. AU continues to make progress in increasing average salaries at the assistant professor and instructor ranks ([AU Average Faculty Salaries](#)).

The comparisons for ranks of instructor and assistant professor could be affected, however, by some issues in how certain term faculty are classified at AU versus other institutions. The university has permitted term faculty hired before 2010 to keep the assistant professor title and allows new term hires with a strong record of research productivity to receive the rank of assistant professor on a case-by-case basis (although there have been few of the latter). This policy means that some term faculty who might be classified as lecturers at other institutions (and would be at AU, if they had been hired after 2010) are included in the category of assistant professors along with tenure-track junior faculty. This fact could hold down the averages for both assistant professors (since salaries for term assistant professors are lower than for those on tenure track) and lecturers (since some of the better-paid term faculty do not have this title).

AU has worked to make its use of faculty titles more in line with other institutions. Previously, term faculty were given the title of assistant professor. These were teaching-focused faculty, and their salaries brought down the overall average. Under the new faculty manual, term faculty customarily do not use the assistant professor title. All new research active assistant professors being hired are being compensated appropriate to their field and more aligned with AAUP salary rank.

There are no benefits exclusive to the faculty. Consequently, the general assessment of benefits in chapter 3 of this report covers faculty benefits. The Faculty Senate Budget and Benefits Committee as well as that committee's benefits subcommittee engage regularly with the university's human resources office to discuss faculty concerns and preferences regarding university benefits. These committees and the faculty senate must approve any changes to salaries and benefits as a part of the university's budget process. The 2011 Higher Education Research Institute faculty survey shows high rates of satisfaction with the university's principal benefits: health care and retirement. Seventy-six percent of the faculty expressed satisfaction with health care benefits, which is on par with the 78 satisfaction rate for private doctoral institutions. Seventy-eight percent of AU faculty registered satisfaction with the retirement benefits, which compares favorably to the 45.9 percent average for comparable institutions.

## Adapting to Changes in Workload and Expectations

As noted earlier, moving to a four-course load for most research active tenure-line faculty was associated with a shift in workload expectations toward a greater emphasis on scholarship. This shift has been enormously helpful in recruiting top candidates for new hires, as the new load specification in the manual makes AU more competitive with peer institutions than the former five-course load requirement.

When efforts to lower course load were instituted in 2008, it was understood that senior faculty who were not “research active” would not have teaching load reductions; thus, some were kept on five- or six-course loads after 2008. For those faculty whose teaching loads were reduced, there is continuous monitoring on an individual basis to see if they still meet their department’s or school’s standards for being considered research active. Faculty are moved to five- or six-course loads if their research productivity no longer warrants a four-course or lower teaching load. Junior faculty receive a four-course load throughout their time on tenure track and sometimes get reductions to three courses (for example, in the first year) as a recruitment device, or even to two courses during their third-year teaching release to maximize their chances of success in qualifying for tenure.

The pace of faculty hiring has expedited the ability of the tenure-line faculty as a whole to adapt to the new workload expectations. Nearly half (46 percent) of the university faculty on tenure lines have been hired since 2003.<sup>10</sup> These individuals arrived at the university during the period when the new research expectations took form, so they are accustomed to those expectations. The ability of some of the remaining senior faculty to adapt has been more problematic. This group includes faculty members who arrived as many as four decades ago, when research expectations were quite different. The more productive scholars among this group welcomed the change and adjusted well; indeed, many were already prolific publishers and continue to be.

One continuing challenge that has been noted is the issue of long-term associate professors who have not been promoted to full professor after many years in rank. For current faculty hired at the rank of assistant professor and later promoted to associate professor, the average time in rank is 9.3 years. Over half of the associate professors have held that rank for 12 years or more.<sup>11</sup>

Several factors appear to have slowed the progression in rank of these long-time associate professors. First, some appear to have entered “the service trap.” The service trap occurs when associate professors take on significant service responsibilities. Some associate professors became department chairs; others assumed major committee assignments. Even

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<sup>11</sup> This group includes 23 percent of the tenured faculty and 99 percent of the tenure-track (nontenured) faculty. The figures omit university and Washington College of Law library faculty. Source: American University Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

<sup>12</sup> Source (hand tabulation): “2011–12 Full-Time Faculty,” *American University 2012–2013 Catalog*, effective fall 2012, Office of the University Registrar, American University, Washington, D.C., Michael W. Giese, editor.

now, some department chairs and program directors at AU are associate professors, and more often than not in recent years, the Faculty Senate chair and top officers have been associate professors. For some time, the university has had a policy of limiting service assignments for assistant professors seeking tenure. This policy, which is common at U.S. universities, has had an unintended consequence at AU of expanding service obligations for some associate professors. While many associate faculty have had success balancing service obligations with scholarship, there is a general sense among faculty that service can have a negative impact on research productivity.

In 2012, CAS did a study of the issue of long-time associate professors, with an emphasis on understanding why women are often in the rank for long periods. The study, confirmed that service and family obligations are issues for both women and men. In 2013, the school used the results and developed ways to support associate faculty. For example, associate faculty who are chairs now get a teaching assistant. Other associate professors—those who are not chairs—are also interested in getting support to help them reach the new scholarship expectations.

The new standards for scholarship necessitate a culture shift on the part of faculty, academic units, and the administration. Faculty must develop strategies for balancing service responsibility with teaching and research expectations. Departments must be willing to provide clear, high, expectations for promotion. Units must also take ownership for quality and be willing to reject promotions if candidates do not meet the high bars that have been set. The administration must provide support to faculty and departments as they work to implement the new standards. The university has made some efforts to facilitate promotions of long-time associate professors to full professor rank. Several years ago, the dean of academic affairs sponsored a program in which long-time associate professors with promising research agendas could win course reductions and research support. At CAS, the dean instituted the policy of selectively allowing a senior faculty member to front-load her or his teaching to 3-3 in an academic year (assuming an average of two courses per semester) to free up a whole semester from teaching, so that she or he could focus on research. Initiatives like this one are encouraging, but their effectiveness needs to be assessed. AU also needs to evaluate what else can be done to assist and encourage associate professors to meet the expectations required for promotion in rank, as well as to enable all senior faculty to take advantage of the opportunities opened up by the shift to lower teaching loads for research-active faculty.

One suggestion is to develop more systematic mentoring and review processes to guide faculty in meeting the expectations for advancing in rank and career objectives. This is important regardless of whether the faculty member is in a tenure-line or term position.

### **Faculty Satisfaction and Balancing Faculty Obligations**

Perhaps the best measure of faculty perceptions of the university is the Higher Education Research Institute Survey of 2011. Five hundred sixty surveys were sent out to full-time faculty—with 44 percent responding. This represented an increase from a similar survey of



2007–08, for which the response rate was 29 percent. Overall job satisfaction (the percentage indicating either satisfied or very satisfied) increased from 68.7 percent in the earlier survey to 77.9 percent in the 2010–11 survey. Satisfaction increased by at least double digits in two specific areas. Faculty were much more satisfied with their teaching load (rising from 49.4 to 68.1 percent satisfied) and opportunities for scholarly pursuit (rising from 54.9 percent to 64.9 percent). Asked if they would come back to AU if they were beginning their careers, 75.8 percent of faculty said they definitely or probably would, up from 63.8 percent in the previous survey. The percentage of full-time faculty agreeing or strongly agreeing that the university is headed in the right direction rose from 59.8 percent to 71.9 percent. Overall, in the 2011 survey, more faculty reported being satisfied with the university now than they were several years ago.

The university recognizes the importance of faculty service to the functioning of the institution, yet the faculty promotion and incentive structure is primarily focused on scholarship and teaching. Service, thus, can have an opportunity cost for faculty, and there is danger that the effort will take excessive time from scholarship. There is a perception among many faculty members that the level of service obligations is high and increasing, but this perception is difficult to verify.

The university also recognizes the challenge that faculty face in managing work and life obligations. A university Ad Hoc Joint Committee for Family Work Life Balance, formed by the provost and the Faculty Senate in fall 2012, analyzed these issues and compiled recommendations. Some recommendations, such as the recommendation to provide emergency child care support, have already been implemented. The university also expanded the reasons that tenure-line faculty can delay the tenure clock by a year. Other recommendations from the report are still under consideration. They include suggestions for additional lactation rooms and facilities, child care for children younger than two-and-a-half, and childcare on-campus after 6 p.m. The Ad Hoc Joint Committee on Family Work Life Balance is planning a survey of the faculty on these issues. This survey will be an important step and the work of this committee demonstrates the university's commitment to supporting faculty to meet their work and life obligations.

### **Preparing Faculty for a More Diverse Student Body**

AU highly values the ability to offer an academic and work environment that is welcoming to all. For example, AU is proud of its reputation as one of the most lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT)-friendly universities. The Safe Space Sticker program includes a training program on heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia, creating a visible support network of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders, and allies. A training workshop entitled Trans 101 was inaugurated in 2010.

The university's Academic Support and Access Center (formerly the Disability Support Services and Academic Support Center) continues to educate faculty on successful ways of working with students with learning disabilities, as well as providing supportive technologies

and classroom note-taking services (for example, for students with visual impairments, ADHD, or dyslexia). The university employs a full-time assistive technology specialist who works with students and is available for faculty consultations. The university is actively committed to ensuring universal design principles, especially as more of its pedagogical tools involve online learning. In addition to these diversity efforts on the university's main campus, Washington College of Law (WCL) has long celebrated its highly diverse student body, including racial minorities, people with disabilities, LGBT students, and international students. The JD student body has been majority women since the mid-1980s, and the law faculty itself is highly diverse. Consequently, teaching a diverse student body is not a new phenomenon for WCL faculty.

Since introducing its General Education Program in 1989, AU has specifically focused on helping faculty incorporate issues of race, gender, and class into undergraduate curricular offerings. In 2012, the university consolidated a number of its existing student-focused resources and opened its Center for Diversity and Inclusion. For example, to help prepare faculty for teaching the growingly diverse student population, the university hosted a faculty retreat in October 2012 entirely devoted to diversity and inclusion. Follow-up events included a session at the January 2013 Ann Ferren conference, and faculty workshops/discussions were offered by the Center for Diversity and Inclusion in collaboration with CTRL.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See chapter 2, the section on diversity and inclusion for general information about AU support in this area.

## CONCLUSIONS

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American University has made substantial efforts to improve faculty quality over the past 10 years, especially in terms of scholarly productivity. This drive has been accomplished by variety of strategies, including establishing more competitive teaching loads for tenure-line faculty, emphasizing senior hires as well as junior level hires, decreasing the role of adjunct faculty and increasing the number of tenure-line and term faculty, developing new expectations for scholarly productivity, and aggressively recruiting the best faculty in each field. Concurrently, the university has addressed related factors including faculty diversity, teaching expectations, assessment of scholarship, research infrastructure, external funding, competitive salaries, and workload distribution. The faculty has changed significantly since the last self-study in 2003–04. AU has also made remarkable progress in all aspects of faculty policies, procedures, and practices, which have helped make progress toward the strategic goal of pursuing the teacher-scholar model. These changes have positioned AU not only to make the intended improvements, but also to move into new strategic directions that will make the institution much stronger and competitive in the future.

One key improvement in the last few years is the implementation of a new faculty manual, in which the criteria for promotion and tenure are articulated more clearly. (This is not only important for standard 10 but also standard 6). The reduction in teaching loads has been accompanied by higher expectations regarding scholarship, which has contributed to AU becoming more attractive to high-quality faculty candidates, resulting in the recruitment of very talented junior faculty and accomplished senior faculty. The new faculty manual also articulates more clearly contractual options and ranks for term faculty, who are vital to AU's goals of excellence in teaching. However, implementation of the changes had just begun. There is still work to be done to fully accomplish the intended goals of the changes, and there is recognition that with changes comes challenges. Concerns remain in several areas, including the challenges facing tenured associate professors in meeting the bar for promotion to full professorship, the changed expectations for senior faculty who joined the institution decades ago, and the still-evolving standards for promotion of term faculty in their respective ranks.

One key strategic initiative is AU Project 2030, which has engaged faculty in submitting proposals to make AU's teaching and research more focused on complementary clusters of inquiry, supporting those areas that are more interdisciplinary in nature and which strengthen AU's capabilities in specialized niches that can help the university distinguish itself from peer institutions. The main philosophy behind the AU Project 2030 initiative is that the faculty recruited today will be the senior thought leaders at AU in the year 2030, and that the programs implemented today will be the ones to give AU its reputation then.

AU has good systems in place to track the composition of the faculty and its diversity, although comparing and attempting to match faculty diversity with student diversity more systematically could more effectively further the university's mission. AU also has good

systems in place to follow the ability of the faculty to attract outside grants and contracts and analyze the competitiveness of faculty salaries. However, challenges continue in relation to AU's ability to offer competitive salaries at the lower ranks, especially for term faculty.

In sum, AU has achieved a great deal of progress in implementing its strategic plan, and those actions have changed the composition and culture of the faculty. Overall, there has been a remarkable transformation of the full-time faculty in every category over the past five years, and the university believes that this self-study is being conducted on the eve of a significant tipping point in the institution's academic development. The fact that many newer faculty colleagues have come to AU with an existing base of published work, research grants, and scholarly citations, along with the many incentives and encouragements put in place for existing faculty, create the basis for an expectation that the university will substantially increase its overall scholarly and professional standing and recognition in the foreseeable future.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. Enhance the culture of the scholar-teacher ideal by developing more systematic mentoring and review processes to guide faculty in meeting the expectations for advancement in rank and continued productivity corresponding to their respective career stages and objectives, in either tenure-line or term positions.
2. Enhance infrastructure for supporting and promoting high-impact faculty scholarship and evaluate the effectiveness of existing incentives and opportunities for increasing faculty productivity and external grants. Improve the ability of individual faculty and the university as a whole to systematically document and communicate their scholarly and creative accomplishments to internal and external audiences.
3. Focus faculty searches on strategic goals, including diversity objectives, building depth to foster within-unit and cross-unit coherence, and hiring faculty who promise to have a visible impact in their fields. Ensure that the focal point of all hiring, promotion, and tenure decisions is rigorous assessment at all levels of the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate.

## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

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AAUP 2011–2012 Interactive Average Faculty Salary Tables  
<http://chronicle.com/article/2013-aaup-survey-table/138291>

Adjunct Faculty Employment Agreement between Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 500 and American University  
<http://www.american.edu/provost/communications/June-20-2013.cfm>

American University Faculty Manual  
<http://www.american.edu/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&pageid=1660808>

American University Self Study 2003–04  
<http://www.american.edu/middlestates/Self-Study-Report.cfm>

Ann Ferren Conference on Teaching, Research, and Learning  
<http://www.american.edu/ctrl/conference.cfm>

Beyond SET (CTRL Noontime Conversations)  
<http://www.american.edu/ctrl/noontimeconversations.cfm>

Center for Teaching Research and Learning Website  
<http://www.american.edu/ctrl/index.cfm>

Research Support Group  
<http://www.american.edu/ctrl/rsg.cfm>

Research and Grants Infrastructure Task Force  
<http://www.american.edu/research/taskforce/index.cfm>

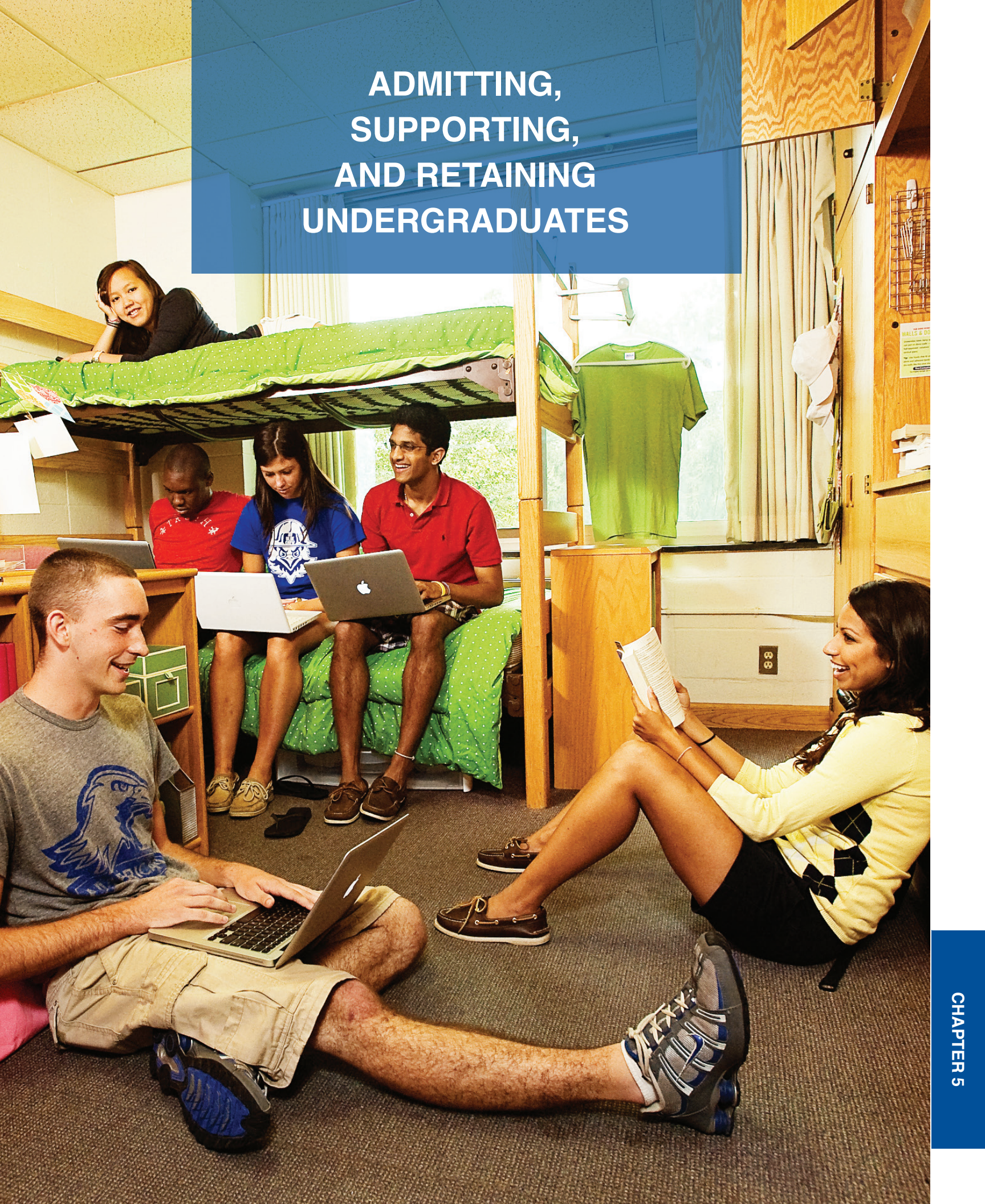
Strategic Plan. American University and the Next Decade: Leadership for a Changing World  
<http://www.american.edu/strategicplan/upload/AU-Strategic-Plan-adopted-Nov-2008.pdf>

Teaching and Academic Unit Promotion and Tenure Guidelines for Tenure-Line Faculty and Term Faculty  
<http://www.american.edu/provost/academicaffairs/unit-guidelines.cfm#ten>

Technology in the Classroom  
<http://www.american.edu/ctrl/techinclass.cfm>

Thirty Three Years of Women in S&E Faculty Positions  
<http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/infbrief/nsf08308/>

# ADMITTING, SUPPORTING, AND RETAINING UNDERGRADUATES



# Admitting, Supporting, and Retaining Undergraduates

## INTRODUCTION

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American University has made dramatic changes to its admissions practices since the past periodic review report in order to more fully meet its mission and respond to the changing nature of higher education. This chapter analyzes how American University meets standard 8 (admitting and retaining undergraduate students) and standard 9 (supporting undergraduate students). By integrating reporting on these two standards, AU hopes to demonstrate the extent of intentional alignment between admission, retention, and support of undergraduate students. The chapter focuses on the following key areas:

- enrollment practices in support of the strategic plan
- services to support academic success
- services to support a positive student experience
- efforts to ensure retention and graduation

## ENROLLMENT PRACTICES IN SUPPORT OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

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American University's mission speaks to the importance of diversity and the value of social responsibility. Yet, the university's undergraduate population has not always reflected this value. Although situated in Washington, D.C., the nation's capital, it was not a truly national university in the sense that it tended to attract many of its students from the East Coast. Even though the university is in an ethnically diverse location, it did not always attract a



diverse student body. Few students came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The issue of diversity, in fact, was an important topic in the development of the strategic plan. In an analysis of AU's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, diversity was listed as a strength ("diverse community") but also as a limitation.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, AU Project 2030 was born out of concern for the undergraduate population of the future. Students born in 2012 (when the project began) would be 18 years old and beginning college in 2030. Was the university preparing to meet the changing needs of this population? It is in this context that the university moved to alter its undergraduate enrollment strategy.

The Office of Enrollment seeks to enroll a diverse class that is comprised of best-fit students for AU. This means selecting students who present a profile that would indicate a match with AU's mission and who would benefit from the educational experience offered at AU. Recruitment, admission, and enrollment efforts are also data driven, and strategic in their focus. In devising enrollment strategies and practices, the primary focus has been on the strategic plan's transformational goals "provide an unsurpassed undergraduate education and experience" and "reflect and value diversity."

For many years, the university attracted a very large percentage of its undergraduates from the East Coast and from families with the ability to afford AU's tuition. Only a small percentage of its students were underrepresented minorities. This reality was in stark contrast to changing demographics in higher education. Provost Scott Bass appointed the Undergraduate Marketing and Enrollment Task Force (UMET) in the fall of 2011 to build upon the efforts already under way to address the needs of the changing population. UMET was a campus-wide committee consisting of representatives from AU's undergraduate schools and colleges, Office of Campus Life, Office of Enrollment, Office of Finance and Treasurer, University Registrar, Academic Affairs, and Office of Institutional Research and Assessment. The group was tasked with studying demographic trends and assessing the impact of these changes on student life at AU. The focus of its work was on emerging student populations at AU, the student experience, and financial concerns.

In 2012, UMET released its final report, *Creating a Culture of Inclusivity*. The report addressed enrollment trends among first-year and transfer students, as well as issues that impact retention. The report also highlights the progress AU has made with regard to the changes in the undergraduate student body and serves as a basis of much of the enrollment information referenced in this chapter. UMET's recommendations address admission practices, funding strategies to recruit new students, support for returning students, and the needs of emerging populations at AU. The changes that have been made as a result of the report are discussed throughout this chapter.

## Changes in Admissions Practices to Better Fulfill Mission

The Office of Enrollment, comprised of the Departments of Enrollment Marketing, Admissions, Financial Aid, Operations, and the Admissions Welcome Center, has implemented a number of strategies to achieve these institutional objectives. The use of a holistic evaluation process is an ongoing practice while others—such as changes in regional outreach, a test-optional policy, the assessment of students’ demonstrated interest in AU as a factor in the admissions evaluation process, and the strategic deployment of financial aid resources—were developed to achieve the university’s goals. Information about admissions policies and criteria is available to prospective students at the admissions website: <http://www.american.edu/admissions/index.cfm>.

### *Holistic Evaluation*

The Admissions staff considers the entirety of the student’s academic record and his or her potential to succeed. While standardized test scores are considered, they are not the most important factor in the review of the student’s academic record. Rather, performance in high school, as measured by grades and rigor of curriculum, is the most important factor in the evaluation. Additional elements in the application provide the context for the student’s performance, and these are considered in the review as well. These include essays, letters of recommendation, extracurricular involvement, and information pertaining to the student’s family background.

### *Regional Changes*

The Admissions office is guided by strategic goals in the development of its recruitment program, as well as data regarding demographic trends. In response to these and other recent trends, the office has restructured the staff in order to increase efforts to reach students of color and to concentrate attention on students coming from the western and southern regions of the U.S. where growth is projected. The UMET report and admissions recruitment plan provide details on the specifics of the office’s outreach activities. All are designed with the goal of identifying and connecting best-fit students with AU.

### *Test Optional*

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), in its 2008 *Report of the Commission on the Use of Standardized Tests in Undergraduate Admission*, urged institutions to rethink their use of test scores in the admission process. As a result, in 2009 the Office of Enrollment launched a test-optional pilot program that allowed fall 2010 early decision (ED) candidates to indicate their preference regarding the use of their test scores in the evaluation process.

In the inaugural year, 79 students (less than 0.5 percent of the total applicants) applied under the test-optional pilot. Test-optional students are not required to submit additional information and are evaluated based on the same components of the application (essays, recommendations, activities outside of the classroom, etc.) as test submitters.

Following research on the pilot, which was conducted in coordination with AU's School of Education, Teaching, and Health and the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, the pilot has subsequently been extended to all regular decision candidates, and there has been steady growth each year in the number of applicants choosing this option. In 2013, 1,695 applications (9.6 percent of total applications) were test optional.

### *Demonstrated Interest*

Within the admissions process, the assessment of a student's demonstrated interest in AU has increased in importance as a factor. It is believed that students who demonstrate a high level of interest learn enough about the university during the admissions process to make an informed determination about whether or not AU is a good fit for them. Students for whom there is a good fit with the institution are more likely to enroll and, hopefully, succeed at AU. This is consistent with AU's goal of increasing yield and improving retention. Evidence of increasing interest in AU appears in recent results from the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) Freshman Survey. In 2013, 54.4 percent of new AU freshmen reported that AU was their first choice out of all the universities to which they applied. That is an increase from 53.9 percent in 2012 and 47.8 percent in 2011.

The Admissions office has tracked the demonstrated interest of its applicants for a number of years, assigning a numerical value to specific activities and actions on the part of students that connect them in some way with AU. These include, but are not limited to, visiting campus, participating in regional events, communicating with admission officers, etc.

While the Office of Enrollment has tracked these activities for a number of years, it was during the fall 2009 admission cycle that the office began to use this information routinely in their evaluation of candidates. During the fall 2012 admission cycle, when AU converted to the exclusive use of the Common Application as the method by which students applied to AU, a supplementary essay question, in which students were asked to describe how well they know AU, was added to the application requirements as a further means of assessing interest. Additionally, a parent letter explaining the role of demonstrated interest in the evaluation process, along with the means by which students could demonstrate interest, was added to the series of student and parent communications.

One of the most significant ways in which a student can demonstrate interest in a college or university is by applying under an early decision program. Under the terms of an ED program, students who are admitted early agree to enroll at the college or university of their choice in exchange for the early notification. Historically at AU, approximately 15 percent of each incoming first-year class enrolled via ED, compared to comparative institutions where these percentages were 40 percent or higher. For the fall 2012 and fall 2013 admission cycles, ED candidates composed 33 percent of the incoming first-year classes at AU.

### *Increased Alumni Engagement*

Alumni are an integral part of the admissions outreach at AU. These connections serve a two-fold purpose, providing prospective students with living examples of the benefits of an AU education and keeping the alumni connected with AU by engaging them with the next generation of students, thereby providing them with an opportunity to serve their alma mater.

There are numerous ways in which alumni have assisted in recruitment efforts, and they are engaged with prospects at each stage of the admissions funnel. Examples include participating in fall regional information sessions and interviews, representing AU at college fairs, attending spring regional receptions for admitted students to assist with conversion, conducting phone-a-thons as a summer retention or anti-“melt” activity, and hosting summer send-off events for newly enrolling students.

The Admissions and Development and Alumni Relations offices have a long history of collaborating to engage alumni in outreach efforts. For example, there has always been a staff person in Admissions whose duties have included serving as a liaison with Development and Alumni Relations to recruit alumni volunteers. Most recently, however the Development office took the step of creating a new position within its Alumni Relations area, associate director of alumni admission volunteers, for the specific purpose of liaising with Admissions to expand alumni involvement. The result has been an increase in the number and type of activities in which alumni assist both domestically as well as internationally. In FY2013, alumni participated in 4,046 face-to-face prospect visits, compared to 477 in FY2009.

### *Financial Aid Strategies and Affordability*

The strategic use of institutional funds to manage enrollment is key to achieving enrollment targets and meeting the enrollment goals of the university. In addition to federal, state, and private sources of financial aid for its students, AU historically commits 29 percent of the tuition revenue generated by undergraduate, degree-seeking students for the purpose of awarding need-based grants and merit-based scholarships. For AY2012–13, this amounted to a total of \$73,233,529. This commitment of institutional grant and scholarship funds by far constitutes the largest source of grant funding obtained by students with demonstrated financial need.

The Office of Enrollment continuously evaluates its funding practices to determine how best to support AU’s enrollment goals. Enhancing socioeconomic diversity is a goal of increasing importance at AU, not only as a means to diversify the composition of the student body, but also in acknowledgement of the changing financial status of the population at large and with an interest in creating access for underrepresented students. The university is committed to creating access for those who demonstrate a fit with AU and the ability to benefit from the experience.

One of the most effective means of providing opportunity and access is through financial support. Without sufficient financial support American University is not a choice for many students. Through the 1990s and much of the previous decade, AU's enrollment and marketing strategies emphasized increasing the academic profile of the university as measured by standardized test scores. As a result, there was an emphasis on using financial aid funds to reward talent through the awarding of merit-based aid, leaving limited funds to support students who were admissible but financially needy.

The report of the Undergraduate Marketing and Enrollment Task Force documents a shift in this philosophy beginning in AY2008–09 when staff within the Office of Enrollment noticed a trend in the direction of increasingly higher percentages of AU funds going toward merit- rather than need-based aid. For example, during the fall 2000 admission cycle, 62 percent of funds offered were for merit aid. By the fall 2008 admission cycle, that figure had grown to 83 percent, leaving little to support AU's neediest applicants.

By the fall of 2009, the country was in the throes of a major economic downturn, causing families to be more concerned than ever with college costs, affordability, and methods to finance higher education. The use of financial aid funds is critical to the achievement of institutional enrollment targets and goals. However, any shift in the use of funds must be gradual and strategic. Beginning with the fall 2009 admission cycle, the Office of Enrollment took steps to address these concerns by looking at both its communication and funding strategies. As a first step, the office revised its communication plan to share information with parents regarding its financial support early in the recruitment process. A letter, along with a brochure, is now mailed annually to the parents of every prospective student to highlight the financial aid application process, as well as to describe the extent of AU's financial support for students and its commitment. Furthermore, in the interest of enhancing its socioeconomic diversity while maintaining quality, the Office of Enrollment modified the merit-to need-based ratio, strategically shifting more institutional funding to need-based grants. Effective for the fall 2009 admission cycle, the Office of Enrollment took steps to modify the merit- to need-based aid ratio. By the fall of 2011, only 54 percent of the funds awarded to first-year students were used for merit aid.

As documented in the UMET report, this shift has resulted in expanded socioeconomic diversity of AU's undergraduate student body. The proportion of Pell-eligible students represented in the incoming first-year class reached 19 percent in fall 2012 and fall 2013 (see figure 5.1 for 2013 data); this was more than double the proportion of 7.9 percent in fall 2008. Also, the university has also been able to meet a higher percentage of the demonstrated need of larger numbers of first-year students compared to earlier years, and racial and ethnic diversity has improved.

The increased focus on need-based financial support of students is critical as the population at AU is changing. As referenced in the UMET report, 65 percent of the eligible population at AU receive some form of financial support. Additionally, AU has a significant percentage

of Pell-eligible (high-need) students. Taken in total, 36 percent of undergraduates for AY2013–14 were of high-to-moderate need (see figure 5.1).

**Figure 5.1: Financial Need of Undergraduates Who Applied for Financial Aid in Fall 2013**

Need Level	EFC Range*	Number of Applicants	Percentage of Class
Pell Eligible (High Need)	\$0–\$5,499	1309	19%
Moderate	\$5,500–\$19,999	1200	17%
Low	\$20,000–\$39,999	897	13%
No Need	\$40,000–\$54,000	301	4%

\*Expected family contribution using federal calculation.  
Source: Office of Enrollment.

As has been noted, AU has made considerable progress in revising its funding practices to better support its students and enhance socioeconomic diversity. Despite these efforts, affordability remains an issue, with many students believing that the current level of support is inadequate given the overall cost of attendance. There have been numerous references in the media to student debt load, as well as net price relative to comparable institutions. AU has worked to address these concerns by launching a college affordability website (<http://www.american.edu/initiatives/collegeaffordability/index.cfm>) to highlight steps it has taken and to educate students and families about these issues. For instance, it is documented that when looking at federal loan debt loads, AU is comparable to most public institutions. Additionally, the percentage of loan borrowers at AU (55 percent) is below the 75 percent national average for students attending four-year, private, nonprofit universities who took out a student loan during AY2011–12, according to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Finally, one phenomenon has created a big problem for a small number of students at American University. A large contributor to the issue of a high average debt for AU grads is elective borrowing—private loans taken outside of the federal financial aid process. A small number of students who chose to take out private loans drastically skewed the student loan indebtedness average for AU, with average indebtedness three times the rate of federal borrowers. As a result of greater awareness, financial literacy, and more informed choices, the number of students taking private loans and their average debt is declining.

Furthermore, the net price metric is potentially problematical for AU, depending on how the measure evolves. With the national focus on college costs and affordability, much attention is being paid to metrics by which to gauge institutions’ levels of support for their students. These could include percentage of demonstrated need met, percentage of students for whom 100 percent of demonstrated need is met, or net price. Using the metric of demonstrated

need met, AU fares well having met the demonstrated need of 98 percent of freshman aid filers for academic year 2012–13. However, much of the media’s attention has centered on the notion of net price as a measure that lends itself to easy comparisons among institutions. And the most recently proposed legislation by the Obama administration looks at net price as a factor to be used in a rating system that will measure college performance. This rating would be tied to federal student aid disbursement to institutions. However, the reality is that net price is a metric that is fraught with complications. The university has yet to decide on its own metric for describing AU’s financial support to students. By having a metric, AU would be better able to track progress on how well it meets student needs.

The current calculation of net price is the cost of attendance (COA) minus the average institutional award (AIA)—need based or merit based. The AIA is calculated by using the total institutional award (merit and need based) committed to the freshman class divided by the total number of students that receive those awards.

The challenge with using net price as an indicator of affordability or financial support is that it is a reflection of an institution’s enrollment strategy. At AU, in addition to offering need-based financial aid, the Office of Enrollment provides a significant number of scholarships, including small awards to low-need students in an effort to gain a competitive advantage over peer institutions. While this strategy may lead to the student enrolling, the current calculation results in a net price of more than \$50,000. The more of these awards that are offered as a yield strategy, the more the net price is increased. Ceasing this practice will reduce AU’s net price, but there would be significant yield implications. So, AU’s relatively high net price is more a reflection of AU’s yield strategy and not a reflection of the university’s level of support for needy students.

That being said, the increasing focus on net price as a metric by which to assess an institution’s affordability warrants that administrators take steps to determine how best to address this issue without compromising its enrollment. In addition to determining the use of appropriate metrics to tell the AU story of affordability, there remains the issue of addressing students’ concern with cost and affordability. Most recently, AU’s trustees revisited the university’s discount rate (percentage of tuition revenue allocated for need- and merit-based financial aid) and affirmed the 29 percent allocation. The university did, however, add another \$1.2 million in financial aid for FY2014. In light of changing demographics and growing student concern, further discussions should focus on the feasibility of an increase.

### *Transfer Students*

Transfer students have long been an intentional part of the enrollment-management strategy at AU, with specific targets set for the fall and spring semesters. On average, approximately 400 transfer students matriculate at AU annually. As noted in the 2012 UMET report, for the most recent three years, there has been steady growth in the number of applicants (both

entering freshman and transfer students) who have completed work at a community college (42.9 percent in fall 2009, compared to 51.6 percent in fall 2012). Within a four-year period, the percentage of transfer students coming to AU from a community college has increased from approximately 40 percent in 2009 to nearly 50 percent in 2012. The transfer population at AU reflects the trend, mentioned in chapter 2, of students choosing to begin their academic careers at two-year institutions.

On average, these students come with increased need for financial support in comparison to students coming from four-year institutions. Students transferring from community colleges are among the neediest of this population (see figure 5.2).

**Figure 5.2: Financial Need of Transfer Students Who Applied for Financial Aid in Fall 2012**

	Avg. Income	Avg. EFC*	Avg. Need
<b>4-year Private University</b>	\$110,251	\$30,741	\$33,031
<b>4-year Private College</b>	\$82,118	\$29,277	\$37,053
<b>4-year Public</b>	\$74,460	\$22,778	\$33,729
<b>Community Colleges</b>	\$72,690	\$18,832	\$42,187
<b>All Transfers</b>	<b>\$78,770</b>	<b>\$23,188</b>	<b>\$38,983</b>

\*EFC = expected family contribution.  
Source: Office of Enrollment.

On average, first-year students are discounted at a rate between 32 percent and 34 percent, while the comparable rate for transfer students is between 7 percent and 11 percent. Much of the difference has to do with the increasing level of competition to recruit new first-year students to AU by making strategic use of those resources to create attractive financial packages. Remaining resources are used to support and retain continuing students, thereby leaving little to fund transfers. However, as the data on new transfer students indicate, the financial needs of this group will only continue to grow.

### *Assessing the Effectiveness of Changes*

As indicated earlier, AU has made a number of changes in its recruitment, admission, and funding practices in the interest of fulfilling its institutional mission and responding to demographic changes.

AU has experienced increasing diversity in each cohort of new first-year students since fall 2008. In AY2008–09, underrepresented students of color comprised 7.9 percent of the incoming class, compared to 18.0 percent of the cohort which entered in fall 2013. Socio-economic diversity is increasing as well, with 19 percent of entering students in fall 2013



being Pell eligible compared to 7.7 percent in 2008; and first-generation students have nearly tripled. It is particularly noteworthy that the academic quality of each incoming class remains strong during this time (see figure 5.3).

**Figure 5.3: Entering Status for First-Time Freshmen, 2009–13**

Freshmen	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Target	1500	1500	1550	1575	1600
Enrollment	1533	1502	1541	1597	1635
Admit rate	53%	43%	42%	44%	43%
Yield rate	21%	21%	21%	22%	22%
Avg. GPA	3.77	3.80	3.82	3.72	3.74
Avg. SAT	1265	1275	1262	1257	1254

Sources: Enrollment targets from EagleData budget reports; enrollment data reflected as of annual census. Admit and yield rates from admissions snapshot data. Average GPA and SAT from Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

As is the case in other areas by which diversity is measured, the incoming classes are becoming more reflective of the population shifts taking place within the U.S., most notably in the West and the South (see figure 5.4).

**Figure 5.4: Freshmen by Region**

U.S. Students by Region:	Fall 2003 (Last Self-Study)	Fall 2009 (Last PRR)	Fall 2013
DC/MD/VA	12.8%	12.7%	10.1%
Mid Atlantic	39.2%	37.9%	32.7%
New England	15.8%	14.9%	14.2%
Midwest	11.2%	9.3%	9.6%
South	12.0%	12.2%	17.6%
West	7.2%	12.0%	14.3%
U.S.: Overseas	0.8%	0.3%	1.0%
Unknown	1.0%	0.8%	0.6%

Source: Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

New strategies such as test optional are proving to be effective as a means of attracting students to AU who might otherwise never have applied, including students of color. As the number of students choosing to apply under the test optional pilot has increased, so too has the number of students of color choosing to do the same (see figure 5.5).

**Figure 5.5: Multicultural Test-Optional Applicants**

	2010*	2011	2012	2013
<b>Total Test Optional</b>	79	870	1302	1695
<b>Multicultural Test-Optional Applications</b>	27	254	478	775
<b>% of Test Optional from Multicultural</b>	34%	29%	37%	46%

\*Inaugural year.

Source: Office of Enrollment.

The Office of Enrollment has instituted a number of new communication, recruitment, admission, and funding strategies, all with promising results. Its partnerships, with the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment and the new retention office, are invaluable in assessing the effectiveness of these new strategies and informing future practices.

## SERVICES TO SUPPORT ACADEMIC SUCCESS

AU provides a range of services and programs to support students' academic success. This section of the chapter highlights a selection of the offices and services that work with students and the measures they take to provide targeted assistance to support their success. These include professional academic advising, the Care Network, the Academic Support and Access Center, the Counseling Center, and the University Library. (Details about such programs and their services can be found on the university website.) Many services are routinely evaluated by students through the university's Campus Climate Survey, which asks about many aspects of students' experiences concerning academics, university services, and the campus community. The results of the survey are used to assess and improve the university.

### Professional Academic Advising

The AU community places high value on a dynamic, combined academic program unique to each student's interests, abilities, and values. Therefore, academic advising at AU follows a professional advising model across the five undergraduate schools and colleges (referred to as the academic units), based on common mission and vision statements developed in 2010 by the academic advising community:

**Mission.** At American University, undergraduate academic advising is a collaborative and purposeful partnership between advisors, the AU community, and students. Approached from a holistic perspective, this process considers and respects students' diverse backgrounds, interests, and abilities. Academic advisors facilitate the identification and achievement of the student's educational and professional goals.

**Vision.** Undergraduate academic advising at American University models best practices for professionalism, collaboratively supports student development, and fosters an environment of student accountability and engagement.<sup>1</sup>

The university does not have a centralized advising system. Instead, academic advisors are affiliated with a specific school or college. In this way, advisors can become experts in the academic area for which they are advising, develop relationships with faculty in those fields, gain knowledge of specific campus resources and programs relevant to these fields, and therefore be better able to serve students in referrals to resources, people, and places.

Students enrolled in multiple academic programs have complex advising needs. Additionally, accreditation requirements in specific academic areas also have an impact on academic advising. In 2005, the Undergraduate Advising Council was developed to provide leadership for the academic advising community and to ensure common goals and processes across the five advising offices. Methods of advising are based on knowledge of student development theory and the growth of students during their college careers. Guidance is provided by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (see the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, *The Role of Academic Advising Programs*), which states that “academic advising is a crucial component of all students’ experience in higher education.”

While there are many formal venues for faculty advisement of students, many AU faculty informally develop relationships with students that provide mentorship and guidance related to their area of study. These relationships are formalized in the College of Arts and Sciences, where academic advising is collaborative between the professional academic counselors and faculty advisors. At the point in which CAS students formally declare a major, they are also assigned a faculty advisor to provide substantive guidance on major specific issues such as research, experiential learning, and postgraduation planning.

### Assessing Advising

The provost's office used the results of the 2011 Campus Climate Survey to explore issues related to the retention of advisors and aspects of quality. After changes were made, satisfaction with the accuracy of the advice received increased from 74 percent to 77 percent at the undergraduate level and 73 percent to 87 percent at the graduate level between 2011 and 2013.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to <http://www.american.edu/soc/resources/Undergraduate-Advising.cfm> for an example of the description of AU's academic advising mission and vision.

Current practices in the AU academic advising community are successful in several ways. Students complete internships for experiential learning purposes, and the academic advising process accommodates changes in major, leaving and returning to the institution, multiple major and minor programs, and appropriate referrals to campus resources. The goals (that is, learning outcomes) of academic advising are shared with new students at orientation programs and reiterated at every phase of transition and advising session. Additionally, the AU Career Center works closely with the academic advising community to provide services to students to allow them to gain experiential learning opportunities, to move through their career development process appropriately, and to accomplish set goals postgraduation. The two processes, academic advising and career advising, are very much linked, working together to provide the support that allows AU students to achieve great success. That being said, there may be even more opportunities for collaboration. During the self-study's comment period, it was suggested that advisors might be able to play a bigger role in helping students with life skills development. The Career Center would appreciate the opportunity to communicate more on issues related to internships. In 2014, more opportunities for interaction between the Career Center and advisors will be developed.

While advising functions are decentralized, the university has taken important steps to improve the advising processes with the goal of improving the consistency of advice and increasing the consistency and integrity of decisions that impact students. The revised Undergraduate and Graduate Academic Regulations emphasize that the function of advising is to support academic standards. This is creating a culture shift, as advisors emphasize student support, not student advocacy. The new regulations, along with raised academic expectations, contain only the essential policies for attaining a degree and have resulted in substantially fewer petitions for exceptions. Lead academic advisors assisted with the technical implementation, planning for the launch, and anticipated the adjustment that the advising community would need to make.

Changes were also made to improve the integrity and consistency of the articulation of transfer transcripts. During 2012-13, the university began developing an extensive articulation database. While in the past, advisors had a major role in deciding whether a transfer student's courses were equivalent to AU courses, now faculty members review the courses and make a decision about equivalency. This information is fed into a database so that, eventually, students from the institution will be able to tell in advance how their courses map to AU courses.

The transfer articulation process involved extensive planning and meeting with the lead advisors to prepare for the shift from advisors to faculty articulation of courses. Because the process was new and faculty had to create new articulations for the majority of courses, there were some delays in the two- to three-week planned time for the completion of a student's articulations. Processes were developed to expedite delayed reviews, but there was some confusion in this first year about processes, and this led to miscommunication. While this was frustrating for many advisors and academic administrators, it has led to a recognition

that the university needs to build more effective ways to convey important advising information across the different schools and colleges.

Advising plays a critical role in student success. While assessments from students have helped underscore some of the strengths and challenges of the current assessment model, a comprehensive review of advising (including a review of the success of recent changes) has not been conducted. Given the incredible changes taking place in AU's undergraduate population and the extensive changes taking place in advising, it is appropriate that the university assess the advising system.

### Care Network

The Care Network (<http://www.american.edu/ocl/dos/Care-Network.cfm>) is an online reporting system administered by the Office of the Dean of Students designed to identify at-risk students who can benefit from targeted intervention and support. Once identified as potentially at risk by a faculty or staff member, the student is assigned a case manager who works with the student until the presenting concerns are resolved. Students with significant or complex behavioral, emotional, social, academic, or medical concerns are referred to the Care Team, an interdisciplinary team that meets weekly to discuss and develop appropriate interventions. The student's case manager communicates regularly with the academic advisor, faculty members, and other campus partners, as appropriate, to ensure that student interventions are coordinated and effective. Approximately 1,300 Care Network referrals are received annually. Additional data on Care Network referrals, case types, and intervention success rates may be found in the Office of Campus Life annual report.

### Academic Support and Access Center (ASAC)

The ASAC (<http://www.american.edu/ocl/asac>) provides comprehensive support to any student who wishes to develop or enhance the academic skills necessary for success in college. In addition, students with documented disabilities utilize the center to obtain accommodations in compliance with ADA/504/508 requirements. The center's goal is to help students achieve their full academic potential, while creating equal access to all educational and cocurricular programs at AU. The center offers individual appointments with professional academic counselors; a writing lab; study skills workshops (including time management, effective writing, textbook reading, note taking, critical thinking, memory skills, and test taking); peer tutor referrals; group tutoring in supplemental instruction sessions; assistive technology consultation; targeted services for specific student populations (multicultural students, international students, veterans); academic support for student-athletes in the Department of Athletics; and assistance for graduate students in their course work or in preparations for comprehensive examinations. Entering freshmen with learning disabilities may apply for transition support through the nationally acclaimed Learning Services Program. The center serves 6,000 students annually; of these, 600 receive accommodations for a documented disability. Additional data on center usage may be found in the Office of Campus Life annual report.

## Counseling Center

The Counseling Center (<http://www.american.edu/ocl/counseling/index.cfm>), which is staffed with psychologists and predoctoral psychology graduate trainees, offers confidential therapy, workshops, discussion groups, and self-help resources to assist students with managing their mental health needs. Referrals to off-campus mental health providers are available for those with more complex or intensive needs. Center providers coordinate care with the psychiatric nurse practitioner in the Student Health Center for those students managing symptoms with psychiatric medication. The center is open Monday through Friday for routine and emergency assistance. In addition, a counselor is on call during nonbusiness hours for emergency consultation and crisis management.

Students in distress who want to access counseling services at the Counseling Center can do so by scheduling an initial intake appointment (typically available within one week) or a same-day emergency appointment. Students are comprehensively assessed and then given a recommendation for treatment. Recommendations include short-term individual therapy in the Counseling Center; group therapy; referrals to other offices and services on campus (for example, the dean of students' office; Student Health Center psychiatric nurse; Academic Support and Access Center; Career Center, etc.); or referral to specialized or long-term treatment with community providers (including low-fee options). Student cases deemed appropriate for counseling services in the center are assessed at the weekly case-assignment meeting, so that the most distressed and/or impaired students are given priority for assignment to a therapist. For students who need to be seen immediately, the center offers urgent care, urgent consultation, and referral services during daily walk-in hours from 3 to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Walk-in contacts are generally brief (10–15 minutes) and are designed to provide students with a brief assessment, support, information, consultation, and/or referrals. For students who come to the Counseling Center experiencing a mental health emergency, as assessed by the clinicians, the contact generally exceeds this brief time frame. This new urgent care walk-in system allows a greater number of students to be seen more quickly. The Counseling Center meets with over 1,000 students each year and has adapted to growing demand by adjusting its clinical service delivery model to allow a greater number of students access to counseling services, but in more time-limited treatment, typically six to eight sessions. Data on the center's effectiveness may be found in the Office of Campus Life annual report.

## MAP-Works

MAP-Works is a holistic approach to student achievement and retention, providing a platform of information that staff use to identify at-risk students early in the term. It allows staff the ability to coordinate outreach efforts with at-risk students by providing the power of real-time analytics, strategic communications, and differentiated user interfacing, with integrated outcomes reporting. Finally, MAP-Works is a tool that teaches students the importance of self-assessment, self-reflection, and self-advocacy in achieving their personal, educational, and career goals.

## University Library

The University Library provides reference support, orientation, instruction, and research assistance to meet the information and technology needs of students. Over the past several years, the library has expanded its online tutorials. It also provides laptops and other technology for students working in the library. Reference support is available online through live chat for students working outside the library. The library is open 24 hours a day with staff support available until midnight Sunday through Thursday evenings and through 9 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays. Surveys of library use from midnight to 8 a.m. reveal the popularity of these hours for student academic study. Student satisfaction with library service is consistently positive and in the 2013 Campus Climate Survey, the university library received excellent or good ratings from undergraduates in these areas:

- library customer service (92 percent)
- research assistance (87 percent)
- online tools (79 percent)

Beginning fall of 2013, several campus units offer their student-facing services in the library. The Department of Mathematics and Statistics consultants help students with problem solving and analysis. The consultants also help students determine the best analytic tool for their research and then coach them on its use.

The Writing Lab will offer additional hours of services to students in the evening, in addition to those already provided in the daytime.

Starting in January 2014, the Writing Center from the College of Arts and Sciences will offer classes and tutoring in the library.

## Faculty Student Support

In general, AU undergraduates find their faculty to be available to them when needed. Approximately 94 percent strongly agree or agree that faculty in their major/program are accessible (see 2013 Campus Climate Survey). However, faculty support involves more than just being available should a student ask for assistance. Individual faculty also have ways to reach out to a student should they be concerned about a student's progress. Faculty and staff are also encouraged throughout the semester via a variety of communications to contact a student's academic advisor if they are concerned about attendance or other issues and also to notify the dean of students via the Care Network if they have any concerns about a student.

Faculty are encouraged to submit early warning notices on any student who is not performing at expected levels in attendance, in quality of work, or in any other way. The registrar sends copies of the early warning notices to each student and to his or her advisor, as well as to the university's retention coordinator, so that targeted assistance can be developed and provided. Advisors follow up with all students who receive these warnings. AU is studying

ways to increase the effectiveness of this process, so that more students who are at risk are identified by their faculty and so that outreach is done as early in the semester as possible.

## Orientation Programs

The university's orientation program, [Eagle Summit](http://www.american.edu/ocl/orientation/Welcome-Weeks.cfm), is a way for students to learn about academics and campus life (<http://www.american.edu/ocl/orientation/Welcome-Weeks.cfm>). First-year and transfer students spend two days and one night on campus the summer before they matriculate. For the past five years, participation rates in new student orientation sessions for fall admits have exceeded 94 percent for incoming freshmen and 66 percent for transfer students. The goal of Eagle Summit, coordinated by the Office of the Dean of Students, is to enable new students to make connections with other new students and to engage the campus and its resources to ensure a successful transition to the university. Trained orientation leaders conduct small group sessions to ensure that summit goals are met. Parents attend a separate program during Eagle Summit, during which they are introduced to campus programs and services and learn how to actively support their student's transition to college. There are six Eagle Summits during the summer and one at the start of each semester. To encourage all new students to participate in the summit, registration fee waivers are available for those with financial need.

The Summer Transition Enrichment Program (STEP), established in 1968, is a seven-week summer residential academy for incoming first-year students whose admission qualifications are slightly below those of the overall applicant pool. (<http://www.american.edu/ocl/cdi/STEP.cfm>).

Students identified for STEP typically include those who are first generation or multicultural and/or demonstrate high financial need. On average, around 40 students are enrolled in STEP each summer. The academic profiles of these students often do not match the typical AU student. Most often, disparities center around SAT scores, which can range 100 to 200 points below the scores of the average admitted student. The Undergraduate Admissions staff conditionally admits these students contingent upon their successful completion of STEP, which is designed to provide students with resources and a community to support them in transition. Participants enroll in writing and math or a general education course. Students attend first-year seminars on topics such as time management, career planning, and working with faculty. The program also has on-campus and off-campus research, networking, and community-building activities. STEP is designed and managed by the Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI).

STEP has a long-standing history of transitioning its participants to life at AU, with all participants successfully completing the summer program and with one-year retention and graduation rates comparable to other undergraduates.



## Welcome Week

At the start of fall semester, Welcome Week serves as a “welcome back” for those who attended Eagle Summit (<http://www.american.edu/ocl/orientation/Welcome-Weeks.cfm>). It includes an abbreviated fall orientation for incoming students who did not attend Eagle Summit in the summer and activities designed to introduce students to the service culture of AU and Washington, D.C. All of these programs are led by faculty, students, and staff who have been trained to help students engage with the university as well as with the city. In AY2011–12, 1,126 freshmen (71 percent of the first-year class) and 50 transfer students (16 percent of the incoming transfer cohort) participated in at least one extended Welcome Week activity.

## SERVICES TO SUPPORT A POSITIVE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

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Student assessment and data collection have been critical to AU being able to demonstrate progress, focus discussion, and drive change to improve undergraduate experiences and outcomes. To accomplish this, AU has collected information from students during their time at the institution through national surveys like the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and freshmen census, institutional surveys like the Campus Climate Survey and Graduation Census, and departmental surveys such as those administered by Residential Education and the academic units. As a result, AU has created a number of programs and services to create an unsurpassed experience for undergraduate students. Chapter 6 (“Undergraduate Education”) goes into detail about high-impact academic experiences that facilitate student success. This section of chapter 5 highlights examples of key resources for providing student support. A more detailed listing can be found on the AU website and the Office of Campus Life annual report.

### Center for Diversity and Inclusion

To help ensure that diversity is recognized and valued by all, the CDI is dedicated to enhancing LGBTQ, multicultural, first-generation, and women’s experiences on campus and to serving as a resource and liaison to students, staff, and faculty on issues of equity through education, outreach, and advocacy. The CDI web page describes the full range of services and programs it provides (<http://www.american.edu/ocl/cdi/index.cfm>). In addition, its office space on the second floor of Mary Graydon Center serves as a welcoming haven for students working on these issues or needing a supportive and empowering community regardless of their identities. Among the many services are the Gender and Sexuality Library; Safe Space training (on how to reduce heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia and provide safe spaces on campus for all); a Rainbow Speakers bureau; a GLBT symposium; training for the community on transgender people; multicultural and first-generation college student outreach; women’s outreach; and support for heritage months.

Results from the Campus Climate Survey questions on inclusiveness and diversity give AU an opportunity to explore how the changing campus demographics are impacting views of the campus community. About three-fourths of respondents agreed that the AU community demonstrates a commitment to creating an inclusive campus community, and the overall percentage of those who agree with the statement has improved over time. Respect for diverse views and perspectives declined (from 84 percent in 2011 to 78 percent in 2013). However, a large majority said that their own views and perspectives are treated respectfully by instructors (92 percent), and 83 percent said the same with respect to students. There is little difference on these questions between underrepresented minorities and the rest of the student body.

### **Support for Registration, Financial Aid, and Student Accounts**

AU Central (AUC) (<http://www.american.edu/aucentral>) is a “one stop shop” student service model that brings together, physically and virtually, the frontline services provided by the offices of Financial Aid, the University Registrar, and Student Accounts. The office was launched in the summer of 2010 in response to student concerns documented in the Campus Climate Survey. The purpose of the office is to resolve student issues effectively and efficiently and eliminate the need for students to bounce from office to office. (For more details regarding the concept and function of the AUC, refer to the *One Stop Advisory Council Final Report and Recommendation*.)

Student satisfaction with AU Central Services is monitored, in part, through survey research. Results are mixed. While results from point-of-service surveys are fairly positive, the Campus Climate Survey results seem to indicate that there are still areas in need of improvement when it comes to AU Central–related services. Only 51.6 percent of students agree that AU Central has the “ability to resolve your issue(s)” in the area of financial aid/student loans. Less than 54 percent agree that AU Central has the ability to resolve issues in the area of billing and payments. Students, through representatives in the undergraduate student government, say that services provided from AU Central are in need of improvement.

While students often associate registration, financial aid, or student account problems with AU Central itself, the truth is that issues typically involve multiple offices, including the schools and colleges. AU Central takes complaints seriously. It uses assessment results to help improve its services. Open-ended comments on the Campus Climate Survey have given the office insight into the misunderstanding that students sometimes have about its services. It has been able to identify areas where it can improve. It is working to develop access to key data, so that it can track specific aspects of student satisfaction and operational metrics that provide real-time knowledge of processes that impact the student experience. Ultimately, it hopes to make data on its operations accessible to students so that they can see for themselves how well the office is addressing student concerns.

## Veterans Support

Though small in number relative to other populations within AU, enrollment of veterans, active duty service members, and service members' dependents is increasing at AU. Between 2009 and 2012, the number of undergraduate veterans enrolled at AU increased from 188 to 224. As of October 1, 2013, there are 276 veterans. Much of this growth was prompted by the passage of a new GI Bill which makes it possible for veterans and their dependents to attend private institutions at an affordable cost. AU's Veterans Liaison Network—a group of staff from Academic Affairs (including academic unit advisors), Counseling Center, New Student Programs, Career Center, and offices of the Dean of Students, Financial Aid, Student Accounts, and Human Resources—was established many years ago to help ensure that AU's student veterans navigate the university successfully to achieve their educational objectives. As AU has gained more experience with the newest members of its community, it has responded by creating a new dedicated full-time veteran services administrator in May 2012. AU also participates in the Yellow Ribbon program that awarded more than \$610,000 to military students and their dependents in AY2012–13. American University has been named a military friendly school by *G.I. Jobs* magazine each year since the award's inception in summer 2010 (included in the 2011 magazine edition). AU also offers Air Force and Army ROTC through an agreement with other local universities and is home to AU Vets, a student-run veterans group that helps students transition from service to college life. A new veteran's lounge opened fall 2013.

## Athletics and Recreation, Student Activities, and Performing Arts

AU students are very engaged and apt to take on leadership roles in a range of campus activities and programs. The number of recognized student organizations exceeds 200, including 30 fraternity or sorority organizations. During the academic year, student organizations under the guidance and coaching of the office of Student Activities hold on average over 5,400 events including forums, concerts, movies, Founder's Day balls, etc. In addition to on-campus engagement, AU students are quite committed to community service. In 2012–13, 3,500 students participated in the Center for Community Engagement and Service's sponsored programs, including the Freshman Service Experience, Alternative Breaks, DC Reads, and one-day service events. For detailed descriptions of the programs and their impact, please refer to chapter 8 ("Other Educational Initiatives").

The Department of Performing Arts (DPA) at AU offers a wide range of opportunities to the entire student population. Students from all majors participate in various campus ensembles and productions at all levels as performers, arts administrators, technical artists, and scholars.

The performing arts programs (music, musical theater, theater, dance, audio technology, and arts management) are dedicated to developing artists, scholars, and administrators of the highest caliber. In addition to providing an essential arts presence for the university,

DPA students also serve as arts ambassadors to the broader community in Washington and the U.S. and throughout the world.

AU Athletics and Recreation provides a range of intramural sports activities, ranging from outdoor soccer to inner tube water polo. Students can participate in the Blue Crew, student fans who attend events, or join the pep band or cheering squad.

### **Campus Housing/Residence Life**

First-year student participation in living-learning communities has grown from 12 percent in 2005 to over 50 percent in fall 2013. Students have filled every class and community AU has offered, thus providing evidence of strong student desire for these programs. The research stresses that enrollment in such programs contributes to retention and success, and, so far, students enrolled in them have been retained at higher rates than students not enrolled in similar programs. The strategic plan highlights the strengthening of American University as a residential campus in the campus facilities master plan as a primary institutional goal for the period of 2010–20. The Residential Education Department was created under the Housing and Dining programs portfolio in 2006 to demonstrate that learning happens outside of the classroom, especially in the campus residence halls, with demonstrated links to student learning and success with retention initiatives (see document titled *Residential Education & Learning Communities*). Since 2005, AU has seen tremendous growth in the area of living-learning communities, particularly as a way to introduce first-year students to campus in meaningful and individualized cohorts.

AU participated in the Association of College and University Housing Officers International Resident Satisfaction Survey (known as EBI) for the first time in spring 2008, repeated the survey again in spring 2011, and will continue to do so every three years. In comparison to the 2008 survey, there were statistically significant increases in satisfaction/learning across eight of the 16 factors and sustained performance in the remaining areas. In the 2008 and 2011 surveys, students participating in special residential communities reported higher levels of satisfaction (ranging from 5.21 to 5.46 on a 7-point scale) than those who were not (5.02).

### **Transfer Support Initiatives**

The university has expanded its transfer student orientation activities to help transfer students make a smoother transition to AU. In fall 2012, a specific service experience was added for transfer students similar to the Freshman Service Experience. In fall 2011, the Transfer Success Series, a noncredit workshop series offered during the first seven weeks of each semester, was introduced as a way for new transfer students to connect with other transfer students and to learn more specifically about the campus and its services. Students enrolling in the Transfer Success Series achieved a higher fall-to-fall retention rate of 90 percent, compared to about 79 percent of their transfer peers who did not enroll in the Transfer Success program.

To provide an additional safety net for the transfer student population, the university launched the new Transfer Student Living-Learning Community in fall 2012. This residential learning community houses a group of entering transfer students on a dedicated floor in Leonard Hall, a main campus residence hall. Transfer students strengthen their peer network through enhanced programming relevant to their living community. MAP-Works responses already document positive differences for the students in this living-learning community as compared to other transfer students.

## **ENSURING RETENTION AND GRADUATION**

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An overview of the outcomes of the past decade of assessment by the Retention Task Force points to three major progressions in the AU's approach to improve success and retention. Early in the decade, the university invited representatives from peer institutions who had a demonstrated history of retention results that AU desired to achieve. These conversations led to interventions aimed at stemming losses from the high and low ends of the student performance spectrum. High academic performers who might leave for more "prestigious" institutions were targeted for more recognition and special opportunities, while poor performers (2.5 GPA and below) were targeted for advising and academic support to address underlying problems.

### **Institutionalized Retention Efforts**

AU takes a multifaceted approach to facilitate the retention of students. For example, programs contributing to higher retention rates, like University College and University Honors, were expanded and refined. Additionally, targeted problem solving at the individual student level was enhanced through development of "intentional conversations" with residence hall students, hands-on support for first-generation students, holistic and developmental advising, and the Care Network.

### **Proactive Assessment of Student Success**

Recently, AU supplemented its ability to respond quickly and effectively to student needs and concerns by implementing proactive systems that seek to anticipate the needs of at-risk students before they become apparent to others. The purchase and administration of the MAP-Works student success and retention platform in 2011 is one of many examples of this campus-wide commitment to anticipate student needs, particularly with those students most likely to experience difficulty.

### **Retention and Persistence to Graduation of First-Year Students**

A national comparison of available retention and graduation rates for first time (freshmen) students indicates AU performs better than average for its institutional type, but not as well as some of the institutions identified as comparator universities.

First-to-second-year retention has improved from a low of 86.2 percent in 2006 to a high of 90.7 percent for the cohort entering in 2009, and most recently has remained at nearly 90 percent for the 2010 and 2011 entering cohorts (see figure 5.6). However, even given all the retention strategies implemented since 2011, retention has fallen. The retention rate for the class that entered in 2012 is 88.2 percent.

**Figure 5.6: First-Second Year Retention by Entering Cohort**

Cohort	2009–2010	2010–2011	2011–2012	2012–2013
AU	90.7%	89.7%	89.7%	88.2%
Doctoral Private Institutions	80.3%	80.3%	80.2%	n/a

Source: Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

Six-year graduation rates have improved from 70.6 percent for the cohort graduating in 2006 to a high of 79.4 percent for 2009 and 80 percent for those graduating in 2013 (see figure 5.7). The 2014 and 2015 six-year graduation rates are tracking above the 2013 rate at the four-year mark.

**Figure 5.7: Six-Year Graduation Rates**

Entering Year and Six-year Time Frame	2003/2009	2004/2010	2005/2011	2006/2012	2007/2013
Six-year Graduation Rate	77.2%	79.4%	77.1%	76.8%	80.0%

Source: Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

AU monitors and assesses the retention rates in student populations described by the retention literature as at risk of leaving the institution at higher rates than their peers. These populations include first-generation college students, low-income students, and students from underrepresented-in-college minority groups. While fall 2012 to fall 2013 retention rates for these special populations decreased, as did the rate for all AU freshmen (see figure 5.8), it is interesting to note that of the freshmen who did not return to AU in fall 2013, the majority are not members of the special populations. For example, of the freshmen not retained in fall 2013, only 2 percent were in Summer Transition Enrichment Program (STEP). Still, the drop in retention rates is a concern.

**Figure 5.8: Retention by Student Type**

	Retained Fall 2010 to Fall 2011	Retained Fall 2011 to Fall 2012	Retained Fall 2012 to Fall 2013
<b>First Generation</b>	84.5%	89.8%	84.5%
<b>PELL</b>	86.6%	89.9%	88.3%
<b>URM*</b>	91.9%	89.2%	86.4%
<b>All First Year</b>	89.7%	89.7%	88.2%

Source: Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

\* Underrepresented in college minority groups.

### Retention and Persistence to Graduation of Transfer Students

While retention rates have dropped for first-year students, the results for transfer students is mixed (as shown in figure 5.9).

**Figure 5.9: Transfer Student Retention plus Graduation Rates by First-Year Cohort**

Entering year	2009	2010	2011	2012
<b>1-Year Retention + Graduation</b>	85.2%	82.0%	80.1%	81.1%
<b>2-Year Retention + Graduation</b>	73.6%	74.0%	69.9%	NA

Source: Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

In an effort to address the transfer student experience and improve retention, AU has taken a number of proactive steps such as:

- establishing a transfer student living-learning community floor in one residence hall
- establishing the Transfer Student Success Series, a program that allows new transfer students to participate in coordinated learning experiences to develop the academic and social skills necessary for success (see [Transfer Student Success Series](#))
- entering into Guaranteed Admissions Agreements with two-year institutions that will assist students in earning a bachelor's degree from AU and smooth their transition from community college to AU

## Implications of Changing Demographics

American University's enrollment of full-time, first-year students identified as being first generation or Pell eligible, or from a racial or ethnic group underrepresented in college, or whose permanent home is 500 miles or more away from the institution has increased annually since 2009. Longitudinal studies from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the Higher Educational Research Institute (HERI), and others have examined the retention and graduation rates for these subsets of students over the past decade and beyond. Overall, the data in these studies suggest that students identified with these traits are less likely to persist and to graduate when compared to their peers. These national trends make it clear that if AU wants more positive results in retention and graduation, retention initiatives must be conceived and implemented with special attention to the diversity of the students served by the university.

As the results mentioned above demonstrate, retention rates for these various groups have, for the most part, trended positively between 2009 and 2012. However, as the size of these aforementioned populations continues to grow, some negative trends are emerging that have caused downward pressure on institutional retention and graduation rates. For example, underrepresented minority students increased in number by nearly 60 percent from 189 students in the 2010 cohort to 302 students in 2012. The first-year retention rate of these students reached a high of over 91 percent (173/189 retained) for the 2010 cohort before falling to 86.4 percent (261/302 retained) for the 2012 cohort. In past years, the retention rate of underrepresented minorities tended to be on par, or even to exceed, the overall retention figure. That is not the case for the one-year retention rate in 2013. The results suggest that a comprehensive study of retention at AU is in order.



## CONCLUSIONS

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The face of AU has changed since the previous self-study. The student body is more racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse. The percentage of first-generation students in the student body has increased. The university is expanding its outreach to include transfer students from community colleges. At the same time, AU's commitment to excellence continues. The percentage of students for whom AU is the first choice has increased and the university has improved its selectivity.

AU has made considerable progress in making access a priority. However, access without success (defined by college completion) is meaningless. For this reason, there has been an increased focus on services for students. These changes have all been intentional, driven by data, and tied directly to the university's strategic goals. They have required reexamination of institutional policies, practices, and uses of human and financial resources.

Demographic projections and trends suggest that future populations of students will only have greater need for services and support—financial as well as programmatic—in order to be successful. The literature suggests that the growth in the student population will come from those students who will be at greater risk without adequate support and programs that integrate them fully into every aspect of campus life. Transfer students will be the fastest-growing segment within undergraduate education, and AU will need to continue to develop policies and practices that address those issues which place this population at risk. True access means being mindful of those strategies that promote success. Success will require greater involvement by faculty and academic advising models that reflect the needs of the changing student body. It will require more understanding of AU's new population, through research on retention.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. Develop more transfer friendly practices in both academic and student support services.
2. Undertake a comprehensive research study to identify those populations most at risk of withdrawing from AU and develop appropriate interventions and student services. The study should also include an examination of those characteristics which point to persistence and success at AU, so that these factors may also be incorporated into the admissions evaluation process.
3. Expand college affordability by evaluating the university's merit- to need-based aid ratio and by increasing scholarship funds for tuition and for costs related to experiential learning (that is, internships, community-based learning, study abroad.)

## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

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*Report of the Commission on the Use of Standardized Tests in Undergraduate Admission*

[http://www.nacacnet.org/research/PublicationsResources/Marketplace/Documents/TestingCommission\\_FinalReport.pdf](http://www.nacacnet.org/research/PublicationsResources/Marketplace/Documents/TestingCommission_FinalReport.pdf)

Professional Academic Advising: Mission and Vision

<http://www.american.edu/soc/resources/Undergraduate-Advising.cfm>

Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education

<http://www.cas.edu>

Academic Support and Access Center

<http://www.american.edu/ocl/asac/index.cfm>

Counseling Center and Staff

<http://www.american.edu/ocl/counseling/index.cfm>

Eagle Summit

<http://www.american.edu/ocl/orientation/New-Student-Orientation.cfm>

Summer Transition Enrichment Program

<http://www.american.edu/ocl/cdi/STEP.cfm>

Welcome Week

<http://www.american.edu/ocl/orientation/Welcome-Weeks.cfm>

Center for Diversity and Inclusion

<http://www.american.edu/ocl/cdi/index.cfm>

AU's Veterans Liaison Network

<http://www.american.edu/veterans/AU-Veterans-Liaison-Network.cfm>

Center for Community Engagement and Service

<http://www.american.edu/ocl/volunteer/index.cfm>

Residential Education and Learning Communities

<http://www.american.edu/ocl/housing/reslife.cfm>

Transfer Success Series

<http://www.american.edu/ocl/orientation/TSS.cfm>

# UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION



## 6

# Undergraduate Education

## INTRODUCTION

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American University has always been committed to high-quality, rigorous, and innovative undergraduate education grounded in the liberal arts. The curriculum has always been strong. That said, the last few years have provided an opportunity to review AU's curriculum and benchmark it against national best practices. Across the institution, and in various programs in the schools and colleges, faculty and academic leaders have analyzed courses, reviewed standards in the major, and examined institutional learning goals. In the process of reviewing the undergraduate curriculum of aspirant institutions and in following the latest research on best practices in higher education, the university has made changes to the curriculum designed to improve the student experience. In doing so, AU has been mindful to recognize that changes to the demographics of the student body will continue. Students bring to the university diverse cultural backgrounds that enrich classroom discussions and other campus interactions. At the same time, students come to AU with an array of learning styles and experiences.

This chapter not only describes the ways that AU has changed its curriculum in order to more fully ensure high standards of academic rigor, it also chronicles how the changes result in high-impact educational experiences that will meet the needs of AU's changing student population. The chapter combines a review of standards 11, 12, and 14 in order to analyze the interrelationship between general education and other educational offerings, as well as the important role that assessment plays in advancing all undergraduate programs.

## ENSURING A HIGH-IMPACT EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) is a leader in advancing best practices in higher education. One of its initiatives, called LEAP (Liberal Education and America’s Promise), epitomizes much of the philosophy of AU’s undergraduate curriculum. Launched in 2005, LEAP stresses the importance of a twenty-first century education—“for individual students and for a nation dependent on economic creativity and democratic vitality.”

By “liberal education,” AAC&U means, “an approach to college learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change. This approach emphasizes broad knowledge of the wider world (for example, science, culture, and society) as well as in-depth achievement in a specific field of interest. It helps students develop a sense of social responsibility; strong intellectual and practical skills that span all major fields of study, such as communication, analytical, and problem-solving skills; and the demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings.” (<http://www.aacu.org/leap/>)

AU’s undergraduate education reflects LEAP’s 10 suggestions for high-impact educational practices. These 10 practices are as follows: first-year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, service learning and community-based learning, internships, and capstone courses and projects.

## COMMON INTELLECTUAL EXPERIENCES: GENERAL EDUCATION, WRITING, AND MATH REQUIREMENTS

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The LEAP initiative advocates for “common intellectual experiences” that include a “set of common courses or a vertically organized general education program that includes advanced integrative studies and/or required participation in a learning community.” It also states that high-impact educational practices include writing-intensive courses. AU’s common intellectual experiences center on the General Education Program, the Writing Program, and its math requirement. Information literacy opportunities also play an important role in ensuring that undergraduates have common intellectual experiences.

This section describes how AU has revised its General Education Program and has made improvements to its writing courses. It also plans to partner with Educational Testing Service (ETS) to conduct innovative assessment of writing. Improvements have also been made to the math and information literacy learning opportunities. Finally, AU is updating its university-wide learning outcomes to build upon the General Education Program and to focus on key skills and knowledge.

## The General Education Program

Since 1989, AU's [General Education Program](#) has served as the anchor for a strong liberal arts education by requiring coursework in five foundational areas: creative arts, traditions that shape the Western world, global and cross-cultural perspectives, social institutions and behavior, and natural sciences and mathematics. All undergraduates must satisfy the 31-credit requirement for the General Education Program by the time they are juniors. The requirement includes taking two courses from each foundational area, with an additional credit for one laboratory course in the sciences. Incoming freshmen may apply approved scores on placement exams—such as the AP, British A-Level, or IB exams—for up to four courses. Incoming transfer students may satisfy all or part of the requirement with equivalent transferred courses. Once students have matriculated, they are not able to take any General Education courses other than those offered by AU.

In 2009, the provost convened a task force to review the university's General Education Program. The review included benchmarking the program against those of other liberal arts and research institutions, confirming that the AU program's principles were sound and relevant. However, the study also identified areas needing improvement and found that the complexity of the program led to dissatisfaction. A review of 2007 Campus Climate Survey data, for example, found that only 50.5 percent of students said they were satisfied with the General Education Program. In 2011, 80.6 percent of students said that they understood the purpose of the General Education Program. Some students, and even some faculty, found that the system of linking courses in areas of study added to confusion about the purpose of the program and did not facilitate completion of the program in a timely manner. Moreover, the review found that learning outcomes could be sharper. As LEAP recognizes in its list of high-impact educational practices, there needed to be more opportunities for integrated studies and participation in learning communities.

The new program is much stronger.<sup>1</sup> The revised [general education learning outcomes](#) are more in line with the essential learning outcomes outlined in *College Learning for the New Global Century* and the suggestions in the *Report on the Task Force for General Education, Harvard University, 2007*. The following outcomes are now in place:

- **Aesthetic Sensibilities.** Students will be able to conduct critical reflections on the nature and history of beauty and art.
- **Communication Skills.** Students will be able to interchange ideas and information through writing, speech, and visual and digital media.
- **Critical Inquiry.** Students will be able to conduct systematic questioning and analysis of problems, issues, and claims.

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<sup>1</sup>See <http://www.american.edu/provost/gened>.

- **Diverse Perspectives and Experiences.** Students will acquire knowledge and analytical skills to understand a variety of perspectives and experiences, including those that have emerged from the scholarship on age, disability, ethnicity, gender and gender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation, and social class.
- **Innovative Thinking.** Students will be able to venture beyond established patterns of thought in imaginative and creative ways.
- **Ethical Reasoning.** Students will be able to assess and weigh moral and political beliefs and practices, and they will be able to apply this knowledge to ethical dilemmas.
- **Information Literacy.** Students will be able to locate, evaluate, cite, and effectively use information.
- **Quantitative Literacy.** Students will know how to apply mathematical, statistical, and symbolic reasoning to complex problems and decision making.

These new general education learning outcomes are designed to tie more closely to the mission and strategic direction of the university. They align with most of the *Critical Domains for Higher Education Student Learning Outcomes*, outlined and proposed by ETS. These domains form the basis of AU's draft institution-wide learning outcomes and include creativity, critical thinking, teamwork, effective communication, digital and information literacy, civic knowledge and engagement, and life skills. All General Education courses at AU now must focus on at least two of the program's learning outcomes. While all the outcomes serve to advance the mission, one learning outcome in particular, Diverse Perspectives and Experiences, highlights the strong value that AU places on understanding the complexities of human diversity and on acquiring global knowledge and experience.

AU also made changes to the oversight of the program in order to ensure that more full-time faculty members be involved in its development, teaching, and governance. In order to increase tenure-line involvement, the half-time faculty director position for general education was replaced by a 16-member General Education Faculty Committee (three members per foundational area, plus the chair). Thus, the program now has input from a wider range of faculty with different disciplinary perspectives.

The new program offers greater flexibility in how students complete the requirements, creating sophomore seminars that allow students to approach an issue from an inter- or multidisciplinary perspective. It ensures that the foundational courses are strong and that second-level courses have meaningful prerequisites. For example, one of the new sophomore seminars, "Science and Literature: Bridging the Two Cultures," is team-taught by physics professor Nathan Harshman and literature professor Richard Sha. Students explore the somewhat erroneous perception that literary intellectuals and physical scientists straddle a vast gulf of noncommunication and differences in perspective. This reading-intensive and evocative course meets the General Education Program's communication, critical inquiry, diverse experiences and perspectives, and innovative thinking learning outcomes.



The General Education Faculty Committee conducted a thorough course review through which the teaching units critically examined their General Education course offerings. Much was done to support the Middle States standard on “assessment of general education outcomes within the institution’s overall plan for assessing student learning and evidence that such assessment results are utilized for curricular improvement.” For each General Education course, units identified which outcomes the course covered, the course’s place within the major, its connection to other general education courses, the faculty available to teach the course, the appropriate class size, and level of student interest.

As a result of this self-examination, a number of courses were eliminated, freeing up faculty to develop and teach classes that better fit the interests and needs of today’s students and more effectively meet the program’s learning outcomes. Several departments decided to completely revamp their general education offerings, and faculty interest in proposing and teaching new courses is growing steadily. For example, in fall 2012, the General Education Program received 30 proposals for new courses. Members of the committee work with colleagues across the university to ensure that all general education syllabi clearly identify the learning outcomes targeted by each course and the specific ways the course addresses each outcome. Syllabi are a crucial communication tool for faculty and students, and rigorous attention to these syllabi will help faculty deliver the desired learning outcomes, as well as foster students’ appreciation of general education. Additionally, General Education staff members are working with teaching units to establish meaningful prerequisites for general education courses taught at the 200-level and to develop linked and sequential course clusters as described above.

### **Assessment of General Education**

AU has a long history of formal assessment of general education learning outcomes using a five-year cycle of that includes rotating the original learning outcomes and assessing one outcome each year. The General Education Faculty Committee continues to assess student learning in the General Education Program using a five-year cycle, but the improved committee structure provides more continuous oversight by each area having at least one faculty member who has served for at least three years. Two of the eight learning outcomes are assessed each year for four years, with a fifth year provided for synthesis and follow-up. For each pair of outcomes, a team of four faculty members prepares for assessment by developing a method for determining whether outcomes have been met and selecting appropriate courses from which to sample student work. (The full sequence of assessment activities and assessment team responsibilities appear in a timetable for General Education assessment, which is available on the assessment website. The timetable shows the semester in which each outcome will be the subject of data collection, data analysis, and curricular changes suggested by assessment data.)

In its first year in the new program, 2012–13, a subcommittee of the General Education Faculty Committee assessed critical thinking using the Critical Thinking Assessment Test

(CAT), (<http://www.tntech.edu/cat/home/>). In order to assess that outcome, the group decided to administer the CAT exam, an NSF-funded tool developed by Tennessee Technological University (TTU). In November 2012, four faculty and staff were trained at a workshop held by TTU in Washington, D.C. AU received a \$6,000 grant from TTU/NSF to provide stipends for faculty to score the exams in an all-day scoring workshop. In all, 180 students took the exam. In spring 2013, 12 faculty members and one administrator gathered to score a randomly selected subset of the exams, which were then sent to TTU for evaluation. TTU provided AU's results in a comparison report. In general, the results showed that most student skills appear to improve based on time spent at the university. Upper-division students showed improvement over lower-division students on all but two of the 15 questions on the CAT test: one dealt with spuriousness, or making unwarranted assumptions about whether or not data supports a theory or argument; and the other asked students to identify what kinds of information would be needed to solve particular problems.

Administration and scoring of CAT is a complex process, and CAT staff experts reported some anomalies in accuracy of grading some of the items. The General Education Committee decided to investigate internal modes of assessing critical thinking and will reassess those dimensions that were of particular concern based on AU's CAT results. During spring 2014, the committee plans to focus on assessing information literacy by examining examples of student work from courses that have information literacy as a learning outcome.

In addition to overall assessment of program learning outcomes, the General Education Program also assesses courses. Every semester, each foundational area subcommittee of the General Education Faculty Committee assesses at least one course within the area. The new learning outcomes provide the basis for these course assessments.

## Writing

AU's [College Writing Program](#) is a critical component of the undergraduate educational experience. Incoming students are required to take a two-course sequence (or a one-semester intensive course if they have obtained approved scores on placement exams), such as the AP, British A-Level, or IB exams. Students who have transferred six credits of writing coursework may fulfill the writing requirement by passing the Writing Proficiency Exam, which is offered four times each year. The College Writing Program's philosophy states:

In the College Writing Program, we encourage students to think as writers—anticipating the responses of a reader, exploring the depth and breadth of a subject, and working with language and form to best express their understanding. Our work with students prepares them for the writing that they will do in the academy and for a lifelong process of intellectual discovery.

The College Writing Program, therefore, offers theme- and content-based, writing-centered, interdisciplinary courses. These courses promote approaches to writing that can be generalized to all academic disciplines. We base our instruction on the premise

that while most students are not fluent in “academic English,” the skills involved in academic prose can be taught and learned in the classroom.

The current program came about as a result of several years of review and assessment. In AY2007–08, the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) convened a committee of faculty and staff from across the university to review the college writing requirement and other issues related to the university’s overall learning outcomes for student writing. As part of the review, the group was tasked with examining the program’s learning outcomes and offering ways to best measure those outcomes. The review included looking at writing programs for more than 10 institutions, including Boston University, Emory University, George Washington University, Northeastern University, Syracuse University, Temple University, Tulane University, and Wake Forest University. The task force report was followed by an external review process that supported the recommendations and validated the overall strength of the program. The report and resulting recommendations led to the following:

- the addition of a requirement that all students must take at least one college writing course. Before 2008, students could have the writing requirement waived with various combinations of AP and IB credits.
- the review and development of learning outcomes, as articulated for Courses Lit 100/102/130, Lit 101/103/131, and Lit 106/132. The overall learning outcomes for the program are available at <http://www.american.edu/cas/literature/cwp/students.cfm>. They include outcomes related to concepts of writing, writing process skills, reading/thinking skills, and research skills.
- the creation of a college writing advisory group that oversees the review of learning outcomes for courses, the design of metrics to evaluate learning outcomes, and the communication of best practices in college writing, and the overall quality of the program
- an improvement in the link between the college writing curriculum and the individual disciplines; in 2012, the advisory group conducted a series of focus groups with faculty to better understand the challenges faculty face when integrating writing into their courses. As a result of their feedback, the group conducted a session on teaching writing at the annual Ann Ferren conference, and it is in the process of working with the Center for Teaching, Research and Learning (CTRL) to provide resources for faculty interested in teaching and evaluating student writing
- As noted in the section on information literacy (later in this chapter), college writing faculty partners with librarians to create and teach lessons on specific research skills. Librarians provide one-on-one consultations with students in the writing program and collaborate with faculty on developing research assignment materials. Librarians and faculty team-teach sessions that combine targeted demonstration and practice of information literacy skills tailored to specific writing assignments. Further, the College Writing Program Library Committee has designed a series of teaching modules, sample lesson plans that can be used for teaching research practices and information literacy. The

library has an online information literacy tutorial, with specific learning outcomes, that can be incorporated into classroom assignments and used to improve student skills. (<http://subjectguides.library.american.edu/infolit.>)

### *Assessing Writing*

The College Writing Program has a robust assessment plan and long track record of reviewing student papers as a way to assess the program. Each year the program draws a large random sample of essays from across the programs for review. (They choose five randomly-selected papers from each faculty member in both fall and spring.) Each paper is assessed by two readers using a rubric. This past year (2012–13) the program focused its assessment on research driven assignments. The assessment found that some faculty asked for research without really specifying what it meant to interact with that research. As one response to this observation, the College Writing director scheduled a pre-semester workshop for faculty in the College Writing Program in which they focused on how to prepare an effective research assignment.

Initial assessments of the program are generally positive, with the expectation that they will improve as the changes to the program are fully implemented. Approximately 85 percent of 2012 graduating seniors say that AU developed their writing abilities “well” or “very well,” a figure on par with past years. (Source: 2012 Graduation Census.) According to the 2012 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), AU students are much more likely than their peers to write papers between five and 19 pages; at the same time, the number of papers assigned with fewer than five pages appears to be decreasing.

While the College Writing Program is strong, the program alone cannot prepare students for writing in the discipline. It cannot prepare students for all the types of writing that may be expected of them in their chosen professions. For this reason, the university is undertaking an innovative, forward-thinking partnership with ETS to explore ways to use technology to advance writing skills. While still in the very early stages of development (as of fall 2013), the goal is to develop new tools for giving students feedback on different types of writing, such as persuasive writing or policy writing. The university is looking forward to intensifying its emphasis on writing by using this partnership as a way of more fully meeting the very practical need for students to apply their writing skills to different environments. In addition, AU has formed a task force to explore ways to improve writing throughout a student’s four year experience. (<http://www.american.edu/cas/literature/cwp/index.cfm>)

### **Mathematics**

Incoming freshmen may satisfy the university mathematics requirement in a number of ways, the most common of which is earning a grade of C or better in an approved math or statistics course offered by AU’s Department of Mathematics and Statistics. Currently, students can also meet the requirement with approved scores on placement exams, such as the AP, British A-Level, or IB exams. Transfer students must either pass an exam given by the Department of Mathematics and Statistics or transfer a calculus or higher-level math course.

### *Assessing Math*

In 2006, the Department of Mathematics and Statistics conducted a complete review of courses for nonmajors. Following the results of the review, the department focused on changing the curriculum of specific courses, such as Finite Math. In 2012, a review of Graduation Census results showed that students were not likely to indicate that the university prepared them well in “quantitative reasoning,” and that the percentage of students saying that they were well prepared had declined over time. After much discussion in groups including the Provost’s Operational Council, a working group was established to further assess the issue of quantitative reasoning literacy. The group, led by an associate dean in the College of Arts and Sciences, released a report recommending that in addition to the current mathematics requirement, all students should demonstrate proficiency in basic statistics. Quantitative literacy was one of the primary topics for a faculty leadership retreat in fall 2013. It is expected that recommendations on strengthening quantitative requirements may be forthcoming.

### **Digital and Information Literacy**

An important common intellectual experience that all students have is the integration of information literacy learning goals in both their General Education and college writing courses. Library faculty provide approximately 30 customized information literacy sessions per year for general education courses. Working closely with teaching faculty, librarians focus these sessions on developing students’ knowledge of resources and research skills in their potential majors, going beyond the basic introduction to information literacy given in college writing classes. General Education courses frequently are amenable to innovation, allowing librarians to test new pedagogical ideas or trends in the profession. For example, in 2013, a librarian experimented successfully with a “flipped classroom” model for the general education environmental studies course, ENVS 250. Students watched video tutorials about using library resources and evaluating information outside of class, and they participated in a competition to collect the best resources for a class topic to be discussed during the session. In 2005, PSYC 115G students participated in a pilot test of Project SAILS, a then-emerging standardized test of information literacy skills. In AY2007–08, the music librarian tested a Student Response System with students in the Understanding Music course. Information literacy is also an important component of the college writing courses, as discussed in a previous section in this chapter.

## UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS

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As of AY2013–14, the university offers 68 bachelor’s degrees and 70 undergraduate minors through the College of Arts and Sciences, the Kogod School of Business, the School of Communication, the School of International Service, and the School of Public Affairs. In keeping with the university’s mission, these programs enable students to pursue studies in the arts and humanities, the social and natural sciences, business, communication, public affairs, and international service. As of Fall 2013, the most popular majors and their student population figures are as follows:

Major	Number of students
International Studies	1,868
Business Administration	798
Political Science	678
Public Communication	340
Journalism	214
Film and Media Arts	214
Psychology	190
CLEG	186
Economics	162
History	130
Justice and Law	106
Law and Society	105

### Premedical Success

The premedical programs help students prepare for and apply to graduate programs in the health sciences, including medical, dental, veterinary and pharmacy school, as well as programs preparing students to become physician assistants, physical therapists, and nurses.

There are approximately 200 undergraduates actively engaged in the premedical program each year, along with between 40 and 60 postbaccalaureate students. The acceptance rate to medical school has averaged approximately 85 percent over the last five years for qualified students (overall GPA 3.3 or greater, math and science GPA 3.3 or greater, MCAT 24 or greater). This number includes students admitted to allopathic as well as osteopathic medical schools, as the osteopathic philosophy greatly appeals to our humanistic-minded student population.

It is notable that AU's most popular majors are very different from those at many other universities (<http://www.american.edu/provost/oira/Academic-Data-Reference-Book.cfm>, table 1-6A). None of the top 10 majors is in the natural sciences. According to the 2012 Freshmen Census, approximately 48 percent of AU's undergraduates graduate in the social sciences, compared to 15.7 percent at other select private institutions. This corresponds with the finding that 22.3 percent of AU's students opt for careers in foreign service, and that 14 percent want to pursue policy-making/government positions (compared to a small percentage of students—3.3 percent and 3 percent—respectively at other select private institutions).

That said, AU has a number of smaller, distinctive programs that enable students to do interdisciplinary work that often is related to the sciences. The newest majors at AU—public health and environmental science—are two such examples. Small science programs, like chemistry, are growing. In 2013, 16 undergraduates were primary chemistry majors. Physics grew from nine primary majors in 2007 to 18 majors in 2013. The science programs have been very successful, with many premedical students finding success in getting into medical school.

Between 2008 and 2012, six majors have been updated and approved by the Senate Curriculum Committee. The BS in marine science was eliminated and eight new majors were created, including Arabic studies; business, language and culture; computational science; public health; and environmental science. Seventeen new minors were created, which help students to expand their academic portfolios to include areas like entrepreneurship, leadership and management, international business, Israel studies, and African American and African dialogue. These new majors and minors are consistent with AU's mission, and they encompass a diverse range of studies. They are inspired by advances in technology and changes in the world's commercial and geopolitical structure, as well as perceived demands from the professional world for graduates with better quantitative skills, the ability to work across international borders, and specific knowledge and skills for a chosen field or profession. They are very much in line with LEAP's goal of preparing students for the twenty-first century, and they provide opportunities for top students to challenge themselves academically.

In line with the university's mission of fostering interdisciplinary inquiry, two features of the new majors and minors are indicative of increasing demand for interdisciplinary undergraduate education at AU. First, several of the new major programs were developed cooperatively across departments or schools (for example, the BS in business, language, and culture studies). Second, the substantial increase in the number of available minor fields provides students more opportunities for multidisciplinary experiences. While it is sometimes difficult to achieve interdisciplinary education goals through cooperative program design, students can and do arrive at interdisciplinary solutions tailored to their own interests by adding a minor field to their degree plans, declaring more than one major field, or earning dual degrees. Students also may design individualized majors and/or minors, subject to review by the Faculty Senate and approval by the vice provost for undergraduate studies. Fifty-four percent of students in the Class of 2012 graduated with either a minor field, with multiple majors or degrees, or with a self-designed major or minor, as compared with 44.8 percent of students in the Class of 2002.

AU's newly designed three-year programs are distinguished from other three-year programs by the pace of study, the incorporation of intensive seminars, and enhanced faculty mentorship. They also offer students socialization through learning communities and other cohort activities. AU wants to ensure that students not only will acquire a degree in three years, but also will have the experience and preparation that prepare them for graduate study or placement in the workforce. Three such programs exist: the Global Scholars Program (School of International Service), which began in fall 2011; the Public Health Scholars Program (College of Arts and Sciences), which began in fall 2012; and the Politics, Policy, and Law Scholars Program (School of Public Affairs), which began in fall 2013. While the increasing number of Global Scholars applications over the past two years indicates the promise of these programs, the learning outcomes are being assessed for each program to help ensure that three-year program students have a comparable or better experience.

## ACADEMIC QUALITY

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American University's degree programs offer significant opportunities for learning. As AU's incoming students improve in quality, it is of ongoing importance that the university challenge them academically. AU recognizes opportunities for growth in the area of academic challenge. The 2012 National Survey of Student Engagement results showed that the university is below its peers in the percentage of students who say that the campus environment emphasizes spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work (80.9 percent for freshmen and 76.4 percent for seniors). According to NSSE, only 56.2 percent of freshmen and 53.5 percent of seniors agree that they are "... working harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations." While this finding is in contradiction to results of student evaluation of teaching—which show that more than 90 percent of students indicated that faculty "required high levels of performance"—it is in line with a steady increase in the percentage of undergraduate students receiving an A or A- in courses (as were earned in 51.9 percent of undergraduate grades in fall 2011, compared with 43.9 percent in 2001). The issue of academic challenge was discussed at a faculty leadership retreat in fall 2013.

One important way that the university has improved academic quality is by revising the academic regulations. In 2010, the Faculty Senate assigned a task force to develop new academic regulations for undergraduates. In developing the regulations, the Faculty Senate examined and benchmarked academic policies of 25 peer institutions. Some of the changes to AU's regulations included limiting the number of courses that can be taken pass/fail, raising the academic GPA standard for dean's list and Latin honors, reducing the number of semesters that a student can be on probation before being dismissed from the university, and strengthening requirements to complete foundational-level courses within a specified period of time. The new regulations, which went into effect fall 2012, reflect best practices in policies that are significant to achieving a strong academic environment and strengthening the undergraduate student experience. As a document, the new regulations are succinct and can be navigated much easier than in



the past. As a result of changes in regulations, academic advising has strengthened; and because the university has emphasized the importance of adhering to the academic regulations, the result has been a significant drop in students' petitions for exemptions and exceptions to the regulations.

## HIGH-IMPACT EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

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AU blends its academic offerings with cocurricular activities that advance its mission by promoting community service and offering opportunities to understand diverse perspectives. Enhanced by the resources and opportunities available in Washington, D.C., AU's student involvement in living-learning communities provides opportunities for application of essential knowledge and practical skills in creative and comprehensive ways.

High-impact experiences are at the heart of the undergraduate student experience at AU. The programs described in this section are examples of how AU fulfills LEAP's guidelines for best practices.

### University College

University College (UC), which was implemented based on the last Middle States self-study recommendations, provides small-group living-learning opportunities to promote in-depth discussion and effective student interaction. In the UC community, small, 20-student classes are taught by full-time faculty. Each class includes an upperclassman associate who lives in the same residential learning community, attends seminars, and serves as a mentor. The residential neighborhood of UC is located in Anderson Hall, allowing students to build relationships, share academic experiences, and adjust to college life. Students in the community have access to speakers and learning-centered outings.

About 400 students were accepted into UC in fall 2012, choosing from seminar classes that included World Politics, Visual Literacy, Sustainability, Anthropology, and Religion and Globalization. Applications for UC have increased from 292 in 2009 to 517 in 2012, with acceptances increasing from 276 in 2009 to 409 in 2012. In 2013, University College experienced a 46 percent increase in applications.

In response to the overwhelming demand, AU has created the University College Collaborative (UCC)—a living-learning experience that provides many of the same benefits of the UC minus the university college Wednesday lab. Like UC, this living-learning opportunity is anchored to an academic course. In the new UCC, select courses are offered to students in specific majors who could not be placed in UC. The UCC students were housed in a living-learning community in Anderson Hall on the third floor north and were included in all of UC's common events and activities that they would have had access to as UC students. They were also invited to apply for research-related activities in the spring semester.

Both current and former UC students report that their academic experience was greatly enhanced by the small class size and by the Washington Lab experience, which gave them an opportunity to meet and interact with Washington professionals in a way that that would not have been possible had they not been part of the University College. The 2012 NSSE results indicate that the supportive environment in the residence hall pays off academically. UC students are more likely than their peers to ask questions in class or contribute to class discussions (78.2 percent of participants versus 67.1 percent of students not in honors or UC). Living with students who are in the same class also seems to create a positive study environment, with almost 90 percent of participants stating that the campus environment emphasizes spending significant amounts of time studying and doing academic work. UC students are slightly more likely than their peers to say that the campus environment “provides the support you need to help you succeed academically” (87 percent versus 84 percent for students not in honors or UC.)

In focus groups and program evaluations, students report that they formed lasting bonds with their fellow classmates, program associate, and seminar professor that proved invaluable in their transition to college life. Students in UC are encouraged to engage with other UC seminars through common events that bring the entire college together to discuss important national and global issues. Thus, the UC program incorporates the hallmark elements of the AU experience of learning and engaging on campus and in the capital. UC earned the Outstanding Collaborative Initiative Award from the Commission for Admissions, Orientation, and First-Year Experience from the American College Personnel Association’s section on College Student Educators International in 2012 (<http://www.american.edu/provost/universitycollege/>).

### **Honors Program**

The Honors program has offered special honors sections of courses taken at every level of a student’s academic career, from general education courses through courses taken in all of the various majors the university has to offer and the completion of a senior capstone project. In 2009, the University Honors Program celebrated 50 years at American University, having served more than 1,000 students. While the program was successful, a review of the program was done in 2011 to ensure that it best met the changing standards of AU.

The review of the University Honors Program determined that the program was comparable to, but not distinctive from, its peer programs. The program was not very selective. No application was required for admission and approximately 15 percent of the entering class became a part of the program in any given year. In addition to the program not being distinctive, the program experienced logistical challenges. In response to surveys, honors students complained that there were not enough honors courses in their majors. They also said that the 12-credit upper-level requirement made it difficult to find courses that would satisfy the honors requirement.

In order for the Honors program to attract outstanding students and gain distinction, the new program—to begin in fall 2014—will offer focused problem-solving courses that integrate several disciplines and include early engagement in research, professional experience, opportunity for creativity and innovation, a substantive and early connection to faculty, and excep-

tional development of oral and written skills. The new program will be a smaller program of 45 entering freshmen and will provide four core honors courses, each taught by teams of three faculty members from different disciplines. Students will be required to apply for admission. The result will be an academically intensive research- and communication-focused liberal arts experience that connects honors students with leaders in their fields. The distinguishing feature of the new Honors program is in providing a core liberal arts experience that is delivered through an integrated problem-solving pedagogy. This integrated problem-solving environment program models the type of learning that is recommended by AAC&U and is truly innovative in its design ([http://www.american.edu/media/news/20131106\\_New-Honors-Program-takes-an-integrated-approach.cfm](http://www.american.edu/media/news/20131106_New-Honors-Program-takes-an-integrated-approach.cfm)).

### **Frederick Douglass Distinguished Scholars Program**

The Frederick Douglass Distinguished Scholars Program (FDDS) awards full scholarships (tuition, room, board, books, and fees) to exceptional undergraduates who are dedicated to improving underserved and underresourced communities around the world (<http://www.american.edu/DouglassScholars>). Established in 2009, FDDS prepares talented students, many of whom are exceptional underrepresented minority students, for success in the best graduate schools and in influential occupations. Students engage in service-learning initiatives, participate in personal/professional development workshops, and meet with notable leaders, entrepreneurs, and dignitaries around the District of Columbia. The university will incorporate future Douglass Scholars into the new honors in the liberal arts program.

FDDS is unique in that it provides significant levels of support to students. Many students are first-generation, and individualized time and attention is given to them by the director and by faculty (<http://www.american.edu/financialaid/fdsprogram.cfm>).

### **Internships**

LEAP lists internships as one of the top 10 ways to ensure high-impact educational practices. In the May 2013 Graduation Census, 87 percent of undergraduates said that they had completed an internship by the time they graduated.

Internships for AU credit are supervised by faculty to ensure that the experience has academic value. The university requires syllabi for all credit-bearing internships and mandates that no more than 15 percent of the internship may be clerical. Faculty and staff visit employers to confirm the substantive work of the internships, required documentation by the students, in-depth supervisor evaluation, and (when applicable) peer-to-peer learning among the students. The Career Center conducts a mid-semester student survey to evaluate the quality and substance of academic internships and is able to share with appropriate schools and departments top employers based on five criteria, as well as those employers whose internships are problematic. Employer evaluations are administered from the Career Center for undergraduate SIS students, undergraduate SOC students, and for a number of departments within SPA and CAS. The employer evaluations enable the university to see how intern supervisors rate students on various qualities. The

university uses this information to refine its internship offerings. In KSB, for example, four courses allow students to gain real-world professional experience by working with consulting firms and others as part of their assignments. Students also actively participate in the work of the SOC's academic centers as interns and in class-related research and production projects.

Requiring field experience is not without challenges, however, particularly in light of the changing demographics mentioned earlier. As AU's demographic has changed with a quarter of undergraduates Pell grant recipients, some students do not have the resources to effectively participate. The opportunity costs of unpaid internships together with the costs of transportation and, sometimes, essential technology may place such opportunities out of the reach of these students. Furthermore, there are the challenges of coordinating conflicting schedules, timing and assignments between traditional classroom and field-based instruction, and academic and nonacademic schedules. These issues must be better addressed to truly integrate experiential learning into the core curriculum.

One sign of success is the level of placement of AU students in competitive career development programs such as the Presidential Management Fellows (ranked third in the country in 2013, up from fifth in 2013) and the Peace Corps (ranked second for students placed from schools of comparable size). More information about AU's internships for undergraduate, graduate and professional students is detailed in Chapter 8 ("Educational Initiatives").

### **Service Learning, Community-Based Learning**

Another high-impact practice listed by LEAP is "service learning, community-based learning." According to LEAP, a key element in these programs is the opportunity students have to both apply what they are learning in real-world settings and reflect in the classroom setting on their service experiences.

Experiential learning plays an increasing role in AU course work. These opportunities have been broadened to provide alternative experiential learning paths to careers, including skills training, the incorporation of class projects, service learning, entrepreneurship, job shadowing, and alumni mentoring programs. SOC's course, *Community Documentary: Stories of Transformation*, allows film and anthropology students to work with neighborhood storytellers to use photographs, family documents, community archives, and their own voices to create first-person narratives. In one such project, prepared for an exhibition in the Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum, students and residents created digital stories about the Anacostia River. In 2012, students in SOC's Environmental and Wildlife Production course produced two full-length documentaries for Maryland Public Television, a continuation of the a longstanding partnership between SOC's Center for Environmental Filmmaking and MPT. In KSB's BSBA program, students in the core information technology course present analyses of new technology to consulting professionals. Students in an elective course on information technology elective work on real consulting projects throughout the semester, ending with a presentation to a client. Finance students act as analysts and portfolio managers for KSB's student-managed investment fund.

In AY2012–2013 the Center for Community Engagement and Service offered 13 alternative break trips in which students use vacation breaks as opportunities for service-learning in student groups. [Past trips](#) and themes include Zambia for the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, Guatemala for supporting fair-trade coffee, and Vietnam for a study on economic development. The office also has developed Community-Based Learning and Research, which provides AU students and faculty the opportunity to respond to significant needs of the D.C. metropolitan area. Students practice, re-examine, and deepen their classroom learning through a project in a nonprofit setting in which their work benefits others as well as their own intellectual development. More than 800 students have participated, with 97 community organizations through undergraduate and graduate courses.

These programs offer students the opportunity to develop key skills in the area of teamwork and citizenship. The assignments challenge students to apply theory to practice and to find creative solutions to relevant problems. This type of learning experience also helps advance citizenship learning outcomes by enabling students to reflect on the importance of the collective and the role of the individual.

## Study Abroad

LEAP points out the importance of offering courses and programs that “help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own.” At AU, the emphasis on diversity permeates all aspects of the student experience. Important programs that advance this goal are the opportunities for studying abroad.

In order to give students a wide range of choices for study abroad sufficient to meet their academic needs, AU Abroad different types of programs that utilize a variety of administrative models. All programs in which AU students participate abroad for academic credit have been evaluated by AU as meeting university-commensurate academic standards and goals. Students can study abroad either through: (1) direct enrollment of AU students as visiting students at overseas universities, (2) custom-designed programs, in which AU has developed its own individualized program “package” at a site abroad, or (3) selected programs offered on what might be termed the “open market” by study abroad providers.

A significant and growing proportion of AU’s students augment their educational experience with study abroad, spending a semester studying at a foreign university. In AY2011–12, 1605 students studied abroad, 1175 of which were undergraduates, making the participation rate 72.4% and ranking AU second in the nation for undergraduate participation in study abroad from doctoral institutions. (see 2013 [Open Doors](#) report.) This is almost double the rate in 2003, when AU’s Study Abroad office was expanded and replaced the former World Capitals program (<http://auabroad.american.edu/>).

CAS students make up 21 percent of the students who study abroad, while SIS are 34 percent; KSB, 17 percent; SOC 15.5 percent; and SPA, 12.5 percent. At current rates of participation, approximately 75 percent of SIS students will have studied abroad by the time they graduate,

as will 67 percent of CAS students and 55 percent of business students. Mandatory study abroad is a core component of the new interdisciplinary three-year cohort degrees in the Public Health and Global Scholars Program in SIS. Despite its success, more could be done to increase participation. There is a lack of study abroad opportunities that meet some academic programs' specific curricular needs. AU Abroad has worked closely with CAS to identify university partners abroad and specialized study abroad programs that will meet the curricular needs of CAS students in a variety of areas. It is because of the efforts to expand program offerings that the participation rate from CAS has risen so dramatically over the last eight years.

Beyond AU Abroad, some academic units have established partnerships overseas that provide for undergraduate experiences. For example, SIS partners with five prestigious universities (one in France, two in Japan, and two in South Korea) to offer undergraduate exchange; it also offers a dual-degree program with one of the Japanese universities. With the exception of one of the Korean universities, these programs allow AU undergraduates to enroll in courses that complement their AU degree programs, and their administrative oversight has also proven successful. (The programs meet all of the Middle States expectations for credits earned at AU.) AU's School of Professional and Extended Studies (SPExS) also offers international study tours that are incorporated into some of the courses offered through the Washington Semester Program. These tend to be shorter in duration, typically three weeks, but offer an immersive experience of substantive meetings and discussions relevant to the course topic. More recently, SPExS has begun to develop new international experiential learning opportunities in Myanmar.

Collaborations with AU's academic units resulted in the establishment of several new important study abroad opportunities: Cuba, with an emphasis in photojournalism; a three-week intensive experience in Rome for admitted freshmen before their first full AU semester; short-term study in India, Thailand, London, and Jamaica for Public Health, in addition to progress on a public health track on a Nairobi study abroad program; and new summer offerings for Global Scholars. Alternative breaks also provide opportunities for students to go abroad for shorter periods and to pursue service learning experiences, such as environmental justice and community empowerment: mountaintop removal in Appalachia and youth empowerment for peace in Israel. There has been a growing proportion of students studying abroad during the summer (25 percent of the total of AY2009–10 participation) and in shorter programs (14 percent in programs two weeks or less). These enrollments seem to be coming at the expense of the longer programs.

### **Undergraduate Research: Undergraduate Scholarship, Research, Professional, Creative Activity, and Merit Awards**

As LEAP points out, “many colleges and universities are now providing research experiences for students in all disciplines.” The high-impact educational practice has been true at AU for some time. However, in recent years, opportunities for research have been expanded.

AU undergraduates have significant opportunities to conduct scholarly activities, master research and creative skills, and disseminate the products of their work. Student engagement in

research begins as early as freshman year, and opportunities to master research techniques exist both inside and outside the classroom. The University Library offers an online tutorial that introduces students to the basics of designing a search, evaluating information, and citing sources. Collaboration between subject specialist librarians and faculty in each school and college provides students with opportunities for advanced information literacy instruction and individual research consultation throughout their AU careers. Many sections of UC require directed research in the spring semester of the freshman year. Students also have access to credit-bearing courses departmental research courses that teach specific disciplines' research skills.

At the university level, summer artists and scholars fellowships enable eight students each summer to conduct full-time, faculty-supervised research or creative work for a 10-week period. Students invited to take part in regional or national conferences may apply for undergraduate research and travel grants. CAS supports student researchers through the Dean's Summer Undergraduate Research Grants. The feminist research award offered by the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies program is an example of departmental support for undergraduate thesis research. The Office of Merit Awards, housed in the Career Center, encourages high-achieving students to pursue nationally competitive, merit-based scholarships that fund undergraduate research. It also mentors candidates for scholarships that provide the foreign language, quantitative, and cross-cultural competency required for sophisticated projects. The volume of faculty mentors who support the office in its work attests to the determination of AU faculty to support student research. In AY2011–12, 208 faculty mentors volunteered to coach student applicants, an 11 percent increase from AY2010–11 and a university record.

With that support, AU students won or were alternates or finalists for 120 nationally competitive scholarships. This outcome, a 46 percent increase from AY2010–11, also was a university record. With 14 scholars, including four undergraduate research grant recipients, AU is a top Fulbright-producing institution for AY2012–13. The office has increased its efforts to encourage science majors to apply for NSF-funded Research Experiences for Undergraduates and research opportunities in federal government laboratories. Additionally, through promotion of programs, such as the Public Policy and International Affairs Fellowship, the office of Merit Awards has made a significant effort to encourage diverse students to acquire quantitative skills relevant to research.

Students with completed research projects have numerous opportunities to present their findings. CAS, SPA, and SIS each organize an annual undergraduate research conference, and numerous academic departments provide majors with opportunities to present their work. The History, Literature and Physics Departments, as well as SPA, stage annual research presentations at which seniors present their final papers. These events are part of the assessment plan to gauge program learning outcomes (see the report on resources for conducting undergraduate research at AU (2010) and a compilation of undergraduate research opportunities in the document *Undergraduate Academic Events*, <http://www.american.edu/provost/undergrad/research.cfm>).

In spring 2012, the vice provost for undergraduate studies began to gather information about all course work and programming related to undergraduate research on campus. Her objectives were to raise awareness of undergraduate research activity and to promote collaboration with respect to programming. One outcome was a day-long, university-wide undergraduate research event for underclassmen in October 2012, attended by more than 200 freshmen and sophomores. The vice provost recently proposed creation of a center, to be housed on the first floor of the University Library, to support all undergraduates interested in conducting undergraduate research. The University Library will continue to play an important role in undergraduate research. AU has created a faculty line for a new instructional design librarian, who is leading a project to redesign the online research tutorial widely used throughout the university to introduce students to sound research practices.

## **USING ASSESSMENT TO IMPROVE THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE**

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### **Introduction**

AU has a long history of assessing student learning. In its 1994 Periodic Review Report (PRR), the university conducted a survey of assessment activities and found that “... virtually all academic units are involved in some form of outcomes assessment, though these may not be recognized as such.” In the 2004 self-study, the university documented that all programs had learning outcomes, and many programs had success in implementing their plans. The university had a Learning Outcomes and Assessment Project Team and had developed processes for completing annual reports on assessment.

By 2009, at the time of the last PRR, efforts to implement meaningful assessment had intensified. Faculty had a better understanding of how to assess and a greater sense of the value of the process. Programs had better, more meaningful assessments plans that took advantage of direct measures of assessment. Plans moved from being overly complex to doable. Most importantly, programs had implemented their plans. The PRR cited examples of how assessments had been used to improve programs. A review of 50 plans that had done assessment found that 22 programs added new courses to their curriculum, three changed course content, and 15 had changed faculty hiring practices or teaching assignments.

In the four years since the last PRR, the university has increased the number of faculty who are involved with assessment and regularized assessment processes. It has improved its assessment methods and increased the number of units that have used results to improve the curriculum. It has worked to integrate course outcomes with program outcomes, and to link program outcomes to institutional outcomes. This section of the report highlights many of the ways that AU meets best practices in assessment, and how it plans to build upon its success. (Although placed in the undergraduate chapter, the processes for graduate programs are the same and will be discussed here as well.)



## Laying the Foundation by Demonstrating Best Practices

AU's assessment processes and outcomes include the best practices highlighted in the 2012 and 2013 presentations made at the Middle States annual conference by Middle States vice presidents Debra Klinman and Ellie Fogarty titled "Implementing Middle States Expectations for Assessment." The presentations emphasized the importance of leadership, organizational structures, incentives/resources, and communication.

### Leadership

AU Provost Scott A. Bass has been a staunch supporter of assessment of student learning. In his welcome message on the university's assessment website, Bass states,

"As provost, I appreciate faculty and students who strive to meet high academic standards. Assessment, and the invaluable feedback it provides, informs us of areas in need of improvement thereby strengthening our curricula. To that end, the Office of the Provost will make every effort to support faculty as they assess courses and programs and implement strategies toward curricular enhancement." (See <http://www.american.edu/provost/assessment/index.cfm>)

The provost mentions the importance of assessment in many of his addresses to the faculty. The commitment to assessment is so strong among campus leadership that measures related to assessment of student learning are included as part of the strategic plan. Most importantly, campus leaders are focused on learning and use assessment results to inform planning. For example, the 2013 Faculty Leadership Retreat topic "Are we demanding enough? Are we providing enough?" was informed by AU's 2012 NSSE assessment results and the 2013 Campus Climate Survey, as well as by data on grade distributions. As part of the retreat, AAC&U Senior Director of Assessment and Research, Ashley Finley, gave the keynote address, "Connecting the Dots: Telling a Better Story about Student Learning, Intellectual Rigor and Faculty Innovation." The retreat focused on the important part that assessment plays in connecting learning experiences to skills, such as writing. Faculty leaders from every school and college spent an entire day developing suggestions for ways to better assess and meet learning goals.

### Organizational Structures

Assessment of student learning is supported throughout the institution. The following are organizational structures at AU that place considerable emphasis on advancing assessment of student learning (see *Learning Outcomes and Assessment Procedures*, 2013, for more information on assessment structures and processes throughout the university):

- **Committee on Learning Assessment (COLA).** By 2009, the former Learning Outcomes and Assessment Team was changed to the COLA, a special committee of the Faculty Senate. In 2011, it became a standing committee. As such, the chair of COLA is a member of the Faculty Senate and is able to communicate to the larger governing body. The committee has formal membership requirements and members are elected by their

peers and serve two-year terms. The committee's formal status provides it with credibility among its peers and reflects the importance that faculty place on assessment.

- **School assessment committees.** KSB has its own assessment committee that is charged with advancing learning outcomes and assessment in its unit. Each school and college has either an assessment committee or some other structural support for assessment.
- **Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA).** The office provides administrative support to units as they develop learning outcomes, structure assessment plans, implement assessment, and use results. In addition to having experts in survey research and data collection, the office has a part-time assessment advisor (a former associate dean from the University of Maryland) dedicated entirely to working with units on improving and implementing their learning outcomes and assessment plans. The office works closely with COLA to provide feedback to units and to present training workshops. Training on learning assessment strategies goes beyond the traditional schools and colleges. The office offers workshops on assessment of student learning to Campus Life staff as well. In addition, the office supports and maintains an assessment website and TracDat.
- **Center for Teaching Research and Learning (CTRL).** CTRL supports all aspects of teaching, research, and learning at AU, including helping faculty to articulate course learning outcomes and develop effective assessments for their courses. While COLA and OIRA tend to focus on program-level and institution level support, CTRL focuses on support to individual faculty members. It provides workshops and has created guidelines for strong syllabi, including assistance with how to align course goals with program and general education goals. The guidelines also include instructions on how to write effective learning outcomes.
- **General Education Committee.** The General Education Committee plays a critical role in ensuring the quality of general education courses, including the ways in which these courses advance the learning goals of the program. An important component of their work is ensuring that general education learning outcomes are integrated appropriately with course and institutional outcomes. The committee not only assesses individual courses, it also oversees the implementation of the assessment results to improve student learning in general education. (For a complete description of general education assessment, see the general education section of this chapter.)
- **Campus Life.** The division of campus life is also organized to advance student learning. It's Development Practice and Professional Development Coordinating Committee offers assessment workshops and it has identified "learning outcomes coaches" who are available to help units that want to assess learning.

### *Incentives/Resources*

Faculty have clear, realistic guidelines for advancing learning outcomes in their courses and programs. To help ensure success, faculty in a number receive assistance to ensure they can meet expectations. Support for assessment activities come of ways:

- **Workshops.** AU has hosted numerous workshops, some involving outside assessment experts. In 2008, AU brought Barbara Walvoord, an expert in assessment, to campus. Her book, *Assessment Clear and Simple*, was provided to all attendees. The session was followed by targeted meetings to determine the best ways to implement her suggestions. In 2009, AU hosted the WASLAN (Washington Area Student Learning Assessment Network) workshop on assessing political science programs, hosting E. Fletcher McClellan, PhD, professor of political science and contributor to *Assessment in Political Science*, a publication by the American Political Science Association.

Since fall 2009, AU has provided more than 11 faculty assessment workshops on topics including evaluating capstones, assessing doctoral programs, developing course-level learning outcomes, and using internships to strengthen program learning outcomes. OIRA, in conjunction with COLA, offers open office hours to allow faculty to receive help with their program's annual assessment reports. In addition, the COLA hosts a concurrent session each year at the Ann Ferren conference, offering faculty perspectives on effective assessment. A session on assessment of student learning is included in orientation sessions for new faculty. Also, the university now has a tradition of offering a spring workshare luncheon as a way for faculty to celebrate successes and share best practices in assessment.

- **Peer feedback.** Each year, COLA reviews assessment reports and provides written feedback to each degree program on the quality of the learning outcomes, the strength of the assessment plan, and the use of assessment results. As part of this review, COLA requests meetings with programs that would benefit from more effective assessment strategies. Members of COLA meet with departments to offer suggestions for improving assessment plans and implementing more useful assessment methods. Using their own experience, and what they see working in other departments, faculty share strategies for how to fit assessment into an already busy schedule and how to make assessment doable and meaningful. Follow-up is provided by the director of the OIRA as needed.
- **One-on-one training and support.** OIRA staff are available to help with specific assessment needs. Departments can request one-on-one meetings to help with everything from developing a rubric to rewriting assessment plans. The office also encourages integrating survey assessment results, such as those from NSSE and the Graduation Census, into unit assessment plans. The office is fortunate to include several staff members with an expertise in assessment. The office's assessment advisor worked one-on-one with more than 20 programs between spring 2012 and spring 2013.

- **TracDat.** In 2010, AU began using an assessment software tool, TracDat, to organize, collect, and report program assessment. All program learning outcomes and assessment plans are entered in TracDat. The software simplifies the reporting process by enabling units to enter all their assessment plans and results in one place. Units can attach rubrics, examples of student work, and summaries of results. Units also document in TracDat how they use assessment findings to improve programs. TracDat is also used by COLA as a site for posting information back to programs, offering comments and suggestions for improvement. The ability to document and store all aspects of program assessment in a central location has been especially helpful to faculty who are new to assessment, since the most recent years of planning and activity can be found all in one place (Assessment results prior to 2010 are stored in the OIRA).
- **Website.** AU has an assessment website that provides a wealth of material for faculty members working on assessment. In addition to information about workshops, training materials, and library assessment resources, the website includes links to examples of assessment plans at other universities. The website also has short videos of AU faculty talking about the value of assessment in advancing their goals. The template for COLA reviews of program assessment reports is on the website as well. As mentioned elsewhere, the site received national recognition.
- **Awards.** In recent years, AU promotes best practices by offering awards to those who use learning outcomes and assessment to advance more meaningful curriculum development. For example, the Center for Teaching Research and Learning now offers a curriculum award for “aligning general education with the major.” The new award goes to a faculty member or unit that can demonstrate that learning outcomes guide the curriculum, that courses incorporate and expand upon general education themes, that information is shared with students and faculty, and that assignments used to assess learning outcomes relate to the alignment.

### NILOA Recognizes AU's Website

In June 2012, AU's assessment website was a featured site by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment. It was recognized for both its creativity and its centralized assessment repository. NILOA said: “the website is designed for both internal and external audiences. Assessment plans are publicly available and include information on indirect/direct measures, group/individual targets, learning outcomes addressed by the assessment, and tentative assessment cycle. Best practices from program/major assessment plans are showcased. For its abundance of information on ongoing assessment activities and mapping best practices within the institution related to assessment, American University's OIRA is June's Featured Website.”

<http://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/FeaturedWebsitePast.html>

## Student Learning and Assessment at the Course Level

Course assessment is an important component of AU's assessment strategy. Course assessment is usually conducted at the unit level as part of its curriculum development and academic program review. That being said, the university has formal mechanisms to ensure that courses have learning outcomes and that the outcomes are assessed.

### *New Course Proposals*

All faculty are requested to provide course learning outcomes in the course proposal. The review of these proposals for meaningful learning outcomes is taken seriously and, in fact, proposals are rejected and sent back to units for revision if the proposal does not include strong learning outcomes.

### *Requiring Learning Outcomes on Syllabi*

All faculty must provide course learning outcomes on the syllabi.

### *Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) Results*

All courses are evaluated using SET. The faculty chapter goes into SET, and the results, in more detail. Here, we focus on the specific ways it helps evaluate whether students understand the learning outcomes for the course. Faculty have a strong incentive to discuss course learning outcomes because the Student Evaluation of Teaching now asks students if: 1) the learning outcomes of the course were clear; 2) the activities/assignments required for the class contributed to meeting the learning objectives; and 3) the materials required for the course contributed to meeting the learning outcomes. Overall, evaluations indicate that communication of course outcomes has been successful, as shown in figure 6.1.

**Figure 6.1: SET Results for Learning Outcomes Questions**

COURSE EVALUATION QUESTION	Percent that answered "always" or "almost always" *	
	2008	2012
The learning outcomes of the course were clear.	86.5%	89.2%
The activities/assignments required for the class contributed to meeting the learning objectives	86.9%	89.9%
The materials required for the course contributed to meeting the learning objectives.	82.4%	85.3%

\* At least a 5 on a 7-point scale.

More than 43 percent of students give the course a score of 7 out of 7, indicating that they are satisfied with what they learned in the course. Most helpful to faculty, perhaps, is the fact that students also fill out a qualitative form that provides instructors with feedback that they can use to improve their courses.

### Student Learning and Assessment at the Program Level

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, AU has a long history of assessment, especially at the program level. **For more than a decade, American University degree programs (over 100 programs) have conducted assessment of student learning in the major.** All academic programs have learning outcomes and the outcomes have been reviewed by COLA to ensure that they are appropriate for the university's mission and of appropriate rigor. All programs (except those that are very new) have assessment plans that document the assessment strategies for each outcome, as well as the targets for success and the cycle for assessment. The results of assessments are recorded by units, as are the ways that assessments are used to improve programs or document success.

AU programs follow a cycle of assessment that expects units will designate one or more learning outcomes to assess each year. Student work relevant to those outcomes are often collected in the fall, analyzed by faculty in the spring, and reported out in the next fall, in their annual assessment report, due on October 1. All degree programs—both graduate and undergraduate—report on their assessment activity and results for the prior year. These reports are reviewed by members of COLA. COLA members represent campus units, including CAS, KSB, SIS, SOC, and SPA. Ex-officio members include the director of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment and the campus assessment advisor. These committee members review each degree program's submission and provide written reviews that ask questions, offer helpful suggestions, and sometimes invite the faculty of the unit to consider a new approach or to meet with experts.

As of October 2013, the time of the last annual report submission, program assessment appeared to have broad acceptance on campus. More than 80 degree programs submitted reports that were reviewed in October 2013 (some were exempt from submission and some were submitted later than October.). This year, as part of the self-study, COLA reviewed AU's progress with assessment. Past COLA members formed focus groups that discussed the current state of assessment at AU. In addition to three focus groups, COLA analyzed comments made in the reviews. These two explorations asked the same question: How well is assessment working in degree programs at AU? How can it be improved?

All three focus groups agreed that the campus has made a great deal of progress in degree assessments. One participant said that assessment seems to be standard procedure now at American University. Others pointed to the fact that more programs are conducting assessments regularly and with "less struggle" than in the past. The groups said they feel a culture of assessment is growing on campus.

The results show:

- There is significant use of direct samples of student work to assess student learning.
- Units are more consistent in use of assessment methods that relate to the goals that they are assessing.

The focus groups also identified areas for improvement:

- Some units use small sample sizes for assessments. This makes interpreting results difficult and faculty are reluctant to make changes based on the results.
- Some assessments need to identify more meaningful targets to denote satisfactory levels of learning. For example, some programs say that 80 percent of students meeting satisfactory learning standards is their target. In reality, they expect better results.
- Some programs still need to use assessment results more effectively to improve student learning. Although a good number of programs have made positive changes based on assessments, the university wants all units to be skillful at “closing the loop.”
- As more faculty get involved in assessment, more opportunities to learn the basics of assessment may be necessary.

To further explore improvements needed in degree assessments, OIRA analyzed the “suggestions for improvement” comments that were given as feedback to units in October. The findings were very similar to the focus group results. Three main suggestions for improvement were identified: 1) find additional ways to use findings; 2) revise or improve their measures of learning so that results will be more actionable; 3) clarify targets or set higher standards.

In its November 2013 meeting, COLA members reviewed results of the focus group sessions and the analysis of reviews. The committee agreed with the findings and proposed solutions for these recurring shortcomings in degree assessments. They proposed a session each year on assessment basics—perhaps titled “Assessment 101.” It seems that some problems are caused by turnover in assessment personnel in departments. This same concern led to the suggestion that more programs may want to adopt the practice of having a standing committee be responsible for assessment. Such a committee operates in several programs already.

Much work has already gone into addressing issues of concern. AU placed additional emphasis on closing the loop during spring 2013. At that time, a workshop, “Results into Action: How to Use Assessment Findings” was held on using assessment results to improve student learning, with representatives from both the undergraduate and graduate levels talking about their experiences. It will be held again in 2014. COLA members also have plans for other assessment workshops, which are open to anyone on campus. One workshop will help programs use their assessment results matching participants with an assessment “expert” (a faculty member from another program) who has had success with assessment. The annual workshare, later in the

spring, will highlight four programs that have been particularly successful in using assessment to improve their curriculum and courses. The assessment advisor will continue to work one-on-one to follow up with those units that have had problems with picking assessment methods that lead to actionable results.

In addition, a session on success in using assessment results was organized by COLA at the January 2014 Ann Ferren conference.

### *Sharing and Discussing Assessments*

Assessment conducted in isolation is not nearly as helpful as creating information that is shared and discussed with appropriate audiences. AU posts program learning outcomes and assessment plans on its assessment website so that students, faculty, and even those outside the university can view the AU's learning expectations for each degree program. According to AU's program assessment guidelines (<http://www.american.edu/provost/assessment/Guidelines.cfm>), "... units are encouraged to find ways (in addition to the official website) to communicate the learning outcomes of their program to prospective and current students." Most programs also post their learning outcomes on their own web pages. (General Education learning outcomes are available on the General Education website, as well as in an attractive brochure designed to inform prospective and current students about the program's learning goals.) Program learning outcomes will soon be even more accessible: plans are in place to include the learning outcomes in the new on-line version of the university catalog.

The assessment website communicates plans and has examples of best practices posted. The broad availability of assessment plans has been helpful, making it possible for faculty to get ideas on how to improve their own assessment plans.

In addition to assessment plans, several units go one step further, posting examples of student work. SOC, for example, has a website devoted to displaying student work. (<http://www.american.edu/soc/film/student-work-gallery.cfm>). Several units invite the university community to poster sessions of final projects developed in research methods courses.

More and more, faculty share their assessment results with one another. This creates opportunities to learn from other's experience. This happens in COLA, where representatives from each school and college have an opportunity to review assessment reports, it occurs during the Ann Ferren conference when programs describe their findings and how they use them, and it occurs during the annual workshare each spring.

### **Advancing Assessment at the Institutional Level**

AU institutional learning outcomes are taught (and assessed) in the common programs already mentioned: The General Education Program, College Writing, and the math requirements. Each of these programs has its own assessment strategy. That being said, the university uses the university surveys (such as NSSE and the Graduation Census) to also assess university goals. The university forms task forces, as appropriate, to act on results when there are concerns. (An



example is the task force that examined quantitative offerings.) College writing has also been examined very closely.

One exciting result of many of these initiatives is that there is interest in making AU's current institutional learning outcomes more explicit. No one doubts, for example, that communication is an AU learning outcome. We assess it in both general education and in College Writing. By making the stated learning outcome more explicit as an institutional outcome, it enables the university to assess it in a more integrative manner. A more explicit statement will also enable AU to communicate the value of an AU education more clearly to students and faculty. The goal is to follow up with more robust discussions about how the learning outcomes can be more fully integrated throughout the curriculum.

In fall 2013, deans and others reviewed a first draft of the explicit draft AU learning outcomes. The draft, based on a study by ETS of critical domains in higher education included: critical thinking, teamwork, effective communication, creativity, digital information and computational literacy, life skills, civic knowledge and engagement, and acquired knowledge. The 2014 Ann Ferren conference plenary session was devoted to reviewing the draft outcomes. Almost 400 faculty from every discipline met in small groups to provide feedback on the learning outcomes and to offer suggestions for changes. It was a robust session. COLA is in the process of reviewing their suggestions. It plans to bring a proposal to the Faculty Senate so that the institution learning outcomes can be formally approved by the faculty.

Overall, AU's philosophy of assessment necessitates that student learning assessment be an integral part of overall institutional assessment initiatives. For this reason, there are a number of institutional assessments that integrate student learning assessment into overall assessments:

- **Learning Outcomes and Assessment as Part of Program Development.** All proposals for new degree programs must submit learning outcomes as part of the approval process. Reviewers take this seriously. Cases exist where proposals have been sent back to the units in order to sharpen or improve learning outcomes or assessment plans. By integrating this into the proposal, new initiatives at AU integrate learning outcomes into the overall decision processes.
- **Academic Program Review.** As mentioned in a previous chapter, AU implemented a process of academic program review in 2008. This review includes a review of learning outcomes and requires units to provide an overall update on their progress in meeting the outcomes. This provides an opportunity for the department's programs to be reviewed by experts who are external to the university. It also provides programs with an opportunity to review their learning outcomes in the context of the department's overall assessment of its strengths and opportunities. One example of the result of program review is undergraduate curriculum in SIS. SIS's program review included a recommendation that the curriculum needed improvement. As a result, the faculty made significant changes to the undergraduate major, as chronicled, in part, in an AAC&U blog about high impact

learning authored by SIS's associate dean for undergraduate studies, Patrick Thaddeus Jackson (<http://blog.aacu.org/index.php/author/patrick-thaddeus-jackson/>).

- **Survey Research and Institutional Data.** Also mentioned in a previous chapter is the fact that AU has a robust student survey program. Surveys such as NSSE are broken out by major for those units that request survey data. This subset of the larger survey provides the unit with helpful information on program-level issues such as faculty-student interaction and the level of academic challenge. Some units also have retention goals and use university data to assess their students' success. The university as a whole also uses the data to identify areas of concern. Learning outcomes issues can then be discussed in larger forums, such as faculty retreats.
- **Resource Allocation.** NILOA suggests that proposals for new resources be informed by learning outcomes. As previously reported, overall budgeting is directly tied to the strategic plan. However, student learning assessment results can also be tied to budgeting. As departments develop budgets, they are encouraged to specify the anticipated effects of new resources on the ability to meet learning outcomes. Thus, if a program proposes that it purchase new equipment, for example, it is suggested that they support the proposal with evidence for how it might impact student learning.

### Getting Results: Assessment to Improve Student Learning

In the end, assessment is not just about the findings. It is about using the findings to improve student learning. NILOA emphasizes the importance of “using the data obtained by measuring student learning to plan, complete, and deploy improvements in educational programs and to reassess learning after improvements are made.”<sup>2</sup> AU does just that. Analysis of TracDat reports between 2011–2013 identified 276 specific changes to be made as a result of assessments. At least 74 programs (undergraduate and graduate) were able to identify areas of improvement and to make changes based on the results. Many of the remaining programs indicated that their assessment results were positive, and that no follow-up or change was necessary. A review of recent assessment activities found that the way assessment results were used fall into three major categories:

1. Follow-up actions that called for fine-tuning or additions to teaching methods in particular courses. Fine-tuning or additions to teaching methods accounted for 97 of the 276 changes, or 31 percent. Examples of fine-tuning included reports from Biology to develop assignments to teach students how to write up results; from Chemistry on having regular appearances by library faculty to talk about effective use of research resources; from International Studies, agreement among faculty to require an abstract with each paper assignment; and from Law and Society, greater emphasis across the curriculum on students' abilities to support conclusions with evidence.

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<sup>2</sup> See Hersh, Richard H. and Richard P. Keeling. *Changing Institutional Culture to Promote Assessment of Student Learning*. Occasional Paper No. 17. Published by the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment, February 2013.

2. Follow-up that involved administrative action, such as standardizing instruction across sections, or providing supplemental instruction in problem areas such as statistics or correct academic citation. Administrative adjustments or changes accounted for the majority of follow-up actions, with 134 such follow-up items mentioned in TracDat records, or 45 percent of all mentions. Examples of administrative actions included reports from Economics to limit the size of econometrics courses to allow for more lab time and hands-on work; from Psychology (MA) to involve more faculty in supervising the research of MA students. Included in this group of changes were hiring decisions, with two degree programs (Psychology and Language and Area Studies) reporting the addition of a faculty member as a way of solving needs identified in assessments, while Elementary Education said that assessment allowed them to pinpoint areas in which new faculty were needed.
3. Follow-up leading either directly or indirectly to curriculum change. Follow-up anticipating or leading to curriculum change was mentioned 41 times, accounting for 24 percent of reports of follow-up actions. These mentions came from 41 degree programs. Journalism and International Studies are involved in full curriculum revisions of their bachelor's degrees, based on assessments conducted during the past few years. Not all actions in the curriculum area are as far-reaching as these. Environmental Studies added two new lab courses designed for majors only. Other programs involved in broad curricular change as follow-up to assessments are Psychology (MA), Graphic Design (BA), and Chemistry (MS), while many other degree programs added courses or requirements.

### **Getting Results: Demonstrating Student Learning**

A very rewarding part of assessment is verifying that students are meeting expected standards for learning. Many programs have examples of how students met or exceeded expectations. Almost all programs have some assessment results that point to success. Although it is impossible to pick “representative examples,” given the varied nature of learning outcomes for each program, the following examples give a sense of a variety of ways that learning outcomes are demonstrated in different teaching units:

Environmental Studies (BS) students in courses at the 100, 200, and 300 levels took a reputable test of environmental literacy. Faculty found that student scores for environmental literacy increased as students progressed in the major—that is, students at the 300 level scored higher than those at the 200 level, who scored higher than students in the 100-level classes. Students at all levels had far greater environmental literacy than a national U.S. sample, meeting faculty expectations for student learning.

Business and Music (BAM) students took an exam to demonstrate “music industry competence.” Using an exam, faculty found that students exceeded the target level in all major assessment categories. Overall, 97 percent of the sample exceeded target with a mean score of 3.9 out of 4. The full report on this assessment is available in the documents section of TracDat.

Political Science (BA) evaluated the ability of students to apply what is learned in the classroom to real life by hosting a poster session of original undergraduate research. The research was evaluated by a team of judges who assessed students' research and oral presentation skills, as well as their ability to apply their knowledge to actual politics. The strongest scores were for students connecting what was learned in the classroom to real life (100 percent). The assessment taught the department that it prepares students well in this area.

### Next Steps in Assessment

As assessment in the academic units continues, quality improves. Through its review process, the Committee on Learning Assessment continually identifies areas of need and addresses them through programming and specialized attention. There are a few areas that COLA is addressing as this study is being written. AU has begun curriculum mapping, but has not required it as a best practice in student learning assessment. While the General Education Program has mapped its courses and most programs have some of their curriculum mapped to program outcomes, engaging in wide-scale curriculum is largely in the future for AU. University-wide course mapping would facilitate effective placement of assessment activities in the curriculum and would allow departments to have a better overall picture of how each course contributes to program learning outcomes. Efforts to encourage course mapping is currently underway by COLA.

Another area of current interest to COLA is best practices for communicating learning outcomes—especially course learning outcomes—to students and prospective students. While most programs have posted their program outcomes on their department websites, course outcomes are not as easy to find. They are on the syllabus, but they are not always available before a course begins.

AU's Office of Institutional Research and Assessment provides expert guidance to units on assessment methods and practices, a service enhanced in 2011 with the addition of the assessment advisor to work with individual teaching units. As the work of assessment is decentralized, more resources may become available for faculty in their own units to support the assessment process and enhance the quantity and quality of assessment activities. Examples of creating assessment support within units might be teaching releases for coordinators of school assessment committees or staff resources to help with the logistics of data collection and analysis.

As the university reviews assessment results in the above programs, it became clear that the learning outcomes transcended any one program or course. In 2013, the university began looking at institutional learning in a more integrative way, by drafting a set of university-wide learning outcomes that extend the goals of college writing, math and general education. The draft outcomes are goals that are already incorporated in many academic programs and include “advancing student learning and assessment at the program level.”

## CONCLUSIONS

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The undergraduate curriculum continues to support AU's *Statement of Common Purpose* by advancing interdisciplinary inquiry, international understanding, interactive teaching (and learning), research and creative endeavors, and practical application of knowledge. American University is preparing undergraduates for further study or for professional careers as evidenced in its robust internships, growing opportunities for research, increase in external scholarly awards, and successful graduate study or job placement. In the spirit of adapting to a rapidly changing world, AU made a concerted effort to strengthen its undergraduate offerings through its review of the General Education Program and a through a large-scale course-assessment project that contributed to realigning undergraduate program requirements. This project contributed to the elimination of underused majors and minors and the creation of programs that better prepare students for a changing world.

Following efforts to update catalog offerings, the university responded to sentiments expressed in student surveys and feedback from faculty by forming a task force that examined quantitative offerings, including academic courses that address big data sets. In order to develop recommendations for improving writing literacy, AU will follow the model established by the quantitative task force.

The university has a robust system of assessment, and academic units are using assessment to improve their programs. Faculty increasingly appreciate the insights and refinements that come to their curricula from thoughtful assessments. The university will continue to strengthen the interrelationship between general education and the undergraduate degree programs. The plan for assessment of the General Education Program learning outcomes has led to an interest to extending and refining AU's institution-wide learning objectives.

As evidenced in earlier chapters, AU has made significant changes in its policies so that academic quality is the single most important concern for faculty as well as for students. For undergraduates, AU took steps to ensure rigor in the curricula and raised its academic standards through rewriting the undergraduate academic regulations. The institution must further ensure that the importance of an AU degree is not devalued by ever-higher grade inflation. GPAs in undergraduate courses at the university increased from 3.19 in fall 2002 to 3.38 in fall 2012. This increase is of concern, and the university must take steps to examine grade trends, identify whether inflation exists, where it exists, and make appropriate changes.

The increased demand for the UC living-learning community has underscored the need for offering high-quality intensive seminar experiences, particularly for first-year undergraduates. The recent experience with the University College Collaborative will inform planning for increasing the number of learning communities and incorporating inquiry-based teaching and learning.

Over the past 10 years, American University has moved from academic and support services operating as separate entities to a collaborative model that allows for high-impact efforts that strengthen retention and students' cocurricular and academic success. The creation of a separate office for Undergraduate Studies is a fundamental contribution to facilitating such collaborations. The Undergraduate Experience Council (UEC) is co-chaired by the dean of students and by the vice provost for undergraduate studies, bringing representatives from campus life and academics for focused planning that substantively improves the many components of an undergraduate student's experience at AU. A monthly meeting of the undergraduate studies group includes leadership from Study Abroad, Merit Awards, and the Career Center, who meet with the key directors and managers in the office for Undergraduate Studies. These meetings have helped to combine and raise the profile of undergraduate research along with other undergraduate experiences. The vice provost for undergraduate studies meets regularly with associate deans and with the Faculty Senate to coordinate efforts to improve curriculum and academic quality. These collaborations have helped to achieve a continued focus on providing a strong liberal arts foundation as a part of the overall undergraduate experience.

Over the past 10 years, parents of prospective students have been more insistent about their sons' and daughters' potential for employment or future study when they graduate from college. Historically, AU has been well positioned to place a substantial number of graduating students in government, communications, arts, public relations, or policy-related jobs. With the recent economic downturns and a shrinking government, the university has proactively focused on widening employment opportunities, including those in the nonprofit sector, and on growing the scope of fields for future graduate studies. The university is examining and responding to the impact of the rapidly changing demographics and demands of incoming undergraduates. AU faces a growing population of students who have substantive precollege experiences that include more rigorous advanced placement courses and high school-to-college transitional programs. More students are opting to attend community colleges for their freshman and sophomore academic base, with the intent of finishing at a four-year institution and of saving on the ever-increasing costs of higher education. This trend has required diligence in updating curricula, nurturing a Career Center that is nimble and responsive to employment needs, and finding innovative ways to respond to changes in demand for AU programs. For example, the Washington Semester Program was at one time the premier program, across the country, for an undergraduate semester in Washington, D.C. With rising costs, some academic institutions and independent businesses began to open their own programs in D.C., resulting in competition that began to diminish enrollments. AU responded by establishing a model that allows universities to use the campus as a spring admit program similar to AU's Washington Mentorship Program, which provides a 15-hour fall program for students who have been admitted as spring freshmen. During fall semester 2013, spring freshman admits to Brandeis and the University of Miami joined American University spring freshman admits in a substantive D.C. experience that included taking courses that will count toward their undergraduate degrees at their home institutions.

Advances in technology and the future digitization of education through a crescendo of open-source courses, MOOCs, and online for-profit universities have motivated AU's careful examination of the role of these changes on curricula and culture. AU is committed to the intensive curricular, cocurricular, and scholarly socialization that only a residential university can provide; however, AU recognizes the value of online and other web-based learning opportunities. Online courses developed on campus have been implemented judiciously, with special care toward maintaining academic quality and learning to use effective hybrid models of course delivery. Finally, the university is incorporating technological and web-driven venues that enhance learning and foster informed scrutiny on the use of such resources.

The ability to be nimble and to make informed changes in a rapidly evolving educational environment has been facilitated at AU by streamlining curricular processes that were once cumbersome, sequential, and prone to discouraged collaboration. Operating on the philosophy that the curriculum belongs to the faculty, the Faculty Senate developed new processes that encourage collaboration and interdisciplinary cooperation between schools and colleges. These processes also allow for a flat process of review so that every academic unit and all faculty can respond to or comment on curricular proposals in a timely manner. This new model for collaborative curriculum development has led to a minor in leadership and management and a minor in entrepreneurship offered by KSB, and this minor is available to any major. The new curricular process permitted fast responses to an assessment process that showed how ordinary economics majors did not receive sufficient mathematical and statistical preparation for doing graduate work in economics or other social sciences; through the new processes, the Departments of Economics and Mathematics and Statistics addressed the need for more math by developing an interdisciplinary new major, the BS in mathematics and economics.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. Update AU's existing university-wide undergraduate learning outcomes to reflect the knowledge and skills that all AU graduates must master. Develop and use innovative, cutting-edge, and direct methods of assessment.
2. Increase the number of undergraduates participating in academic learning communities and provide additional opportunities for undergraduates to engage early on in research and problem-solving-based learning.



## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

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The General Education Program

<http://www.american.edu/provost/gened/index.cfm>

College Learning for the New Global Century

[http://www.aacu.org/leap/documents/GlobalCentury\\_final.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/leap/documents/GlobalCentury_final.pdf)

Report on the Task Force for General Education, Harvard University, 2007

[http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic830823.files/Report\\_of\\_the\\_Taskforce\\_on\\_General\\_Education.pdf](http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic830823.files/Report_of_the_Taskforce_on_General_Education.pdf)

Critical Thinking Assessment Test

<http://www.tntech.edu/cat/home>

University Mathematics Requirements

<http://www.american.edu/provost/undergrad/undergrad-rules-and-regulations.cfm#8.3>

College Writing Program

<http://www.american.edu/cas/literature/cwp/index.cfm>

Undergraduate Degree Programs

<http://www.american.edu/academics/index.cfm>

Three-Year Degree Programs

<http://www.american.edu/provost/3YrBach/index.cfm>

Revised Academic Regulations

<http://www.american.edu/provost/undergrad/undergrad-rules-and-regulations-toc.cfm>

University College

<http://www.american.edu/provost/universitycollege/index.cfm>

Honors Program

<http://www.american.edu/provost/honors/index.cfm>

Frederick Douglass Distinguished Scholars Program

<http://www.american.edu/financialaid/fdsprogram.cfm>

Alternative Break

<http://www.american.edu/ocl/volunteer/Alternative-Breaks-Homepage.cfm>

Study Abroad Program

<http://auabroad.american.edu>

University Library

<http://www.american.edu/library/index.cfm>

Office of Merit Awards

<http://www.american.edu/careercenter/meritawards/index.cfm>

AU Assessment Website

<http://www.american.edu/provost/assessment>

# GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION





# Graduate and Professional Education

## INTRODUCTION

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American University has maintained a strong focus on graduate and professional education since its founding more than a century ago. The university currently offers a wide array of master's, doctoral, and professional degrees, along with a number of graduate-level certificates. Legal education is offered through AU's Washington College of Law (WCL). As of fall 2013, graduate and professional students made up over 42 percent of the university's student body, with 3,048 master's students, 401 doctoral students, 1,716 law students, and 312 nondegree and certificate students.

This chapter covers standards 9 (admissions and retention), 10 (student support services), 11 (educational offerings), 14 (assessment of student learning), and 6 (integrity) as they apply to graduate and professional education. This chapter also reviews the university's ongoing efforts to assess, strengthen, and redesign graduate and professional programs in order to implement the relevant strategic plan goals and address the challenges that these programs face. In addition, this chapter examines how AU's graduate programs demonstrate the university's commitment to interdisciplinary inquiry, international engagement, and experiential learning and its efforts to meet the changing needs in the marketplace for graduate and professional education. However, some issues related to graduate education are covered in other chapters, specifically the following: The development of online master's programs and other forms of nontraditional graduate education at AU will be covered in chapter 8, many of the student services covered in chapter 5 are also available to graduate students, and the separate accreditation of certain graduate and professional programs by outside accrediting bodies in their fields was covered in chapter 2.

## FIT TO MISSION AND STRATEGIC GOALS

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Much like its undergraduate programs, [AU's graduate and professional programs](#) fulfill the mission of the university. As figure 7.1 shows, the Juris Doctor is the largest graduate program, with over three times as many students as the next largest program. At the master's level, enrollment tends to be highest in professional fields such as international relations, business administration, public policy, and communication. The university also has smaller master's programs in a variety of niche areas including arts management, creative writing, film studies, global environmental policy, public anthropology, and sustainability management.

AU offers 11 doctoral degrees (figure 7.1). The doctoral programs are heavily concentrated in the social sciences and policy fields, as befits AU's mission and its Washington location. Nevertheless, the newest PhD programs (behavior, cognition, and neuroscience, launched as an interdisciplinary science program in 2009, and communication, started in 2011) move AU's doctoral education opportunities into new strategic directions designed to match faculty capabilities with student interests. In contrast to the master's and professional degrees, which are heavily concentrated in the professional schools, many of the largest doctoral programs are in the College of Arts and Sciences in fields such as anthropology, economics, history, and psychology. Although doctoral enrollments are lower than those in the master's and professional programs, the doctoral programs are considered the flagships of many of AU's academic units, and much effort is put into ensuring their quality and reputation. Rather than establish doctoral programs in all academic units, AU has chosen to limit its PhD offerings to a small number of fields in which it can concentrate resources and achieve distinction.

**Figure 7.1: The Largest Master's and Professional Programs and All Doctoral Programs, with Enrollments as of Fall 2013**

### Master's and Professional Programs

Program	Enrollment
Law (JD)	1,462
International Affairs (MA)	430
Business Administration (MBA)	163
Public Administration (MPA)	152
Public Policy (MPP)	132
International Legal Studies (LLM)	125
International Peace & Conflict Resolution (MA)	112
Finance (MS)	102
Accounting (MS)	95
International Development (MA)	92

## Doctoral Programs (PhD unless otherwise indicated)

Program	Enrollment
Economics	92
History	54
International Relations	53
Anthropology	49
Clinical Psychology*	39
Public Administration	31
Behavior, Cognition, and Neuroscience*	30
Law (SJD)	22
Political Science	19
Justice, Law, and Society	17
Communication**	15

Source: *Academic Data Reference Book (ADRB)*, 2013–14.

Note: Students still enrolled in terminated doctoral programs are not included.

\*New as of 2009; these were formerly separate tracks in a single PhD psychology program.

\*\*New program as of 2011.

Several parts of the strategic plan express rising expectations for graduate education at AU. One of the 10 transformational goals of the strategic plan is to “demonstrate distinction in graduate, professional, and legal studies.” This goal is ambitious and may be facilitated by clear specification of what is meant by “distinction,” as well as articulation of possible means for obtaining this goal. Specifically, this goal states that, “With each graduate program demonstrating distinction and increased support for programs that have achieved or may achieve high recognition, we will be known as a world-class institution for legal and advanced graduate studies.” Graduate education is also closely linked to most of the other strategic plan objectives, including fostering the scholar-teacher ideal, creating research centers and institutes, reflecting and valuing diversity, promoting social and international engagement, encouraging innovation and high performance, and achieving recognition and distinction for the university. Planning for graduate programs, specifically, was also conducted in 2011 at the faculty leadership retreat, which focused on the changing market for graduate education (also discussed in chapter 8, “Other Educational Initiatives”).

AU’s commitment to its graduate programs is also demonstrated by the relevance of several of the strategic plan’s six enabling goals to graduate and professional education. The first enabling goal, “diversifying revenue sources,” is intended in part to enhance external funding of graduate students’ studies (for example, by employing graduate students as research assistants on faculty grants in departments or institutional grants in research centers). The ena-

bling goals of enhancing information technology, library resources, research infrastructure, and campus facilities are all critical for providing the necessary foundations for first-rate graduate studies.

The importance that is given to graduate and professional studies in the strategic plan reflects a desire to improve graduate education. This is a timely goal given the wide range in the national rankings of graduate programs at AU, where at present some programs are ranked in the top decile by Academic Analytics while others are ranked in the bottom decile. A long-term strategy needs to be formulated for improving underperforming graduate programs. The strategic plan took effect at a time when graduate and professional education faced many challenges nationally, ranging from an economic crisis and slow recovery to the advent of online programs and competition from for-profit institutions. With economically strapped students more concerned than ever about the value of a graduate degree, the university knew it would have to pay more attention to the fit between its programs and student interests, as well as its ability to serve nontraditional graduate students effectively. Thus, the implementation of the strategic plan, along with AU's desire to respond effectively to a rapidly changing external environment, have led to massive changes in graduate and professional education at AU, most of which are still ongoing and which are detailed in the rest of this chapter and the following chapter (which covers online education, nontraditional programs, research centers, and the sciences).

## **STRENGTHENING SHARED GOVERNANCE AND REGULATIONS**

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Much has been accomplished in the past five years. AU has strengthened graduate education by improving shared governance so that there is greater oversight of academic rigor and more emphasis on ensuring the quality of courses and programs. AU also revised its academic regulations for graduate students and completed a comprehensive assessment of graduate education, the recommendations from which are now being implemented. Periodic external review of all programs, accredited or not, also occurs. These actions have already begun to have an impact on the overall quality of AU's graduate education.

### **Instituting and Maintaining Shared Governance**

When the strategic plan was approved in 2008, much of the administration of graduate and professional programs had devolved to the individual schools and colleges. AU's administrative structures never included a central graduate school or office. The dean of academic affairs (then a de facto vice provost) oversaw graduate studies but had many other responsibilities and was not able to devote significant attention to graduate education. The registrar's office had responsibility for enforcing the academic regulations but was frequently requested by individual units to make exceptions to regulations that were increasingly seen as cumbersome and obsolete. The centralized Graduate Admissions office had been abolished about a decade earlier, leaving admissions in the hands of individual schools and colleges, all

of which used different systems and procedures. Among other things, this decentralized system meant that AU had never adopted a single enterprise solution to graduate admissions processes. There was still some centralized authority in allocating graduate financial aid to the various academic units and in setting standards and rules for financial awards, but otherwise AU's graduate programs operated independently.

While respectful of the university's tradition of autonomous schools and colleges, the provost realized that the strategic plan objectives for graduate education could not be met without a better balance between central oversight and coordination on the one hand and decentralized operations on the other. Therefore, in 2008, the provost vested responsibility for all nonlaw graduate programs in a new position, the vice provost of research and dean of graduate studies, a position currently occupied by Jonathan Tubman. The Office of the Vice Provost for Research and Dean of Graduate Studies was created to coordinate information and planning about graduate education, create programs that promote graduate student learning, and enforce timely completion of degrees. In response to this administrative reorganization, those schools and colleges that did not already have a central administrator for graduate studies created new associate dean positions for this purpose. The result is a greater balance of centralized coordination and strategic management with continued autonomy in day-to-day program administration and development. However, the vice provost for research and dean of graduate studies subsequently found that the responsibilities for managing the two different parts of his portfolio (support for faculty research and management of graduate programs) had increased to the point where he needed to appoint an associate dean of graduate studies, starting in July 2013. The new associate dean (Michael Keynes) assists with building graduate enrollment, implementing national best practices, supporting the implementation of a new graduate enrollment management system (discussed later in this chapter), and overseeing students' progress in their programs of study.

In addition to these administrative structures, the faculty continue to oversee graduate education through several important committees. The Committee on Graduate Curriculum, which is a standing committee of the Faculty Senate, consists of faculty representatives from each of the schools and colleges, except WCL, plus one graduate student, and the dean of graduate studies as an ex officio member. The committee makes recommendations to the units, the senate, and the administration regarding:

- existing graduate curriculum and course offerings
- new programs and major curricular changes
- new courses for completeness of the syllabus, redundancy of material across teaching units/academic units, up-to-date reading list and other resources, clarity of assignments, rigor, and specificity of grading and evaluation expectations
- any changes and terminations that affect more than one teaching unit
- general curricular policies affecting graduate academic programs

Thus, the committee is directly responsible for the Faculty Senate's commitment to academic rigor in graduate-level curricula and course offerings. Also, the senate has a Committee on Learning Assessment (COLA) that reviews graduate program assessment plans, requires annual updates on assessment results, and offers support to units that need help with assessment.

In addition, each school or college has a faculty committee that evaluates proposed new or revised graduate programs. Individual teaching units within schools and colleges maintain their own systems of graduate studies committees and also appoint faculty directors of specific master's and doctoral programs. Thus, faculty are heavily involved, along with the unit deans and central administrators, in the administration and oversight of graduate and professional programs in a system of shared governance. For example, in summer 2013, a doctoral council, consisting of two doctoral program directors and the associate dean of graduate studies, was implemented to review all proposed doctoral dissertation committees. This structure was implemented to provide collaborative oversight that ensures all doctoral dissertation committees contain members who are research active and have the requisite skills to assist doctoral candidates in completing their research projects successfully.

### **New Academic Regulations**

In 2010, AU began an extensive overhaul of its academic regulations in an effort to separate the rules for undergraduate and graduate education into two distinct documents. This was part of a comprehensive review of all academic regulations for the university. In 2011, the Faculty Senate established a task force of faculty and administrators to: conduct an analysis of existing rules and procedures; identify best practices at other institutions; restructure the organization of the graduate academic regulations; eliminate sections that were more appropriately placed in separate documents; and create a streamlined, web-based document that could be more easily accessed and understood. The entire process of review and revision took two years and involved a series of meetings with stakeholders representing staff, faculty, graduate directors, and administrators across the campus. The review also fostered robust discussions about the state of graduate education at AU and the university's strategic goals.

The new graduate regulations are contained in a streamlined and simplified document posted [online](#). It is designed to be easy to navigate and to provide “one stop shopping” for information about policies and procedures relating to nonlaw graduate education. The regulations include hyperlinks throughout to ensure immediate access to any documents pertinent to each topic. Among the many changes found in the new regulations are the following:

- clarification of policies concerning admissions, residency, leaves of absence, probation, dismissal, and a number of related issues
- establishment of a program of study for each student, ensuring transparency and clarity, and planning for progress and completion of course requirements in a timely manner
- revision of grading, course numbering, and other procedures to bring the graduate regulations in line with revisions in the undergraduate regulations



- clear, standardized processes for certificate programs
- new requirements for Responsible Conduct of Research, including training and research assurances
- clear and consistent time limits for completion of degrees, including clarification of procedures and acceptable conditions for extending the time limits
- elimination of requirements of a comprehensive examination and either a thesis or a designated “nonthesis option” for master’s degrees and replacement of the requirement with the options to require field-appropriate types of integrative capstone experiences
- replacement of detailed requirements for specific numbers and types of comprehensive examinations and “tools of research,” which are used to apply uniformly to all doctoral programs, with streamlined rules that allow greater flexibility for units to design their own PhD requirements consistent with best practices in their fields
- a university-wide template of requirements and procedures for doctoral education that can be adapted by individual programs to reflect best practices and standards in their respective academic fields; these new guidelines include revised university policies for dissertation committees and minimum credit hours, as well as the creation of a doctoral council to assist programs in implementation of the new procedures

The Faculty Senate approved the new graduate academic regulations in May 2012, with implementation beginning in AY2012–13. To ensure an efficient transition, the university conducted two parallel efforts: 1) training programs involving administrators, academic advisors, and staff; and 2) a technological implementation initiative involving the Office of Information Technology (OIT), the Office of the Registrar, and members of the Academic Affairs staff. With the new regulations in place, each doctoral program has been encouraged to examine its curricular offerings, the number of credits required, and the structure of its comprehensive exams and other requirements to better facilitate student development and degree completion. Master’s programs have also been encouraged to use their new flexibility, for example, by selectively replacing former comprehensive examinations with other kinds of field-appropriate capstone experiences. One example of the latter is the move currently under way in the School of International Service (SIS) to offer an experiential “practicum” as an option for satisfying the master’s capstone requirement.

## GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

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Graduate and professional enrollments play an important role in the university's financial health, but AU faces challenges in enrollment management similar to those faced by other institutions. This section will analyze how AU is grappling with these challenges, starting with a review of the current trends in enrollment, admissions, and diversity of graduate students and then turning to the university's strategic goals and its success and challenges in achieving them.

### The Graduate and Professional Education Task Force Report

Changes to graduate and professional education are being put in place based on the work of a task force convened by the provost to assess issues related to graduate and professional education at AU. During AY2012–13, the task force investigated issues including quality standards, enrollment management, governance structures, admissions and financial aid practices, branding, and marketing. The task force issued a report that drew from national trends in graduate education to make recommendations for AU's programs. The following were among the task force's recommendations:

- develop standards and guidelines for strategic enrollment-management practices and graduate admissions processing practices, including staff training and development
- implement an enterprise-wide graduate admissions processing solution
- develop strategic partnerships to build pipelines for potential applicants and alumni
- promote the strategic use of financial aid to attain institutional goals
- develop compelling brand architecture for graduate education at AU

### Recent Enrollment Trends

As shown in figure 7.2, graduate and professional enrollments in fall 2013 totaled 5,133, down slightly from the fall 2010 peak of 5,326 but still 180 above the fall 2007 level of 4,953. AU's professional schools generally increased master's level enrollments between 2007 and 2013, but these gains were partially offset by declines in master's enrollments in the College of Arts and Sciences. Total doctoral enrollments decreased from 470 to 401 over the 2007–13 period, in large part due to the phasing out of certain doctoral programs that had been eliminated in the early 2000s as well as improved enforcement of time limits for completion.

**Figure 7.2: Graduate Enrollment Trends by Degree and School/College, Fall 2007 to Fall 2013**

Master's	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Arts & Sciences (CAS)	818	833	905	883	693	689	677
Communication (SOC)	347	349	375	385	364	369	369
Business (KSB)	389	411	461	509	467	500	558
International Service (SIS)	821	799	819	881	915	976	914
Public Affairs (SPA)	473	474	514	541	525	518	530
<b>Total Master's Excluding Law</b>	<b>2,848</b>	<b>2,866</b>	<b>3,074</b>	<b>3,199</b>	<b>2,964</b>	<b>3,052</b>	<b>3,048</b>
Doctoral	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Arts & Sciences (CAS)	343	315	306	296	286	269	266
International Service (SIS)	51	47	52	53	57	58	53
Communication (SOC)	-	-	-	-	7	10	15
Public Affairs (SPA)	76	69	75	72	77	75	67
<b>Total Doctoral Excluding Law</b>	<b>470</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>433</b>	<b>421</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>412</b>	<b>401</b>
Law (by Degree)	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
JD	1,483	1,427	1,356	1,503	1,500	1,513	1,432
LLM	134	141	170	185	200	185	200
SJD	18	18	19	18	19	20	22
<b>Total Law</b>	<b>1,635</b>	<b>1,586</b>	<b>1,545</b>	<b>1,706</b>	<b>1,719</b>	<b>1,719</b>	<b>1,684</b>
<b>Total University</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>All Graduate/ Professional Programs</b>	<b>4,953</b>	<b>4,883</b>	<b>5,052</b>	<b>5,326</b>	<b>5,110</b>	<b>5,182</b>	<b>5,133</b>

Source: *Academic Data Reference Book (ADRB)*, various years.

### Admissions and Conversion

Figure 7.3 summarizes graduate and professional admissions data over the same time period. Between fall 2007 and fall 2013, total applications generally increased for master's and doctoral programs, but (following a national trend) decreased for JD degrees in the law school. Correspondingly, admission rates fell in master's and doctoral programs overall, indicating greater selectivity, but rose in the JD program especially in the last three years shown. It is especially hoped that greater selectivity at the outset of doctoral programs will result in fewer problems of excessive time to completion at the back end (many PhD programs have noted that the best students usually finish in a timely manner, but weaker

students take much longer). Finally, conversion rates have fluctuated without any obvious upward or downward trend.

**Figure 7.3: Graduate Admissions Summary, Fall 2007 to Fall 2013**

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
<b>Master's*</b>							
<b>Applicants</b>	4,942	4,902	5,806	5,861	5,585	5,772	5,510
<b>Admitted</b>	3,370	3,209	3,751	3,778	3,509	3,566	3,547
<b>Acceptance Rate</b>	68.2%	65.5%	64.6%	64.5%	62.8%	61.8%	64.4%
<b>Registered</b>	1,236	1,203	1,352	1,394	1,182	1,322	1,264
<b>Conversion Rate</b>	36.7%	37.5%	36.0%	36.9%	33.7%	37.1%	35.6%
<b>Doctoral**</b>							
<b>Applicants</b>	668	673	694	847	864	894	845
<b>Admitted</b>	180	172	180	201	175	146	162
<b>Acceptance Rate</b>	26.9%	25.6%	25.9%	23.7%	20.3%	16.3%	19.2%
<b>Registered</b>	69	60	69	76	77	58	63
<b>Conversion Rate</b>	38.3%	34.9%	38.3%	37.8%	44.0%	39.7%	38.9%
<b>Law (JD Only)</b>							
<b>Applicants</b>	8,401	8,185	8,666	9,021	7,524	6,028	6,168
<b>Admitted</b>	1,899	1,775	1,931	1,934	2,075	1,962	2,713
<b>Acceptance Rate</b>	22.6%	20.9%	22.3%	21.4%	27.6%	32.5%	44.0%
<b>Registered</b>	498	474	481	502	475	493	473
<b>Conversion Rate</b>	26.2%	26.7%	24.9%	26.0%	22.9%	25.1%	17.4%

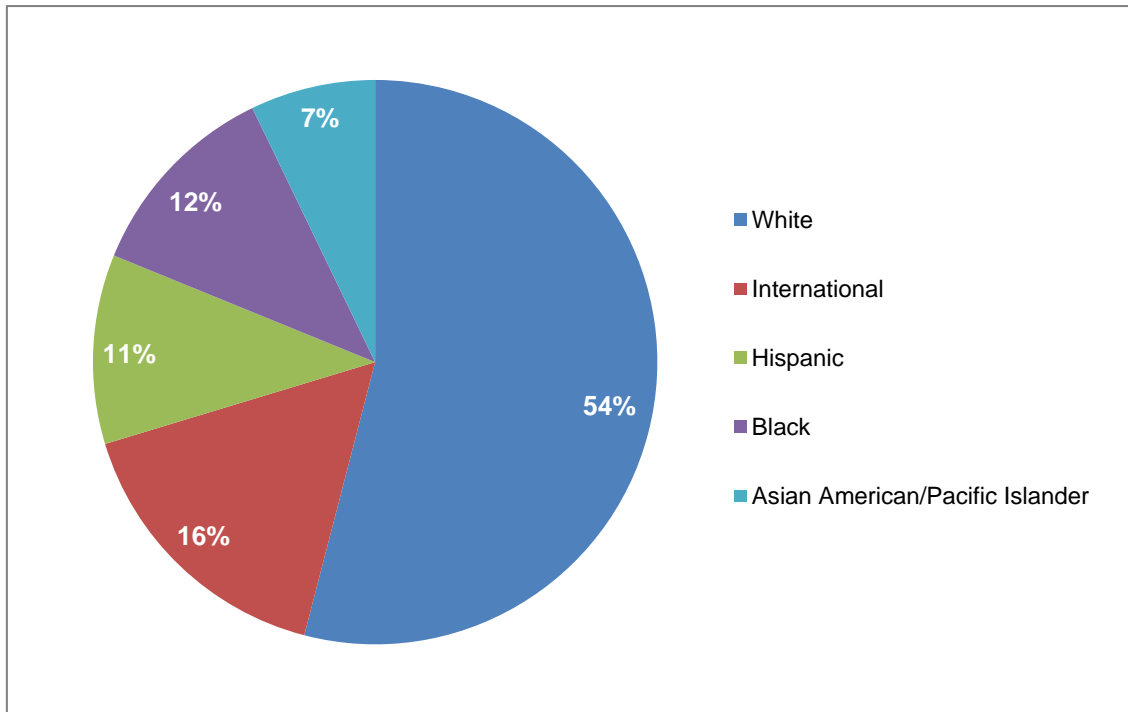
Source: ADRB, various years, except law data from WCL.

\*Excludes LL.M.

\*\*Excludes SJD.

In line with AU’s mission and strategic goals, an important goal for many programs is to admit cohorts that enrich opportunities for students to work with colleagues who bring diverse perspectives to the classroom. One example of such diversity is the racial and ethnic diversity of AU’s graduate students. Figure 7.4 details the diversity of the graduate student body. As of fall 2013, approximately 53 percent of those who self-reported their race/ethnicity were white/Caucasian, 16 percent were international, 11 percent were black/African American, 11 percent were Hispanic, 7 percent were Asian American/Pacific Islander, and smaller percentages were in other categories. The AU graduate student population is mostly female: 60 percent were women as of fall 2013. Success is tracked in many ways. For example, survey data indicate that 88 percent of graduate students agreed that AU is committed to creating an inclusive campus community, and 92 percent agree that AU demonstrates a commitment to respect for diverse views and perspectives.

**Figure 7.4 : Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity of Master’s, Doctoral, and Law Students, Fall 2013**



Source: *ADRB*, AY2013–14.

Note: The figure excludes students who declined to indicate race or ethnicity.

## Strategic Enrollment Goals and Admissions Processes

The AU budget calls for growth of 100 graduate and professional students, campus wide, each year over a 10-year period. This implies an increase of 1,000 students, or about 20 percent growth, over a decade. Unfortunately, over the past three years, AU has not met these targets, and total graduate enrollments have declined slightly since peaking in 2010 (see figure 7.2). Therefore, in order to better ensure AU's academic and financial future, the university is now investing in the infrastructure of its graduate programs—particularly the development and marketing of its certificate and master's programs. The university is also moving heavily into online master's programs, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

The effective recruitment of talented graduate students is most clearly demonstrated in academic units at AU that have implemented strategic approaches to graduate enrollment management. For example, SIS and WCL use strategic marketing and recruitment practices, including clear branding, mission statements, and student value propositions; clearly defined market segments; differentiation from competitors; identification of potential applicants in specific market segments; tailored communications to applicants; and, consistent follow-up and cultivation of relationships with applicants. The School of Public Affairs (SPA) and the Kogod School of Business (KSB) use many of these strategies as well. Units at AU that do not use these approaches as extensively appear to have greater difficulty in meeting enrollment targets.

A lack of coordination among central and local marketing and branding efforts may have led to transmission of conflicting messages to potential applicants, as well as an indistinct brand architecture. The duplication of graduate admissions efforts may have diverted resources away from the formation of more efficient (automated) processing systems. In addition, the lack of a centralized admissions operation has prevented the collection of institution-wide data that could be mined to assist units in branding and marketing. An adequate mix of innovative graduate programs, designed to facilitate career advancement and delivered in ways that accommodate the needs of contemporary graduate students, many of who work part or full time, is essential to developing new market segments. In KSB, the development of the professional master's of business administration PMBA program is a case study supporting this argument.

The Graduate and Professional Education Task Force report puts special emphasis on branding and marketing to increase awareness of (and applications to) AU's programs. The report also calls for unit-level, program-specific input into goal setting for graduate enrollments and the development of AU's brand. The report recommends instituting university-wide recruitment efforts, such as web pages and staff resources devoted to helping prospective applicants identify the right programs for their career interests. These efforts can certainly be helpful for increasing the public visibility of AU's graduate and professional programs and increasing applications. Greater effort is needed to clearly articulate and communicate how specific graduate programs prepare prospective students to advance their careers or start new ones in particular career trajectories.

It is worth noting that AU's recent challenges in increasing graduate enrollments have occurred at a time of unusual economic difficulties nationally and internationally. The U.S. economy is having the slowest recovery from a recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s, Europe is depressed economically, and many global regions are slowing down. There is public skepticism about the value of a graduate degree at a time when postgraduate employment is often problematic because of the general economic climate and significant government cutbacks. AU's ambitious goals for growing graduate enrollments and the strategies for potentially achieving them may need to be reevaluated in light of these circumstances. These trends, however, have not impeded growth in graduate enrollments at local peer institutions or in terms of national graduate enrollment trends. More focus on national best practices in graduate enrollment management is critical to the enhancement of graduate enrollments at AU.

With diligent focus, American University will take several years to implement all the new strategies and procedures recommended for increasing graduate and professional enrollments, to refine the strategies and processes to ensure success, and to assess how well the various efforts are working. However, as the budget is developed every two years, it will be important to reassess whether continued growth of 100 graduate students per year is or is not a feasible goal. Most likely, the largest increases in graduate enrollments (and hence the validation of the current strategy) will come primarily through the success of the new online master's and professional programs in generating increased enrollments, the prospects for which are covered in the next chapter. A graduate program mix that better reflects market demands and strategic realignment of resources may accelerate the enhancement of graduate enrollments.

### **Graduate Financial Aid**

Except for WCL, which has its own financial aid policies, graduate financial aid (GFA) funds are drawn from the tuition paid by graduate students who do not receive GFA awards. As of fall 2013, GFA funding totals over \$17 million. At present, virtually all GFA awards are based on merit criteria rather than on financial need. However, the distribution of GFA funds between master's and doctoral students, across academic units, and in response to competing strategic objectives represents an ongoing dynamic tension at AU. Significant discussion occurs at multiple levels of leadership as to how different aspects of the university mission (for example, doctoral research and training versus professional master's education, increased graduate enrollment versus retention of existing students) should be reflected in articulated priorities for GFA funds. There is no mention in the strategic plan of institutional priorities for the expenditure of GFA funds. The task force report, while not making specific recommendations, does state the principle that GFA allocations should be tied to explicit missions and goals at the individual program level. In addition, the report urges the development and implementation of a process for assessing the return on investment (ROI) of GFA resources, a process that would use standardized metrics to improve assessments of which units use GFA funds most effectively.

The university is also seeking to increase the amount of graduate aid through alumni donations and external grants. AU has also loosened restrictions on aid to make it possible for those who previously did not qualify (for example, part-time students, continuing students, and students taking summer courses) to receive GFA awards. The Office of the Provost also provides funds each year to support doctoral students' field research (\$100,000), as well as 16 one-semester doctoral fellowships to support students completing their dissertations (\$200,000). These efforts have been augmented in part to improve doctoral students' average time to completion and lower doctoral student attrition, two measures on which AU ranked poorly in the recent NRC rankings of U.S. doctoral programs. The university needs to determine if it has reached the appropriate balance among uses and priorities for GFA funds and if it needs to further examine financial aid strategies through analysis of data and examination of national best practice standards.

The university has implemented specific actions to assist students in limiting debt associated with graduate or professional school. For example, the new graduate academic regulations include provisions to improve time to degree for both master's and doctoral students, including time limits for degrees, continuous enrollment, special pricing of noncredit options for maintaining matriculation, and extensive joint BA/MA degree offerings. As noted above, AU now provides \$17 million annually in merit-based financial support to master's and doctoral students. The Office of Merit Awards also provides dedicated support to highly qualified graduate students to write competitive applications for external scholarship and fellowship funding. Each academic unit includes professional staff or faculty who serve as graduate advisors to enhance the effectiveness of student decision making and to improve time to degree. Future efforts to limit graduate student debt may include a reexamination of the criteria for the distribution of GFA funds (for example, merit- versus need-based criteria), greater attention to programming that promotes student financial well-being, and a range of campus support units that work with graduate students.

## STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

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Most of the services available to undergraduates (and described in chapter 5) are also available to graduate and professional students. This section highlights some services that are especially important to these students.

### Library Services

The AU library provides dedicated study space and other services for graduate and professional students, including: the Graduate Research Commons (GRC), an area that includes collaborative workrooms; day-use lockers; a “smart” classroom; and thesis/dissertation formatting assistance. The library also offers a series of workshops targeted to graduate students during the academic year, including sessions on writing a literature review, identifying archival data for research, and writing for publication. AU



subject-area librarians are available for personal appointments when students have questions about projects and papers. Recognizing the need for graduate students to obtain expert advice on data that are useful to their research and to have those data both protected and accessible during their research and writing, the library has hired a data research librarian to assist them and their faculty. Beginning AY2013–14, a small group of senior library faculty and staff are meeting monthly with the Graduate Leadership Council to deal with any issues and to plan/test changes to the services. Administrators are currently looking at the most opportune time to have librarians stationed in the GRC, in lieu of booking appointments. In addition, the library has at least one subject specialist assigned to each of the schools and colleges, and these specialists make a deliberate effort to meet and orient all the new graduate students.

Graduate students who are conducting field research have available a range of equipment to check out from the library, including cameras and voice recorders, tripods, wi-fi access points, and laptops or tablets already loaded with research materials. The library is the home of e-submission of all dissertations. (For details on graduate student satisfaction with services, see the 2012 Campus Climate report ([http://www.american.edu/provost/oira/campus\\_climate.cfm](http://www.american.edu/provost/oira/campus_climate.cfm).)

### Career Services

All graduate students outside of the law and business schools are served by the university's Career Center, ranked among the top 20 nationally by the *Princeton Review* since 2007. The Career Center assigns advisors with subject matter expertise to each school so that students benefit from building a relationship with their advisor that continues throughout their time at AU. Students make contact with their advisors in a variety of ways, including in-person one-on-one appointments, phone or Skype meetings, and drop-in advising hours that are held in each school's primary building on a weekly basis.

Advisors assist students with career counseling, internships, and self-assessment through tools like the Strong Interest Inventory and Myers Briggs Type Indicator. In addition to these one-on-one services, students have access to a variety of workshops and professional development events. Topics include interviewing skills, resume building, online branding, and networking strategies. The Career Center also facilitates campus interviews and job information sessions with potential employers.

The Washington College of Law has its own career development office, called the Office of Career and Professional Development. Its services are described below. The Kogod School of Business also has its own career services office, the Kogod Center for Career Development, with seven full-time staff and a menu of options similar to those offered by the AU Career Center.

## Doctoral Services

Each doctoral program provides many services that prepare their students for both academic and nonacademic careers. To the extent that doctoral students are supervised and mentored by faculty who are fully engaged in research, students can access a range of experiences (for example, professional writing, peer-reviewed manuscript submission, conference attendance and presentations, membership in professional societies) that prepare them for academic careers. Other resources at AU, such as the Greenberg Seminars, CTRL, the Career Center, the Writing Center, and experiential learning during internships, provide important learning opportunities in the areas of teaching and learning, data analysis and presentation, professional skills, and writing that are significant components of professional preparation for a research career in either an academic or nonacademic setting. Other support operations such as the Office of Sponsored Programs and the Office of Merit Awards assist doctoral students in drafting and refining applications for scholarships, fellowships, and externally sponsored research projects.

## WCL Student Services

The Office of Student Affairs (OSA) provides services that are consistent with the needs of students in the Washington College of Law. The OSA is staffed by the dean of students and an assistant director. Starting with orientation, which is conducted by OSA, students are encouraged toward professionalism by beginning to take responsibility for their actions and their representations. During the remainder of the academic year, and throughout their time at WCL, students can anticipate the following assistance from Student Services:

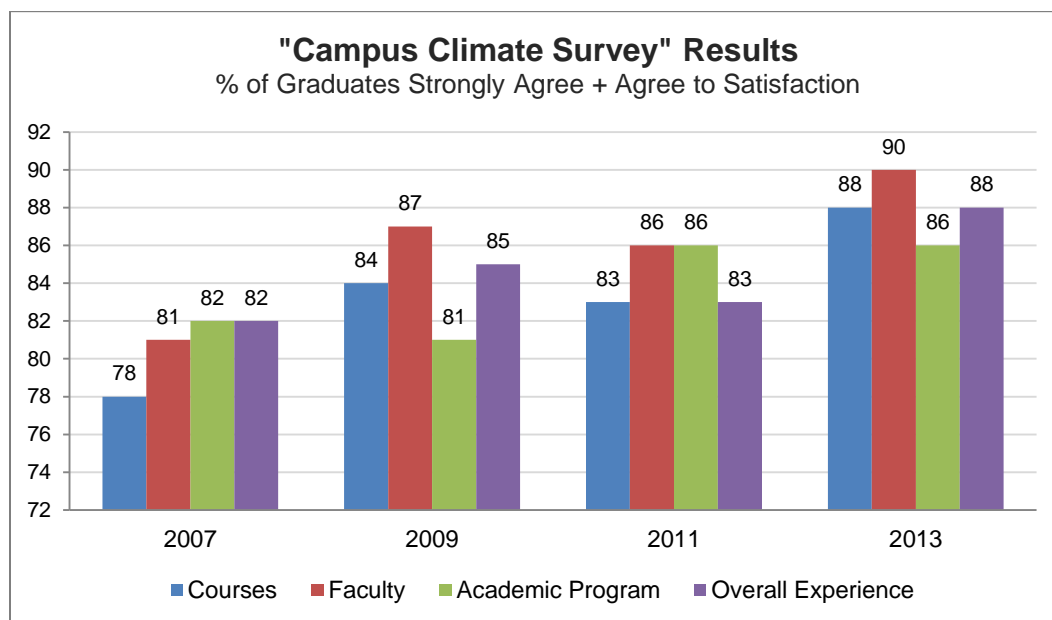
- **Academic advising.** Section-by-section, first-year advising on graduation requirements and upper-level course selection, supplemented with faculty-hosted sessions by subject area, arranged by OSA.
- **Bar examination sessions.** Second-year sessions designed to address jurisdiction selection through the lens of reciprocity, waiver, employment options, etc.; third-year/fourth-year sessions designed to focus on mental and physical preparation for the upcoming bar examination.
- **Accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).** At any given point in the academic year, Student Services is supporting an average of 70 students under the ADA; these students receive notes, extended time on exams, shared or private rooms, etc., and career preparation (interview) advice and counseling.
- **Wellness outreach.** OSA has made an effort in recent years to strengthen the mental and physical wellness of its students. From one-day fairs to a series of sessions, the office continues to experiment with student wellness outreach. OSA has moderated at least one panel each year devoted to “The Happy Lawyer,” during which a frank conversation is held regarding the concerns of students and efforts to address and anticipate issues. Discussions have focused on the importance of topics such as the student as a person, meditation, balance, and avoidance of unhelpful substances.

The Office of Career and Professional Development (OCPD) educates students about workplace professionalism and the diverse range of career opportunities available. OCPD offers individual career counseling, specialized programming, and extensive resources. OCPD assists students in achieving career satisfaction through self-assessment, exploration, and the development of effective job search strategies. A career counselor can review resumes and cover letters, conduct mock interviews, and assist in planning an effective job search. OCPD sponsors a variety of recruitment programs and other events to facilitate interaction between students and employers.

## THE GRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Overall, graduate and professional students at American University express satisfaction with the student experience. Survey results have generally demonstrated high levels of satisfaction among students and alumni with their graduate programs. The Campus Climate Survey consistently shows that around 80 percent or more of nonlaw graduate students are satisfied with their course, programs, and faculty, as well as their overall experience (see figure 7.5).

**Figure 7.5: Graduate Student Satisfaction with University Experience**



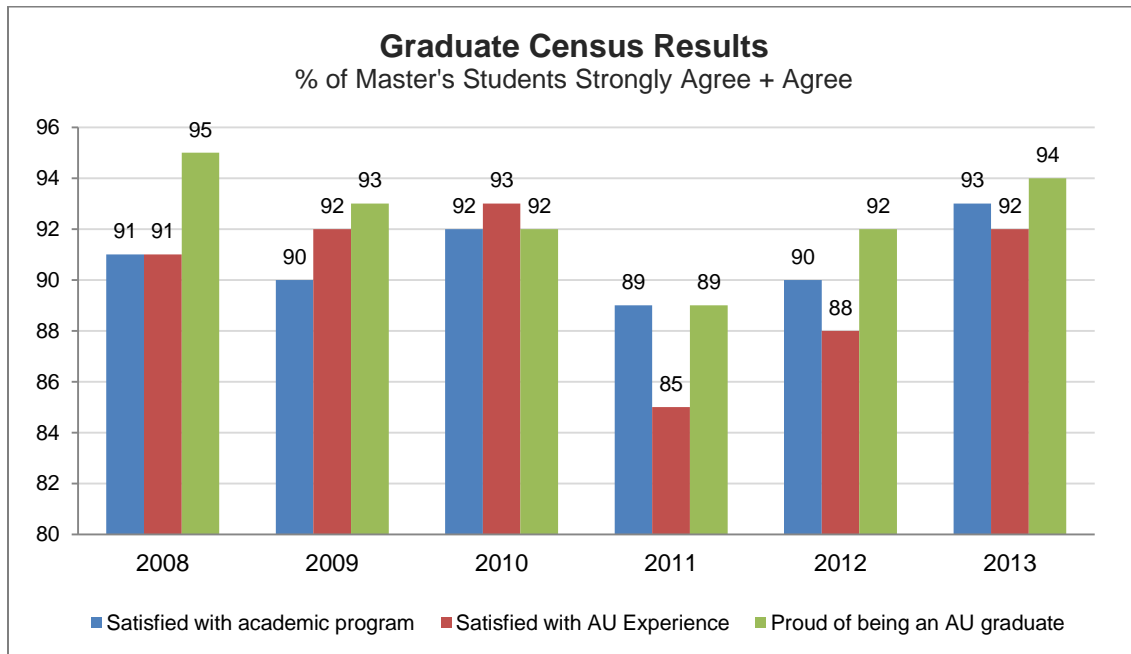
Source: Campus Climate Survey.

The survey results of current students are positive and the survey helps identify areas for improvement. However, discussions with graduate students during the development of the self-study found that even more could be done to identify areas in need of improvement.

For example, discussions with students during the comment period of the self-study revealed that some students were dissatisfied with the availability of courses for their concentrations. Students are eager to have the content of their courses be as applicable to the job market as possible. The discussion led to the identification of issues that are solvable. As a result, the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment will begin holding regular town hall meetings with graduate students each semester so that issues can be addressed promptly.

High levels of satisfaction are found at the time of graduation. As seen in figure 7.6, survey results from the graduation census for the past five years show that master’s graduates have the percentage agreeing and strongly agreeing that they were satisfied with their academic program has remained at about 90 percent or above, while satisfaction with AU has been at 85 percent or above. Large percentages also agree that they are proud of being American University graduates and that they would recommend AU to prospective students.

**Figure 7.6: Graduate Student Satisfaction with University Experience**



Source: Graduation Census.

In 2010–11, AU conducted a survey of all its alumni, including graduate and law. This was the first university-wide survey of alumni since 2000. The alumni survey asked about employment and further education, assessments of their academic program, and their current opinion of AU. For those who had received their degree in the previous five years, these results were as follows. On a scale from Not Well at All (1) to Very Well (5), graduate alumni rated how well their program prepared them for additional graduate or professional school at 3.39, and law at 3.71. On the same scale, law school alumni rated preparation for

employment at 3.71; graduates were at 3.83. Asked to rate their current opinion of AU, on a scale from Strongly Negative (1) to Strongly Positive (7), the mean score for graduates was 5.51 and for law was 5.48.

### Postgraduation Employment

One way that AU assesses how well it is preparing students is the Graduation Census, a survey of all graduates that asks about job placement, further educational plans, and the development of student abilities. Previously, the survey asked graduates how well their AU experience developed their abilities in the following areas: effective writing, original research, substantive knowledge in the field, critical reading and comprehension, and analytical thinking. From 2008 to 2012, on a scale of 4 = very well, 3 = well, 2 = fair, and 1 = poor, the mean scores for all of these abilities were between 3.00 and 3.38.

One area that has not been included in the survey, but is of considerable interest, is quantitative reasoning and analysis. Beginning in late 2012, the provost created a campus-wide task force to examine current courses and learning outcomes in the arena of quantitative preparation. The work of this task force is ongoing. A question related to quantitative reasoning and analysis was included beginning with the May 2013 survey (see figure 7.7). Additional questions relating to preparation for employment were also added, assessing application of knowledge and the use of computer applications. The questions also changed to ask graduates to rate their own abilities. Mean scores for four of the skills were 3.50 or above. The area of quantitative skills was the lowest self-measured item, with a mean of 3.02. This may be due to the fact that not all programs have quantitative learning outcomes. Still, it is below expectations. For many programs, the ability to use and understand statistical methods is critical. Another area mentioned as a concern during the comment period was information literacy.

**Figure 7.7: Graduation Census Results for Development of Abilities, Master’s Students, May 2013**

#### May 2013 Master’s: How would you rate your own abilities in the following areas?

	Mean
Thinking Analytically	3.62
Applying Knowledge	3.55
Critical Reading/Comprehension	3.54
Substantive Knowledge in My Field	3.46
Conducting Original Research	3.28
Using Computer Application	3.25
Quantitative Skills	3.02

4=Very Well; 3=Well; 2=Fair; 1=Poor.  
Includes only those who offered an opinion.  
Source: Graduation Census.

Assessing employment that is appropriate to each degree presents a challenge at the graduate level, as it differs between fields. The Graduation Census also asks graduates about their postgraduation activities. For May 2012 nonlaw master's graduates, 86 percent were working, 4 percent were pursuing additional education, and 2 percent were doing both, as of six months after graduation. Of those working, 89 percent are in full-time positions and 62 percent report their position relates directly to their degree, while another 30 percent say it relates indirectly. Finding better ways to summarize and publicize these data will be a priority for the future. AU's strategic plan objectives include the following: "Demonstrate that graduating...master's and PhD students achieve success six months after graduation, either through employment in their chosen field or by continuing their studies in the graduate school of their choice."

In fall 2011, the newly appointed SIS dean, James Goldgeier, made it a priority to ensure that SIS students were well positioned to join the professional workforce upon graduation. He created the SIS Task Force on Professionalizing the Master's Programs. The task force presented its findings the following January. It first conducted a benchmarking study, which found that the number of economics and quantitative methods courses required at AU were generally on par with other Association of Professional Schools of International Affairs (APSIA) schools. However, AU was in the minority of APSIA schools by not requiring any professional skills courses (for example, policy analysis, accounting, management, etc.). The most startling finding from the benchmarking exercise was that AU was the only U.S. APSIA school that required a long, substantial research-based paper as its capstone: all other APSIA schools offered or required a group practicum or simulation exercise for their program capstone. Based on these results, the task force made four recommendations. The first recommendation was to introduce a practicum option for the capstone. In fall 2012, four pilot practica were successfully offered, with the number rising to 15 in spring 2013. The second recommendation was to make completion of an internship or certification of relevant professional experience a requirement for all master's students. This requirement is now part of the MA curriculum. The third recommendation was to offer and staff more second methods and skills classes in program evaluation, policy analysis, and advanced quantitative and qualitative methods. Providing these classes is a process that is ongoing. The final recommendation was to increase dedicated resources for SIS career counseling and alumni relations. SIS now has a dedicated career services staff person with an office in the SIS building, as well as a new associate director of Alumni Relations, who also works for part of the week in the SIS building.

An overriding concern for WCL at this time is the economy and its impact on the legal profession, its students, and the law school. Law schools nationally are facing a crisis as the legal services industry has entered a period of decline. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of law jobs has declined by 54,000, from 1,123,000 in 2004 to 1,069,000 in 2011. With the decline in jobs, the average starting salaries for all law school graduates has also gradually declined alongside an increase in the cost of legal education.

Given the transformations in the legal employment market, the law school has reevaluated its programs and services, particularly in the career development area. A primary example is the creation of the WCL JD Distinguished Fellowship Program. Since 2009, WCL has funded a “bridge” program for each of the four most recent graduating classes consisting of a competitive application and decision process. That program has given 160 students the ability to continue their substantive legal training for a period of time while conducting their full-time job searches. In addition, WCL’s new faculty committee on career development and eleven faculty practice groups designed to assist students in their career development.

Other efforts include increased employer outreach in the public and private sectors; internal modifications, such as the conversion of a recruitment position into the manager of employer relations; enhanced student focus and communication through online counseling appointment scheduling; the creation of a student-to-student mentoring program; and overall strategic planning that takes into account the impact of decisions on the career development of students and alumni.

The WCL Office of Career and Professional Development sponsors a wide variety of educational programs, guidance on application processes, and networking events that facilitate the interaction between students and practitioners. WCL graduates continue to secure positions in the public and private sectors. Regularly, the representation of government and public interest employers exceeds the national average.

The law school compiles and reports detailed employment statistics for its recent JD graduates, which reflect the graduates’ status as of nine months after graduation. As a result, the 2012 class is the most recent class for which finalized data is available. Of the 463 graduates in the Class of 2012, 353 graduates reported being employed within nine months after graduation; 180 graduates were in full-time, long-term positions that required bar passage; and another 68 graduates were in full-time, long-term positions for which a law degree is advantageous. This “JD advantaged” classification is important, because many students know at the outset of their legal education that they do not want to practice law in the traditional sense. Recent graduates in the JD advantaged classification identify fulfilling opportunities in the areas of advocacy, policy, legislation, and regulatory work. Other roles in consulting, community organizing, education, international, and corporate work are also viable alternatives to traditional legal practice. WCL graduates in bar pass required positions including those working as associates in law firms of all sizes, law clerks for federal and state judges, prosecutors and public defenders, and direct legal service providers in a variety of organizations. Additional statistics can be found at: [http://www.wcl.american.edu/career/documents/recent\\_employment\\_statistics.pdf](http://www.wcl.american.edu/career/documents/recent_employment_statistics.pdf).

WCL provides a variety of opportunities for law students to complete part of their legal education outside the United States. More than half of all law school students will participate in at least one of these activities before they graduate. Students may spend up to two years abroad in international JD dual degree programs, simultaneously earning the WCL JD degree

and the JD-equivalent degree in Australia, Canada, and France or a master's degree in Spain. Graduates from these programs are now practicing lawyers in more than 10 countries. WCL students may also direct-enroll for a semester at more than 30 law school partners on six continents to learn the law as locals do. During the summer, students may study the law of international organizations in Geneva; human rights or business law in Chile, Argentina, London, Paris, Geneva, Brussels, or Turkey; and international criminal law in The Hague. They may also spend the summer months working in numerous internships and externships elsewhere around the globe. Finally, students with less flexible schedules may compete abroad for a week in one of at least seven competitions worldwide or spend a week assisting the United Nations Committee against Torture during its fall hearings in Switzerland. WCL strives to instill in its students a worldview based on first-hand experience, with the intention of producing graduates who can think creatively to break down barriers and solve the problems that divide people and nations. With this in mind, new opportunities that serve both students and the greater needs of society are continually being developed.

Overall, AU graduate and professional students are successful in gaining employment in their fields and the university has made progress in developing a curriculum that meets the needs of employers. Still, more opportunities for sharpening the curriculum to better fulfill student and employer needs may exist. The university can do more to interact with strategic partners, perspective employers, and others as a way to review and update the university's educational offerings.

## RETENTION AND GRADUATION

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Retention and graduation have long been a focus of efforts at the undergraduate level and they are also emphasized for graduate students. In the fall of their second year, about 90 percent of nonlaw master's students are either retained or have graduated (see figure 7.8). By the end of the fall of their third year, the percentage of master's students who have graduated is about 70 percent (figure 7.8). These percentages are somewhat volatile and do not appear to be trending either up or down. A greater focus on retention and time to degree in graduate programs, particularly for master's programs at AU, could enhance graduate enrollments and the proportion of students completing their graduate degrees. Specific efforts are needed at the master's level following the development of processes for monitoring the progress of doctoral students.



**Figure 7.8: Masters' Retention and Graduation Rates, Fall Semesters, 2008–12**

Fall	Entering Class	As of Fall 1 Year Out						As of Fall 2 Years Out	
		Enrolled		Graduated		Total		Graduated	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
2012	1,322	1,032	78.1%	184	13.9%	1,216	92.0%	TBD	-
2011	1,182	877	74.2%	216	18.3%	1,093	92.5%	810	68.5%
2010	1,394	984	70.6%	278	19.9%	1,262	90.5%	940	67.4%
2009	1,352	1,008	74.6%	231	17.1%	1,239	91.6%	1,002	74.1%
2008	1,209	880	72.8%	213	17.6%	1,093	90.4%	864	71.5%

Source: Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

Between AY2008–09 and AY2011–12, doctoral average time to completion had held steady at about seven years (figure 7.9). AY2012–13 saw a drop in time to completion. The average time to degree is now 6.5 years. At the same time, looking at incoming classes, 40–50 percent graduate within eight years (figure 7.9). Since 2008, doctoral programs have enforced more stringent time limits on completion. Students who had been in their programs past the time limit specific to their degree were required to submit detailed plans for completion or else face dismissal. Efforts to improve doctoral student completion rates and average time to completion have resulted in discussions about whether faculty incentives need to be changed to take into account the mentoring needed for doctoral students to be successful.

**Figure 7.9: Doctoral Time to Completion and Completion Rates**

**Doctoral Time to Completion  
2008–2012**

AY	# of Graduates	Time to Completion
2012-13	55	6.5
2011-12	51	7.2
2010-11	41	7.2
2009-08	46	6.8
2008-09	44	7.1

**Doctoral 8 Year Completion Rates  
2001–2005**

Fall	Entering Class	8 Year Completion	
		#	%
2005	71	35	49.3%
2004	68	34	50.5%
2003	62	28	45.2%
2002	96	40	41.7%
2001	90	43	47.8%

Source: Office of Institutional Research and Assessment

Across the five academic units that award doctoral degrees, there is too little consistency regarding the significance of doctoral mentorship in faculty tenure and promotion processes or teaching load calculations. Standardized policies do not currently exist at AU to promote faculty involvement in doctoral student mentorship, such as course releases following the advising of a certain number of doctoral dissertations (which is standard, best practice at many PhD-granting institutions). Both the quality and the timely completion of PhD dissertations depend on time and attention that faculty devote to advising them. In order to achieve the strategic plan goals for distinction in graduate studies, as well as goals related to student and faculty research, the university needs to provide research faculty the time needed to be fully engaged in mentoring of doctoral students.

## **EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT OF GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

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AU's basic infrastructure for the effective assessment of student learning outcomes and the progress that has been made, overall, in implementing and using assessment was described in the previous chapter on undergraduate education. Unlike many institutions, AU did not start with undergraduate assessment and then move to graduate assessment. For over a decade, AU has worked to design and implement assessment plans at the graduate and professional level. That said, some graduate programs were quicker to adopt assessment than others. Fortunately, the use of assessment is becoming more consistent. AU's efforts to strengthen graduate-level assessment throughout the university are described in this section.

### **Graduate Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment Methods**

All graduate programs (more than 50) have stated learning outcome goals for their students and maintain assessment plans and records of results in AU's TracDat system. Graduate programs at American University are just as likely as undergraduate programs to conduct regular assessments of learning outcomes.

Many graduate programs have been quick to realize that their capstone practices, already in place, yield ideal assessment materials. For example, most master's programs have final projects or papers that can be analyzed for evidence of student learning. The challenge for most programs was that many programs originally wanted to count "passing" an exam or "fulfilling" an internship requirement as evidence of learning. Over time, graduate programs have come to understand that these events are milestones rather than learning outcomes and that student work in the exams or internships must be examined to determine whether or not learning outcomes have been met.

One major change is that many units have revised their comprehensive exams to make them more in line with the expected learning outcomes of the program. This makes use of exams for evaluating learning outcomes more effective. Significant progress has been made in get-

ting graduate programs to develop rubrics. These ensure a level of standardization in grading theses, comprehensive exams, presentations, etc., and they clarify that learning outcomes are actually being met. The MA program in literature developed a rubric for grading comprehensive exams based on the program learning objectives. Examples such as this one have been shared on the assessment website and in workshops in order to facilitate their adoption by other programs.

### **A Variety of Measures**

The things AU needs to assess in graduate education are complex and varied, and, as a result, not easily captured without a variety of measures. The plan for the PhD program in clinical psychology has been highlighted for its different high-quality measures.

(<http://www.american.edu/provost/assessment/Best-Practice-Plans.cfm>) These include successful completion of online trainings, exams, presentations, internships, and a thesis, which allows the program to serve students interested in clinical practice and research, combining concern with academic outcomes as well as professional ones. Like many graduate programs at AU, this degree incorporates professional and academic elements. It will often be the case that these elements must be assessed in different ways.

At the graduate level, in particular, the university has many professional programs designed to enhance students' effectiveness in specific careers. For these programs, it is crucial to have information that assesses student success in gaining employment in the field and student and employer feedback on how well the university prepared them in the field. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the university uses the Graduation Census as a way to track whether students gain employment in their chosen field. Some units also do separate surveys of students and others gain feedback from employers. SOC, for example, is in the process of having alumni in the field review student work. Internship surveys of site supervisors can also be a valuable tool to learning about the strengths and weaknesses of AU students.

One assessment method that is less used, but would be useful, is feedback from employers. Not all programs have robust methods for gathering feedback from employers, although feedback is often essential to know whether the curriculum is relevant. This is an issue that transcends graduate education. It is also important for undergraduates.

### **Using Assessments**

In order for assessment to be truly meaningful, it must be capable of generating change. Models of assessment generally emphasize that what is learned should be used to make changes, and then these changes must themselves be assessed. As mentioned in the undergraduate chapter, closing the loop has been recognized by the Committee on Learning Assessment (COLA) as a challenge. While many graduate programs use assessment results effectively, there are also examples of programs that have done assessment but where no action has been documented. Often this is due to the quality of the assessment results, rather than a lack of commitment to improving the program. As mentioned in the undergraduate

chapter, the issue is being addressed by holding one-on-one sessions with department faculty and by offering workshops designed to share suggestions on using assessment results.

One positive consequence of putting the power in the hands of each department has been that it allows for tailoring assessment plans to the unique concerns of each program. Comprehensive exams work for many programs but not all. For example, the MA in public communication had included a comprehensive exam, a common assessment measure across AU's campus and beyond. Because of the length of the program, students took the exam within four months of beginning the program, immediately following the completion of three core classes. In assessing comprehensive exams using a rubric developed in relation to learning objectives, faculty concluded that students did not have time to synthesize what they had learned and that the capstone was a better way to assess student progress. As a result, the comprehensive exam is no longer a program requirement.

Gaps in students' educational experience, sometimes detected by assessment in graduate programs, can be addressed by the university at large, as well as by the department or program. In fall 2011, the Graduate Studies office conducted a survey of graduate students about their interest in support services and graduate enhancement experiences. These results were used to develop the Graduate Enhancement Workshop series. Topics covered included promoting success in graduate school; responsible conduct of research, writing and publication practices; and career services for master's candidates. These workshops span the concerns of various degree programs, and improve the experience of graduate students.

### **Faculty Involvement/Buy In**

As with assessment at the undergraduate level, assessment at the graduate level often falls on one or a small number of department members, suggesting variation in faculty engagement. But the most successful programs have been those that have had wide faculty involvement. At times, the barrier is an assumption that most professors will be uninterested in learning outcomes, or information learned about strengths and weaknesses, but experience shows this is not the case. On the contrary: faculty, when they have engaged these questions, care passionately about these issues, as they get to the heart of what their programs, and disciplines, are all about. For example, the journalism faculty often have professional experience, and their input led to the development of learning outcomes that address preparation for jobs in journalism and the creation of an investigative journalism track. One reason for emphasizing publicizing assessment is to further engage faculty in this manner.

## CONCLUSIONS

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In the last few years, AU has made dramatic changes and improvements in many different aspects of graduate and professional education in response to various assessments and reviews. The university has created and implemented an infrastructure for oversight and management of graduate and professional education by creating the Office of the Vice Provost of Research and Dean of Graduate Studies, who works in collaboration with unit-level program directors and associate deans in a process of shared governance. The university has vastly improved the clarity of its academic regulations for graduate students and is implementing procedures to keep track of graduate and professional students' progress through their individually designed programs of study. AU is also working toward implementing a variety of new online degree programs and graduate certificates to address the changing needs of graduate students (as will be discussed in the next chapter), and it has increased graduate financial aid and kept tuition increases to a minimum in consideration of the current economic climate. New marketing efforts and improved admissions processing are also expected to help generate increased enrollments of high-quality students.

These improvements are relatively recent, however, and the university is only now beginning to be able to assess the extent to which they will be successful. This assessment will necessarily be fluid and will require flexibility in how the university makes changes to its graduate policies and programs. However, all of these changes were undertaken with a clear purpose: to achieve the strategic plan goals for the quality and distinction of AU's graduate and professional programs as well as the university's enrollment targets for them. After so many changes have been enacted in a relatively short period of time, it will be important for the university in the next few years to work on the implementation of the changes that have already been agreed to, to assess their success, and to find new or revised strategies in areas where results are disappointing or new challenges arise.

As the university moves forward, it must continue to build on its strengths by continuing to look for innovating ways to strength graduate and professional education by examining its program offerings and delivery modes. It will also be important for the university to address specific areas of student learning, such as statistical training and information literacy, and other areas of learning.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. Incorporate expertise from strategic partners, prospective employers, aspirational universities, and other educational providers to update current institutional practices in graduate and professional education with regard to optimal program offerings and delivery modes.
2. Complete implementation of best practices in strategic graduate and professional enrollment management, and evaluate outcomes both university-wide and within academic units, including coordinated marketing activities, effective expenditure of graduate financial aid, efficient application processing, and strategic communications with prospective applicants to facilitate meeting strategic enrollment targets.
3. Provide greater opportunities to perform advanced work in graduate programs by enhancing institutional capacity to instruct and support in areas such as cutting-edge statistical and methodological training and information literacy.

## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

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AU's Program Assessment Guidelines

<http://www.american.edu/provost/assessment/Guidelines.cfm>

Graduate Academic Regulations

<http://www.american.edu/provost/grad/grad-rules-and-regulations-toc.cfm>

Graduate and Professional Programs

<http://www.american.edu/provost/grad/index.cfm>

Graduate Training and Workshops

<http://www.american.edu/provost/grad/all-students.cfm>

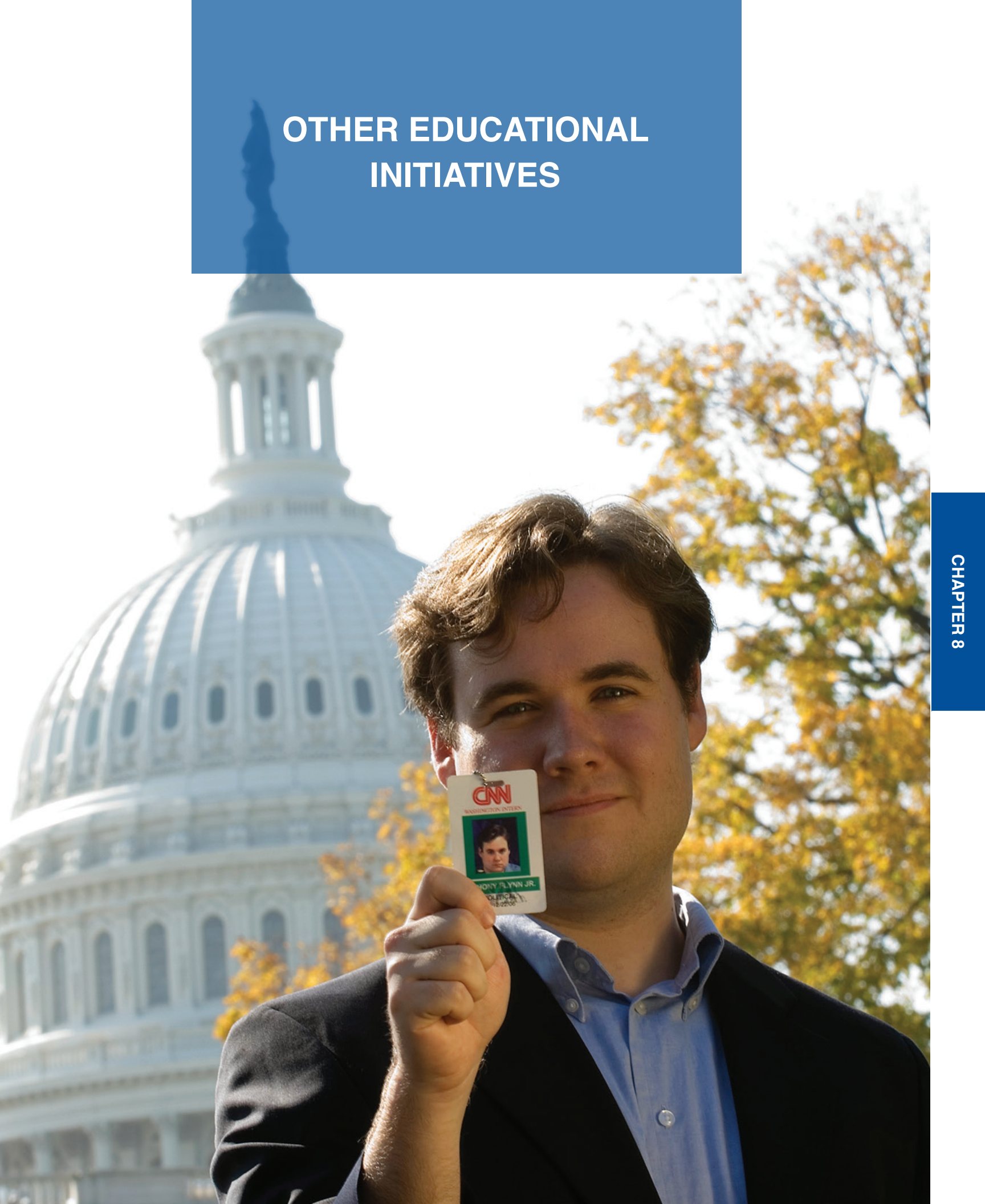
Postgraduation Success and Outcomes

<http://www.american.edu/careercenter/Outcomes-and-Statistics.cfm>

Washington College of Law

<http://www.wcl.american.edu/>

# OTHER EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES





# Other Educational Initiatives

## INTRODUCTION

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AU is undertaking this self-study at a time when higher education in the United States is facing serious challenges and transformative changes. Higher education today is grappling with growing concerns regarding the rising cost of tuition; the changing demographics of the student body; and the ability of institutions to adapt to new audiences, new modes of educational delivery given technological advances and competitive conditions, and external pressures for greater accountability regarding learning outcomes and employability of graduates. These shifts call for new approaches to learning and new ways of thinking about the academic enterprise. As AU addresses these issues, it seeks to move beyond the transformations of the past several years—which have largely pulled the institution up closer to national norms and benchmarks for a university of its caliber—and to become part of the process that is pushing out the frontiers of higher education across the country.

AU's responses to these challenges have been covered throughout this self-study. This chapter focuses on initiatives that the university is undertaking in three areas that either were not emphasized in previous chapters or that transcend the scope of those individual chapters (for example, initiatives that affect undergraduates, graduate and professional students, and faculty): enhanced venues for interdisciplinary inquiry, innovative modes of learning delivery, and expansion of the locations in which education takes place. It also covers one other, important issue, which transcends the scope of individual chapters: the importance of the sciences to the future of the university. Because many of these initiatives relate to standard 13 (related educational activities), this chapter covers those portions of standard 13 that are relevant to AU.

## AU'S INITIATIVES IN INTERDISCIPLINARY INQUIRY, EDUCATIONAL DELIVERY, AND LEARNING LOCATION

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### Using Research Centers to Advance Interdisciplinary Inquiry

AU has a strong foundation for interdisciplinary studies. Some of its schools (notably SIS and SOC) already transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries, but all of the academic units are moving toward greater collaboration both among their own departments or divisions and across the different schools and colleges. Over the past several years several new majors or concentrations at the graduate and undergraduate levels have been created, including international arts management, environmental science, ethics, peace and global affairs, sustainability management, political communication, business, language and culture studies, public health and mathematics and economics, among others. The types of concentrations and majors involve cross-collaboration among various schools and programs. The university has intentionally expanded the breadth of interdisciplinary majors and certificates in order to ensure that graduates are competitive in the job market and prepared to effectively tackle the great issues of our times.

As noted in chapters 2 and 4, AU Project 2030 aims to align new faculty slots and academic programs with rising cross-disciplinary fields in which AU has the potential to achieve national and international prominence, starting through cluster hiring of faculty. AU2030 also encourages collaborative models of learning, research, and work essential to success in today's society. AU2030 recognizes that a university with limited means cannot achieve distinction in all areas, and so far has identified a set of niches in which AU has a realistic foundation for establishing broad, cross-disciplinary scholarship and education. The establishment of a shared multi-disciplinary research agenda for "2030" is bringing together clusters of faculty and researchers from across the university to address important and emerging questions in public health, environmental science, global governance, big data, the state of the D.C. metropolitan area, and others. As new hiring leads to critical masses of faculty in such areas, it is expected that new programs will be developed and new opportunities for teaching and scholarship in these fields will emerge that will make AU distinctive.

In addition to these and many other interdisciplinary initiatives described throughout earlier chapters, AU students and faculty have numerous opportunities to engage in significant cross-disciplinary research through the more than 25 research institutes and centers that are currently organized at AU. These centers and institutes should not be confused with university administrative centers. The primary purpose of the centers and institutes described here is to support and develop the individual and collaborative, cross-disciplinary (that is, involving more than one academic unit or department) research efforts of their members. As part of achieving this goal, faculty affiliated with these centers and institutes provide expanded opportunities for cross-disciplinary, laboratory- or field-based research and training for graduate students. Furthermore, although these centers and institutes are not academic units, they sponsor activities, such as special courses, colloquia, multiunit research meetings, and off-campus training opportunities that enhance the educational experience for graduate students.

It should be noted that AU has had research centers for a long time, but what is new in recent years is the commitment to support only those centers that demonstrate the potential to garner significant amounts of external funds and to achieve significant national or international prominence in their areas of inquiry.

Drawing on an unusual concentration of faculty expertise in Latin American and Latino studies—and recognizing the advantages of the university’s Washington, D.C., location—AU recruited a senior scholar in 2010 to establish a campus wide [Center for Latin American and Latino Studies](#) (CLALS). This center fosters innovative research across campus, while attracting global attention and substantial external support and establishing ties to leading universities throughout the Americas. Three years since its inauguration, the center now attracts roughly \$1 million annually in external support, projects the AU brand through prestigious publications and a growing array of web-based and social media outlets visible throughout the Western Hemisphere, and is poised to expand exponentially during the coming years, having submitted roughly \$8 million in proposals for external support during 2013.

Similarly, in 2011 AU recruited a senior scholar to launch a research-driven Center for Health, Risk, and Society (CHRS), which has established the university as a focal point for innovative investigation of pressing issues related to HIV/AIDS, global health inequalities, and linkages between community disruption and health outcomes. That center, like CLALS, has attracted large grants from an array of prestigious funding agencies and has branded AU as a go-to place for research on issues that are salient worldwide.

CLALS, which is the largest center at AU, crosses both disciplinary and geographic boundaries. CLALS includes more than 75 AU faculty distributed among each of AU’s seven colleges and schools, supports collaborative research and knowledge-dissemination efforts, and provides innovative spaces for graduate student training in the fields of both Latin American and Latino studies. Most of the roughly two dozen initiatives operating under center auspices correspond to one or more of five thematic clusters and many of these projects are undertaken in collaboration with academic institutions elsewhere in the hemisphere, with particularly strong ties in Brazil, which is a strategic focus for AU, as well as in Mexico, Central America, and Cuba. The center is also pioneering efforts to partner with both public and nonprofit sector institutions engaged with pressing issues involving Latino communities, such as patterns of immigrant entrepreneurship, health implications of mass deportations of Latinos, and the impact of out-of-school programs on child development in Latino neighborhoods in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area.

A number of other research and training centers serve the needs of a more global and demographically diverse student body and external audience. For example, the School of International Service (SIS) houses the ASEAN Center and the African Council (devoted to geopolitical studies of Southeast Asia and Africa, respectively). SPA’s Women and Politics Institute provides young women with research and training opportunities that increase their knowledge about the challenges women face in the political arena and that encourage them to

become involved in the political process. Further, the War Crimes Research Office (WCRO) in the Washington College of Law (WCL) promotes the development and enforcement of international criminal and humanitarian law primarily through legal research that assists international courts and tribunals. WCL has eight to 10 faculty and more than 100 students participating in WCRO, and the work of the faculty provides students in a variety of legal specializations with opportunities to do research and writing in these important areas of international law.

AU has recently taken steps to organize new research centers that will expand the opportunities for faculty and graduate student to engage in collaborative and interdisciplinary science. For example, the Center on Health, Risk, and Society brings together faculty and students from CAS, SIS, SPA, WCL, and KSB to conduct research on the social dimensions of health and health-related risks, with emphasis on describing the roots of these risks in social inequality, and on the identification of structural interventions that can effectively reduce them. Members of the CHRS have developed several successful and externally funded research programs that provide graduate students at AU with diverse opportunities for interdisciplinary training.

More recently, AU recruited two senior-level faculty members to build and direct the university's Center for Behavioral Neuroscience and the Center for Food and Society. Both centers are designed to bring together faculty and students from diverse disciplines to address significant national and global challenges to human health and welfare from biological, behavioral, and public policy perspectives. The goal of these new centers is not only to promote research collaborations across units, but also to grow and further strengthen all the sciences at AU. To achieve these outcomes, AU has provided support to develop both the intellectual and physical resources of the university.

For example, with funds from AU and the National Institutes of Health, the newly formed Center for Behavioral Neuroscience has already established analytical, surgical, and small animal nuclear resonance imaging research cores that are available for use by students and faculty in multiple departments (34 faculty in 10 departments). Funds have also been committed by AU to develop additional core research capabilities in confocal microscopy, optogenetic interrogation of tissue, and cognitive neuroscience. To develop cross-disciplinary intellectual resources, AU has made funds available for faculty retreats, specialized, interdisciplinary graduate seminars, international symposia, and new faculty hires in select areas of behavioral and computational neuroscience. These recent developments will greatly enhance the ability of AU to provide graduate students with cross-disciplinary research opportunities in the biological, behavioral, and physical sciences.

Despite such very positive developments, the biggest obstacle to the continued growth of AU's centers for interdisciplinary science, and in the research and graduate training they promote, is the need for construction of a state-of-the-art physical research environment. This need is most acute in chemistry where the laboratories available to faculty and students are not in line with other universities. Furthermore, although the physical facilities for research

in biology and for neuroscience research with animal models have been improved, the amount and quality of the space available for these efforts remains below standard compared to competing universities. These problems can be addressed by the construction of a new science building at AU. A modern research environment with state-of-the-art laboratories would not only expand the research and teaching capabilities of the current faculty in all scientific disciplines at AU, it would also greatly improve AU's competitiveness in attracting outstanding new science faculty and graduate students to campus.

Among the criteria that are used for the annual evaluation of the centers and institutes at AU are the number of graduate and postdoctoral students that are mentored and financially supported, and the number and quality of on-campus and off-campus educational and training opportunities that are provided to these students. These criteria demonstrate that promoting the cross-disciplinary research training of graduate postdoctoral students is an important goal of the centers and institutes at AU. At the same time, the university will be looking to eliminate centers that exist largely on paper (or on the Internet) but are not actively promoting scholarship or raising external funds. For example, the School of International Service (SIS) is engaged in an assessment of all of its own internal centers based on these criteria during AY2013–14, and the result is expected to be a renewal of the charters only for those centers that are truly distinctive and meet AU's strategic objectives for quality of scholarship, external funding, and national or international visibility.

## **Innovative Modes of Teaching Delivery**

### ***The School of Professional and Extended Studies (SPExS)***

Beyond serving diverse student needs as discussed in earlier chapters, AU established SPExS in spring 2012 as the university's seventh degree-granting school to more flexibly and effectively leverage AU's resources in response to demographic shifts and labor market trends and needs. The school's educational offerings complement those of other AU schools by serving a population broader than the traditional undergraduate and graduate student population admitted to those other schools. Through online and face-to-face programs, and a growing network of partnerships with other academic institutions and prospective employers, SPExS fosters active citizenship, learning from leaders and real-world practice in Washington, D.C. and beyond. SPExS emphasizes pedagogic approaches for lifelong learning that are innovative, cross-disciplinary, and practical (for example, "knowledge in action") and networked. It extends the university's reach beyond the campus as an active link to the neighborhood and employers, and—by receiving students for semester-long study from nearly two hundred schools worldwide—to the nation and international community.

The school is developing a range of lifelong learning opportunities, including academic and cross-cultural bridge programs for postsecondary and postbaccalaureate students, experiential learning programs that combine in-classroom learning with a field-based practicum or an internship to capitalize on AU's location in a global capital. SPExS strengthens applied skills and professional development through professional master's programs, certificates (noncredit

and credit), and short courses, as well as personal enrichment and public outreach program, whether for women in career transitions, veterans or newly arrived non-native English speakers AU thus is able to serve a wide variety of diverse students, including those not matriculated in degree programs, and provide pathways for underserved populations. For example, the Washington Internship for Native Students (WINS) at SPExS enables students from Native American and Pacific Islander, and other underrepresented communities to participate in sponsored internships with federal agencies, nonprofit organizations and private businesses while acquiring additional academic and professional skills and knowledge. This school also hosts many of AU's bridge and college-preparatory programs. It focuses on career- and college-readiness by teaching students of all ages to effectively translate and connect knowledge and expertise across disciplines, employment sectors and diverse communities.

### *Online and Hybrid Modes of Education*

American University's online programs are providing greater flexibility in instruction and bringing new perspectives into AU's academic programs. The graduate degree-seeking students taught in online programs meet the same qualifications and standards for admission to the university as on-campus students. Enrollment in these courses is capped to ensure that students successfully complete their work. Online courses and programs at AU embody the mission and standards of its school and colleges and these programs allow career starters, switchers, and enhancers the opportunity to actively engage with the AU community from anywhere in the world. This approach to online learning reflects the institution's commitment to teaching.

A recent report released by the Sloan Consortium (<http://www.sloanconsortium.org>), the leading barometer of online learning in the U.S., shows that demand for online course work is growing, surpassing 6.7 million students taking at least one course in 2012—an increase of 570,000 students from the previous year. Nevertheless, there remains significant resistance across college campuses to this form of instruction: 69.1 percent of chief academic officers across all types of institutions say that online learning is “critical to their long-term strategy,” and yet only 30.2 percent of these leaders believe that their faculty support this approach. Concerns remain about learning outcomes, completion rates, intellectual property, and pedagogy.

Although MOOCs (massive online open courses) have grabbed the headlines, AU has taken a decidedly different approach. Rather than focusing on a massive market of students in large online classrooms with little teacher and student interactions, AU is staying true to its mission by focusing on what it does exceptionally well: teaching degree- and certificate-seeking students through engaging and thoughtful faculty-student interactions in small, diverse classrooms, including online “classrooms.” Rather than supporting individual course development, the emphasis has been on developing programs that focus on Teaching Online Qualified Engaged Students (TOQUEs).

AU's unique online graduate programs are designed to fit the schedules of working professionals seeking the advanced knowledge and skills needed in today's competitive world. AU has made

much progress since 2010 both in providing online courses (especially in the summer) and in developing new online degree programs. The trajectory looks promising. Graduate online courses were first available in online format in the summer of 2010. Various schools across campus jointly offered 28 graduate online classes in the summer of 2010, 36 in 2011, 51 in 2012, and 45 in 2013. In 2008, the School of Education, Teaching and Health (SETH) began offering an online certificate in nutrition education. Approximately 15 students have successfully completed the certificate to date, and it plans to expand the online nutrition education master's degree in 2014. AU is also certified to offer an MS in finance in Virginia, and the graduate certificate in digital media is specifically designed for those seeking to develop advanced skills in the uses of social media and technologies for professional development.

An asynchronous teaching model, unfettered by a physical requirement, affords greater flexibility of instruction and access to more diverse perspectives in the rapidly emerging and cutting-edge area of digital media skills through real-time interaction between guest speakers and students from around the globe.

In October 2011, the provost hosted a leadership retreat on the changing market for graduate education, inviting the directors or chairs of graduate programs. Directors of the SETH nutrition education certificate, the digital media skills certificate, and the CIDP MA degree shared their best practices with the rest of the graduate education leadership at the university. AU President Neil Kerwin and Provost Scott Bass shared insights about current trends and future challenges for graduate education. The session stimulated attendees to think about creative and innovative ways that the university could expand graduate offerings to new market and provide niche degrees. One takeaway from the session was that online offerings are particularly appropriate for graduate programs, where people are looking for professional skills but not necessarily a traditional campus experience.

Since the retreat, the various schools and colleges within the university have explored partnerships with companies that service online degree programs. AU is presently working with two vendors, 2U and Deltak, to launch a new series of online programs. The teaching platform they have each developed create highly engaging and interactive classroom settings with enrollments limits for each program. These online-enabling partners provide market research, marketing, recruiting, and technology support on the platform only. The university and its schools and colleges determines what programs to launch and how the curriculum should be designed for both synchronous and asynchronous teaching. The schools are also responsible for selecting and admitting students to the university, hiring instructors, advising students, offering career counseling, and engaging alumni. The University Library is responsible for providing the same resources and access to librarians as would be done for an on-campus class. The library has extensive experience meeting the needs of on-line learners (<http://www.american.edu/library/services/online.cfm>).

SIS partnered with 2U to launch an MA in international relations online (MAIR) in May 2013. MAIR is the first top-tier, online, graduate program of its caliber in international relations. The degree is designed for students who would like to begin an international relations career, as well as those already working in the field—in the United States or around the world. This allows students who are employed full time, or who live outside Washington, D.C., the opportunity to access the same educational benefits as on-campus students. Students participate in weekly class sessions in an innovative, live, virtual classroom, where they will interact with SIS faculty and a diverse group of peers to analyze and discuss course content. The first cohort was 27 students, who began the two-year program with two courses. The ultimate target is to have 300 MA students registered by May 2015.

Several schools have partnered with online enabler Deltak to develop online MA programs and certificates. In spring 2014, the SPExS will launch a credit-bearing certificate in project monitoring and evaluation for practitioners in international development that could combine with AU's other graduate offerings. In spring 2013, CAS launched three online master's programs addressing timely professional needs while building on AU subject matter expertise in nutrition, education, and economics and in teaching English as a foreign language. SPA is planning a new online master's in public administration. SOC launched an online certificate in digital media skills in March 2012. The certificate can be earned over a year on a part-time basis. It is targeted at professionals who were trained before the new developments in the web and social media occurred and at new graduates who want additional skills. Nine students graduated in May 2013. SOC hopes to expand its online offerings to include a master's program in strategic communications in the future.

Hybrid online programs also are underway. In fall 2012, KSB started the professional master's of business administration (PMBA) program for students who would otherwise not attend AU or pursue an MBA. Students are required to attend class one night a week on campus, with the rest of their homework and discussions done online. In this hybrid learning-teaching model, half of the "contact" hours are delivered in the traditional classroom and half in a virtual (online) classroom that uses an asynchronous delivery model. The PMBA is meant to be completed in seven consecutive semesters, over the course of 27 months. The first cohort admitted in fall 2012 had 34 students and will graduate in December 2014.

WCL launched an online program with a summer offering of Advanced Legal Research Studies in 2012. WCL has selected a comprehensive learning technology platform partnering with Desire2Learn. WCL is focused on consulting with faculty and enabling the law school's educational offerings to be available to a worldwide audience, anytime, anywhere. Certificate programs are in development, including an online certificate program on international commercial arbitration, taught by world-renowned practitioners. These innovative programs will take advantage of educational technology tools neatly integrated into a seamless learning experience, whereby learners can collaborate with faculty and peers around the globe.



Programs delivered through either distance education—whether by Internet, television, or videoconferencing—or other means should meet academic and learning support standards, appropriate to the type of delivery, comparable to those offered in more traditional formats within higher education. The university expects that student learning objectives and outcomes remain consistent across comparable offerings, regardless of where or how they are provided. AU ensures that students registered in such courses and programs are, in fact, those taking the courses and receiving academic credit. The university uses various means, such as a secure login and passcode, proctored exams, or other technologies or practices, which are effective to verify student identity. AU has developed procedures to meet these expectations for all online programs. Nevertheless, concerns remain about completion rates, intellectual property, and pedagogy. Long-term effectiveness will be measured by AU’s ability to sustain and increase matriculation in these programs and by graduation rates.

To ensure that online programs are coherent, cohesive, and comparable in academic rigor to traditional programs, online degree programs are subject to the same approval processes as any new degree program at the institution. They are reviewed and vetted first by the faculty of the academic department in which they originate, then by the school or college’s faculty council, and, finally, by the university’s Faculty Senate. Simultaneously, they are reviewed and vetted by the school or college’s academic administration and dean, and then by the Provost. The University Library is asked to sign off as well, to assure that appropriate resources are available to support each class offered by the university. Only then are these programs finally implemented and, following implementation, they are subject to ongoing review by the university’s academic and administrative elements.

One example of how AU maintains high standards and compatibility is Kogod’s PMBA program. The program uses the identical courses from the full-time MBA, which ensures full compliance with Middle States and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). All learning outcomes are identical with the variation between sections focused on the delivery model. PMBA course development requires the use of a dedicated instructional team, which includes the services of an instructional designer. All faculty must prepare their courses following a consistent course structure but relying upon the pedagogy appropriate to the course subject matter. In PMBA’s short existence, there has been course-to-course improvement in the use of the information technology and rigor of the classes. Each course raises the bar in some manner of speaking.

## Learning Beyond the Classroom

### *Experiential Learning—Internships, Externships and Clinics*

AU has many innovative approaches to experiential learning. Virtually every school and department on campus offers students opportunities to engage with prospective employers and professional fields through group applied research and production projects.

In KSB, for example, four courses allow students to gain real-world professional experience by working with consulting firms and others as part of their assignments. Students also actively participate in the work of SOC's academic centers as interns and in class-related research and production projects. SPA has a number of experiential learning opportunities for different cohorts of students. Students in the four-year SPA Leadership Program develop their leadership skills and capacities in part by working with the D.C. community in a variety of ways. The SIS offers a practicum to graduate students. Experiential learning in the classroom is the foundation for every program offered through SPExS, which specializes in hands-on academic experiences that bring students in contact with expert practitioners and thought leaders in all of the fields covered by SPExS courses. WCL's extensive programs in experiential education (overseen by an associate dean for experiential education), include its nationally-recognized clinical program, in which law students (under close faculty supervision) represent indigent and under-served clients in 10 distinct substantive law areas; its supervised externship program, in which each year approximately 450 students gain legal experience in government, public interest and pro bono settings, both domestically and internationally, and linked to seminars that emphasize student reflection; its simulation programs (trial advocacy and pre-trial advocacy) and courses (for example, interviewing and counseling; lawyer bargaining; alternative dispute resolution). It also supports various faculty-supervised projects (impact litigation; UN Committee Against Torture; WCRO) in which students gain real-world experience in critical areas of the law.

Although internships have been an important feature of AU's programs for many decades, the way the institution thinks about and evaluates its internships is changing in light of new expectations in job markets. As an article from *U.S. News* reports, "employers almost universally maintain that partaking in an internship—or several, which sets a student apart from his or her peers even more—before graduation is integral to finding meaningful employment in today's seemingly impenetrable job market"<sup>1</sup> (Burnsed, 2010)<sup>1</sup>. Research on internships by Hynie et al. also shows that students reported acquiring research and professional skills, plus a new understanding of theoretical knowledge, and that projects generated concrete outcomes for their community partners. Students maintained ongoing

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<sup>1</sup> Burnsed, B. (2010). Degrees are great, but internships make a difference. Retrieved from <http://www.usnews.com/education/articles/2010/04/15/when-a-degree-isnt-enough>.

relationships with their organizational partners beyond the terms of their internship, creating opportunities for ongoing benefits to both students and community partners (Hynie, 2008)<sup>2</sup>.

One measure of performance that attests to the quality and impact of the American University internship ethos is the level of placement of AU students in competitive career development programs, such as the Presidential Management Fellows (ranked third in the country in 2013, up from fifth in 2012), and the Peace Corps (ranked second for students placed from schools of comparable size). The Graduation Census taken at the six-month postgraduation mark suggests consistently high rates of career and graduate school advancement among American University students. Combined with the close integration of internships into the academic core of the university, university policies on academic credit, the strong presence of AU's career centers in academic affairs, and consistently close relationships with employers and alumni, are all factors that may have contributed to the increasing number of graduating seniors reporting that they had an internship while at AU. In spring 2009, 81 percent reported participating in an internship and 87 percent reported the same in spring 2013.

Since AU's last Middle States review, the U.S. Department of Labor has clarified its position on unpaid internships. In for-profit organizations, employers are not allowed to fill positions deemed crucial to the organization with unpaid labor. They are not allowed to replace formerly paid positions with unpaid internships. Essentially, any position, which could be considered clerical or blue collar should not go to an unpaid intern but be paid instead. Government entities and nonprofit organizations are exempt from a requirement to pay in these situations. Both the AU Career Center and the Kogod Center for Career Development have sought to develop more paid internships for AU students. University policy does permit students to be compensated financially for their internship while earning academic credit at the same time, since they are not and should not be seen in any way as substitutes for or as equivalent staff members.

The availability of internships in the greater Washington, D.C., area has never been lacking, although in tight economic times the availability of paid internships definitely declines. More recently, negative news coverage and prominent court cases have further eroded employer willingness to accept interns—paid or unpaid. Nevertheless, virtually every school on campus and the Career Center makes concerted efforts to attract internship employers by promoting the high quality of AU students, by matching student interests and skills with potential employers, and by promoting these opportunities to students. Employers have a wide variety of ways of reaching students through free postings, fairs, networking receptions, and special events. Alumni, too, are one of the best resources for internship development for AU students. AU emphasizes networking with alumni, faculty, and other employers not only as a means of recruitment of AU students as interns, but also in identifying internship placement opportunities.

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<sup>2</sup> Hynie, M., Jensen, K., Johnny, M., Wedlock, J., & Phipps, D. (2011). "Student internships bridge research to real world problems." *Education + Training*, 53(2/3), 237-248. doi:10.1108/00400911111115753.

As an example of academic unit initiatives to create internship opportunities, the School of Communication has instituted a Dean's Internship program that is based on agreements with significant partner organizations to reserve regular, competitive internship opportunities for SOC students. Dean's Internship partners include the Smithsonian, *Washington Post*, National Academy of Sciences, National Park Service, and National Geographic Society and *USA Today* and NPR. Having ongoing relationships that produce portfolio-level work helps SOC set high standards for professional internships.

The American University Career Center, the Kogod Center for Career Development, and SPExS fully support students and employers with noncredit internships, and WCL is known for its clinical practice. The support includes reflection on what kind of internship to seek, preparation for applying for internships, and best practices for supervising and mentoring employers who hire AU students in noncredit internships. External partners are constantly cultivated as internship employers for both academic and noncredit internships. These partners often participate in panel presentations, networking, and other career-related events.

AU places a premium on the quality and substantive nature of internships, whether for credit or not. In 2012, new academic regulations, improving the regulations passed in 1999, include the requirement for all faculty to have a syllabus for their internship students and requirement that internships be no more than 15 percent administrative work. These requirements ensure that academic internships offer the highest quality learning opportunity for students and reassure employers both of the quality and relevance of the internship experience. Schools and departments use the academic regulations as a baseline, and many have additional requirements and parameters.

Registration for internships is, however, still a widely differentiated process across schools and departments and largely completed on paper rather than through appropriate data-entry systems. One of the biggest challenges is the need for a more streamlined registration process for students. The current paper-based process is cumbersome and more prone to human error or delays. There are conflicting policies among the schools and departments regarding the internship opportunities for double majors and minors. Greater consistency will reduce students' confusion on these matters. While the Kogod Center for Career Development has individual offices for one-on-one advising, the AU Career Center does not. To adhere to best practices and professional standards, this shortcoming would need to be addressed. Finally, as AU hosts an increasingly diverse population, it may also need to offer greater variety in level and type of internship opportunities.

As noted above, AU seeks to integrate internship activities as much as possible into the academic curriculum. Each school has a slightly different approach to how this goal is accomplished. SOC, for example, decided to focus those credits into a singular, senior internship capstone and developed an alternative in a field experience opportunity where students could earn academic credit prior to the senior capstone experience, making internship opportunities accessible to a wider range of students. Kogod faculty have a shared course

syllabus which is used for all academic internships. Kogod offers a field experience for 0.25 credit hours. Several schools, including the SPA, SIS, and SPExS offer weekly classes in support of academic internships. These classes offer the ideal opportunity for discussion and reflection, a critical component of the internship experience. SPExS has dedicated faculty, both adjuncts and full-time term, who teach internship support classes and during the summer help to students actually find internships as well. Although the CAS demonstrates a wide variety of approaches to internships, some of its departments have particularly exemplary internship approaches, for example in economics, philosophy, history, psychology, and SETH.

There are opportunities to further strengthen experiential learning at AU, notably in two areas: greater consistency of syllabi across departments and programs and continuous improved training of faculty and employers in line with best practices. Internship course experiences could be enriched with more varied assignments so that the internship can be a fully integrated academic experience with a reflection component and assignments that promote both critical thinking and integrated experience into the core curriculum. An expanded, universally accessible employer evaluation system would not only lighten the workloads of individual faculty but also aggregate more effectively data about internship learning.

The university's academic regulations clearly outline the process and requirements for evaluation of experiential learning in the form of internships: to receive academic credit, the work for the internship must be more substantive than administrative, with non-administrative work comprising in general at least 85 percent of the work performed. The instructor must provide to the student and the supervisor an academic syllabus, with clear learning outcomes for the internship, have regular meetings with the student, and assign papers, interviews, reports, or other academic assignments designed to provide an academic foundation and support for the internship. The workplace supervisor will be required to assess the student's performance, but that assessment can count for no more than half the final course grade. The academic component of the course must be valued as at least half of the final course grade.

AU is very serious regarding the manner in which internships are assessed, albeit with some variation across schools due to the decentralized, school-based approach to internships. Learning is assessed in classrooms, which support the internships, from assignments given by internship faculty and from evaluations completed by internship site supervisors. To assess the quality of an internship offering, AU's academic regulations provide the basic parameters. In addition to the position being substantive and worthy of academic credit (approximately 12-weeks long with varying hours, depending on the credits requested), students must meet prerequisites as determined by their department. Typically both the faculty member and the academic advisor are likely to evaluate the internship for appropriateness. Career advisors are sometimes asked for preapproval of a position. Once a position has been approved for a particular student and they complete the internship, their learning is assessed through the academic assignments grades and through the employer evaluation.

To demonstrate employment outcomes to prospective students, the career centers work with AU's Office of Institutional Research and Assessment on graduation outcomes for students six months out. When the data are ready for publication, the career centers include them on their websites, and they are presented at prospective student days and conversion events and in other literature. In addition to individual advising for students, the AU Career Center, Kogod Center for Career Development and the SPExS internship and career advisor also collect data through mid-semester surveys to capture the substance, quality of employers, and success stories among the interns who are registered for academic credit. Employer evaluations are offered for faculty to lighten their administrative load and to collect aggregate data regarding learning outcomes and to better track employers in terms of the quality of their offerings through the quality of their responses. These reports, when shared with faculty, lead to more coordinated efforts and mutual understanding of where the best internship sites may be. Employer evaluations serve not only to assess student learning outcomes, but also to guide employer development.

### *Community-Based Learning and Service*

AU actively facilitates the engagement of its students and faculty in local, national, and global communities and issues in an effort to engage responsibly with communities by cultivating mutually beneficial partnerships that promote learning, leadership, and social change. The Center for Community Engagement and Service (CCES) serves as a coordinating and monitoring hub for focused collaboration between nonprofit groups and AU faculty, staff, and students and the development of new faculty and student resources. Its primary programs are:

- **Freshman Service Experience:** a program every August for incoming students who engage in two days of service and three evenings of learning about Washington, D.C. In 2012, 590 students participated, led by another 100 upper class group “leaders.” The students worked at 48 nonprofit sites.
- **DC Reads:** a tutoring program for K-8 students in Washington, D.C. AU students are trained and tutor youth at nine sites throughout D.C. During AY2012–13, 303 students served as tutors.
- **Alternative Breaks:** These student-led trips are both domestic and international and occur over winter, spring and summer breaks. In AY2012–13, 13 trips were organized to India (2), Rwanda, South Africa (2), Mexico, Guatemala, Haiti, Thailand-Burma, Cuba, Northern Ireland, Puerto Rico, Corn Best, San Francisco, and Pennsylvania. All had a social justice theme that was the center of learning. Most but not all do service as one component of the trip. A total of 141 students were involved.
- **One Day Service Events:** The events typically include World Aids Day, MLK Day of Service, Dr. Seuss Day, and others. In AY2012–13, 350 students worked with 15 different community partners.

- **Community Service-learning Program (CSLP) and Community-Based Learning:** This pedagogical method extends classroom learning into the community through a planned, mutually beneficial relationship between students in particular classes and nonprofit sites. CCES runs the CSLP program and in AY2012–13, 103 students participated, working 40 hours each during a semester at 53 sites. In addition, some classes incorporated community-based learning for all students both through projects and hours. During the same year, 804 students worked with 97 nonprofit organizations.
- **The Eagle Endowment for Public and Community Service:** This unique grant-giving program allows students to identify issues they care about and write a grant to fund a particular community project. During AY2012–13 eight grants were funded at three different time periods, receiving a total of \$3150 for the projects. Students write the grants and a “Council” composed of undergraduate and graduate students reviews them and decides which will be approved.

In addition, various student clubs, sororities and fraternities collaborated with CCES to organize projects that service low-income and marginalized populations. In all, 3,500 undergraduates worked approximately 104,300 hours with 260 community and nonprofit organizations in the D.C. metropolitan area.

The center also works closely with faculty to provide professional development and curriculum development that deepens course-based community-based learning and facilitates the development of meaningful partnerships and learning experiences for students.

CCES seeks to develop a more socially responsible student body through enhanced training that links local and national issues with international concerns. The 13 Alternative Break trips linked their social issues to service projects in D.C and the Frederick Douglas Distinguished Scholars Program supported three students on alternative breaks. Both DC Reads (a children’s literacy program) and Alternative Break implemented the CAS learning outcomes template related to humanitarianism and civic engagement. (See the Office of Campus Life annual report for AY2013–14 for more details regarding these programs).

Several of SPExS Washington Semester and Washington Mentorship programs also have substantial service learning components, including classes such as Transforming Communities, International Environment and Development (IED), and Peace and Conflict Resolution. The students in these courses are active participants in service learning projects both in D.C. and abroad.

## ENHANCING THE SCIENCES AT AU

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This self-study has given the university an opportunity to review many aspects of its facilities, students, faculty, and academic programs. However, one area that transcends the themes of the previous chapters (because it relates to both graduate and undergraduate programs, as well as both faculty hiring and student recruitment) is the increasing role that the sciences play in shaping the future of AU. Therefore, this section will address AU's assessment of its science offerings and the need for improved facilities to accommodate this new emphasis.

The sciences at American University are in a time of expansion and revitalization. Since his arrival in 2008, the provost has made an effort to strengthen the university's science departments and to right size them with respect to demand. As part of this initiative, AU has added tenure-line faculty, several net-new, to all of the science departments in the past five years, specifically (including positions currently being filled in 2014): 4 positions in biology, 3 of them at the senior level; 2 positions in chemistry; 2 positions, 1 senior level, in computer science; 1 position in environmental science; 2 positions, 1 senior level, in physics; and 1 senior-level neuroscientist in psychology, for a total of 10, 7, 6, 5, and 5 tenure-line faculty in biology, chemistry, computer science, environmental science, and physics, respectively. The university has been strategic in growing the science faculty, often making senior hires in key interdisciplinary areas in order to foster collaboration and a culture of attracting external support. The university has also allocated close to a million dollars to core facilities (confocal microscope, animal facility enhancements, etc.) to help the sciences prosper.

The university has seen tangible results from its investment, with external funding and the effective rate of indirect costs growing. One example of the increased strength of the sciences is that in 2009, the university had only one NIH R01 grant; in the current fiscal year, it has seven. The university's success in enhancing the sciences over a five-year period is quite exceptional. Part of this success can be attributed to the fact that there was ample need for improvements, and that the university was able to put resources toward the initiative at the time when the economic downturn was reducing hiring and spending at other institutions. Although the marketplace is now becoming more competitive again, the candidates applying for open positions remain outstanding.

Tangible results are also evident in terms of the size of our undergraduate science student cohort. The number of science majors increased 54 percent between AY2009–10 and AY2013–14, an increase of more than 153 students. This may reflect, in part, the efforts that have been made (leveraged with the added faculty resources) to strengthen our curriculum and to develop new, interdisciplinary programs including a BS in public health (launched fall 2011) and a BS in neuroscience (coming for fall 2014). As with the faculty hires, the newly developed programs reflect the growing need for students with strong quantitative and interdisciplinary skills.

The largest impediment to AU's continued enhancement of the sciences is the lack of adequate physical infrastructure. As mentioned in chapter 2, the poor state of the science



facilities has been a discussion at the university for more than three decades, and in recent years at least three committees have been convened to plan for new science facilities. However, no such facilities have been built in several decades, and to date there is still no firm plan for a modern building to house the wet sciences (biology, chemistry, environmental science, and neuroscience). It was recently announced that computer science, physics, mathematics-statistics, and a new program in persuasive gaming are slated to go into a new academic complex, the Technology and Innovation Center, to be completed by fall of 2016. These departments make up a cluster of highly quantitative disciplines that are most likely to collaborate with each other. Interdisciplinary collaborations are becoming more important with time. Interdisciplinary projects are often born from hallway conversations between researchers.

To attract the best science faculty and students, a university needs to have up-to-date science facilities. More than in any other disciplines, modern, safe, and efficient spaces for teaching and research are a *sine qua non* in the sciences, where the cutting edge changes quickly. We have been able to attract excellent new faculty to date primarily by renovating individual labs for them. These renovations have tended to be quite expensive because the university is forcing specialized lab spaces into buildings that were not designed to handle them. Details of the specific building needs for the sciences are outlined in a report by the CAS associate dean for graduate studies (available in supporting documentation). It should also be noted that a new science facility is included in the current long-term capital budget, that it has received and will receive serious attention by the senior leadership of the university, including the Board of Trustees, and that funding requirements, a general funding plan, and fundraising goals for this facility have been set.

## CONCLUSIONS

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AU, like all institutions of higher learning, is expected to adequately prepare its graduates for a competitive environment calling for interdisciplinary knowledge and collaborative, problem-solving abilities. Universities have to be nimble in responding to the demand for different delivery modes as well as for new areas of expertise, particularly in the sciences and health fields. AU has no plans to abandon its strong commitment to a liberal arts foundation, especially for undergraduate education, in its mission statement, but AU needs to ensure that students capitalize on this foundation as they specialize in their particular majors or fields and use their solid liberal arts foundation as a selling point as they move forward in their academic and professional careers.

Indeed, in a world in which strong writing and problem-solving skills, solid quantitative reasoning abilities, and broad-based knowledge that cuts across disciplinary boundaries are ever more appreciated and required, AU's *Statement of Common Purpose* still reflects a mission that is appropriate for getting its graduates entry into the job market. At the same time, AU aims to pursue “innovation with rigor” in higher education to ensure that its mission and strategy remain relevant to society at large and also ensure sustainable, long-term standards of high-quality knowledge creation and dissemination. Rigor is especially important in experiential learning. AU recognizes that in today's interconnected economy and society and an increasingly competitive educational environment, strategic partnerships with other complementary educational and research institutions as well as with employers, and strength in key areas, such as the sciences, are essential to the success of its students. They not only allow AU to expand its menu of educational offerings but also provide clearer career pathways for an increasingly diverse and mobile student body.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. Strengthen the quality and intensify collaborative partnerships and co-branded arrangements with other universities and nonprofit and private sector organizations in the U.S. and abroad to enhance AU's competitiveness, complement AU's offerings, increase interdisciplinary, extend AU's geographic reach, and enhance sponsored funding.
2. Encourage innovative delivery of education, including creating more opportunities for learning that combine the best of online, technologically enhanced education with the benefits of personal contact that AU offers its students.
3. Strengthen experiential learning opportunities through greater and more consistent academic rigor and assessment and enhance cooperation with employers through active consultation of industry/employment sector leaders, mentoring of internship/practical supervisors, and exploration of various forms of cooperative/service learning.
4. Work collaboratively to ensure that AU graduates develop knowledge, skills, competencies and values that are highly sought by employers and that epitomize the best qualities of the college-centered research university experience. Make explicit linkages between the curricular and co-curricular experiences in order to ensure that graduates demonstrate these learning outcomes.
5. Make improvement of AU's science and health programs a priority by identifying ways that the university's science facilities can be improved and its science-related programs enhanced.

# CONCLUSIONS





# Conclusions

American University is a stronger institution than ever, but it is not resting on its laurels. AU fully appreciates the magnitude of the challenges facing higher education in the United States today, and it embraces the need to transform itself continually in order to meet the everchanging needs of increasingly diverse student populations in difficult economic times. This chapter will conclude the self-study by summarizing the university's major transformations, the assessment and benchmarking processes that have driven these transformations, and the continued transformations upon which AU is now embarking in order to position itself to meet the challenges it expects to face in the foreseeable future.

## A TRANSFORMED UNIVERSITY

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AU is a transformed institution today, compared with 10, or even five, years ago. Although the university has always been strong in all of Middle States' 14 standards, the self-study demonstrates that the university continues to move in a direction that better fulfills its mission and more closely resembles the practices of high-quality, aspirational institutions. Since its last accreditation review, the university has adopted exemplary new governance structures, hired a bold new leadership team, and implemented an ambitious strategic plan. The university has engaged in multifaceted efforts to address its deficiencies in relation to comparator institutions in many dimensions, by means such as revising its internal policies and procedures for students and faculty, expanding campus facilities, improving alumni outreach, and encouraging greater external funding of research. AU sees itself as a college-centered research university, with greater expectations for scholarship than in the past, combined with a continued emphasis on high-quality teaching, a first-rate undergraduate experience, and excellence in graduate and professional studies. AU has a model of an open and transparent administration, in which key campus leaders communicate

regularly with the campus community, hold town hall meetings, and welcome student and faculty participation at all levels of governance up to and including the Board of Trustees.

The university's financial position is remarkably strong, especially in view of the recent economic climate. AU has had balanced operating budgets throughout these turbulent times and has improved its endowment management and development operations. The university's sound financial management was recognized by the assignment of an A+ credit rating by Standard and Poor's in 2009 and the reaffirmation of its A2 rating, with an upgrade to a positive outlook by Moody's in 2011. AU did not have to make any cutbacks during the financial crisis, but on the contrary, proceeded ahead—albeit in a measured, prudent, and careful way—to implement the budgetary requisites of the new strategic plan. This included, among many other things, the creation of new full-time faculty positions, for both tenure-line and term faculty, and regular, although modest, salary increases for faculty and staff throughout this period.

On the teaching side, the university is working on integrating a strong liberal arts education with the development of skill sets for the workplace. It has revised its General Education Program, and it will launch an innovative new Honors Program in fall 2014. AU offers extensive opportunities for experiential learning, ranging from internships in D.C. to study abroad, and is actively working to create new or enhanced avenues for quantitative skills, interactive teaching, interdisciplinary studies, and student research. It is ensuring that the institution's learning outcomes provide students with critical skills necessary to meet the needs of an ever-changing workplace. At the graduate level, the university is going ahead with distinctive online master's and professional programs across its various schools and colleges, while building innovative programs to attract nontraditional students to campus through the new School of Professional and Extended Studies, as well as in the existing academic units. One new doctoral program in Communication and a revamped PhD in behavior, cognition, and neuroscience have been created.

In regard to faculty, AU has raised the expectations of high-quality, high-impact scholarship for tenure-line faculty, while reducing teaching loads and providing greater research support for those who meet the new expectations in terms of scholarly productivity. The new faculty manual embodies the norm of a four-course teaching load for tenure-line faculty who are deemed active in scholarship, while allowing variability around this norm in recognition of different levels of performance in scholarship and other areas. The new manual has also regularized the status of full-time term faculty, permitting them to obtain multiyear contracts and advance through their own series of ranks, while a contract with the Service Employees International Union has addressed the concerns of part-time, adjunct faculty about their employment status, remuneration, and working conditions. Teaching evaluations and other indicators of teaching quality are strong for all types of faculty.

AU was successful in gaining city approval of a new 10-year campus plan that will further address pressing space needs, including moving the Washington College of Law to a new facility at more prominent location on AU's Tenley Campus and building an entirely new East Campus that will combine residential and academic facilities on the site of a currently underused outdoor parking lot. These new projects come on the heels of a previous wave of facilities expansion that

included two new residence halls and new or completely renovated buildings for the School of International Service and School of Communication. AU has also acquired much space in office buildings and other venues in nearby neighborhoods of Northwest Washington, D.C., for use by administrative offices and various sorts of special facilities, thereby freeing up space on the central campus for academic and student use. In addition to improving its physical plant, the university has also been reconstructing and updating its infrastructure in numerous other areas, especially in information technology, enrollment management, grants administration, alumni relations, external marketing, and public communications.

## USING ASSESSMENTS AND BENCHMARKING TO DRIVE IMPROVEMENTS

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These transformations have been brought about and are continuously informed by an ongoing process of assessment. AU has what the *Characteristics of Excellence* calls “effective assessment processes” that are “useful, cost-effective, reasonably accurate and truthful, carefully planned, and organized, systematic, and sustained.” (p. 26) The availability of qualitative and quantitative data has enabled the development of metrics that set high standards and that enable the university to track its progress. AU has deeply embedded assessment in all of its operations and decision making, from the level of learning objectives for individual courses and programs, through all parts of academic program administration and facilities planning, and up to the management of budgets and the implementation of the strategic plan. The changes and transformations described in this self-study grew out of substantial self-assessments, conducted by a wide variety of committees and task forces, with input from affected stakeholders, as described throughout this report. Budgetary priorities have been aligned with strategic plan objectives, and progress or challenges in the achievement of those objectives is regularly monitored and assessed. Such assessments are used to drive improvements, including any necessary adjustments to planned changes.

A key feature of AU’s assessment strategy has been the regular use of external benchmarks as guidelines for what the university needs to do in order to accomplish its strategic goals. The benchmarks vary depending on the purposes of a given assessment effort and may include: schools with which AU competes for students (either locally or nationally); schools that have a similar academic configuration (for example, research universities without a medical school); other college-centered research universities; and universities with comparable programs in particular fields (for example, independent schools of public policy or international relations). Most importantly, the university benchmarks against aspirant institutions, pushing itself to be even better. External benchmarking has been used in areas ranging from program reviews at the individual teaching unit (department or school) level up to the reforms of the Board of Trustees and university governance practices. Revisions to the academic regulations, faculty manual, General Education Program, Honors program, and numerous other policies and procedures have been benchmarked to best practices at peer institutions and aspirational schools.

## POSITIONING AU FOR THE FUTURE

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The self-study fulfills an important goal, that of helping the university to prepare for the changing nature of higher education. As the previous chapters demonstrate, the transformations of the past several years, guided by numerous assessment efforts and the recurrent use of appropriate external benchmarks, have changed AU from a somewhat insular institution, where progress was measured relative to its own past, into a school that is much closer to national norms for a university of its size and ranking. In the coming years, AU will be able to turn its attention from catching up to moving ahead—from striving to emulate best practices in other universities to helping push out the frontiers of higher education both nationally and internationally. Indeed, perhaps the most distinctive feature of AU today is the self-conscious orientation of all its planning efforts toward expectations about future needs and challenges. AU's leadership is fully cognizant that higher education in the United States is changing rapidly and dramatically, and that AU must not only keep up in terms of matching existing best practices and standards, but also by positioning itself at the forefront of change in U.S. academia. At AU, the future is now, and the university is not simply planning for the future—it is making changes now to be ready for the future when it arrives.

One clear and fundamentally important area of change addressed in the self-study is in the demographics of the U.S. student population. The college and graduate students of the future will be more diverse in many dimensions (including race, ethnicity, geographic origin, and gender orientation) and will include many students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as older students returning to higher education at various stages in their careers. AU is already moving to embrace this change by transforming its enrollment strategies and developing new programs. At the undergraduate level, AU is successfully recruiting students from more diverse backgrounds and in a wider range of regions than in the past. It is reconfiguring its support services and academic advising to try to ensure the success of these new enrollees. Many of the recommendations in the self-study are intended to benefit this population. At the graduate level, the university is seeking to develop new types of graduate and professional programs (both online and on campus) that can meet the needs of students of all ages and backgrounds who are concerned about their postgraduate employability. In the years ahead, AU will continue to work on creating a culture of retention and inclusion so that all students, regardless of background, can be successful.

This self-study also highlights the importance of efforts to think of learning in entirely new ways. Academic instruction methods are changing in light of new expectations and demands. In this context, AU seeks to move away from traditional classroom approaches in which faculty mainly impart information to students and students demonstrate that they have absorbed the material. Opportunities to develop methods that enhance problem-centered learning will be critical. Students today must acquire both a strong liberal arts background and practical applied skills. This report demonstrates the progress AU has made already and offers recommendations that reflect AU's ambition to do more.



One important step that AU is taking is revising its institutional learning outcomes, based, in part, on the “Critical Domains for Higher Education Student Learning Outcomes,” proposed by an Educational Testing Service study. Proposed draft outcomes at the time of the self-study are: creativity, critical thinking, teamwork, effective communication, digital and information literacy, citizenship, and life skills. As another benchmark, the university will be strengthening its implementation of the “High-Impact Educational Practices” identified in the AAU&C LEAP initiative: first-year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, service learning and community-based learning, internships, and capstone courses and projects. AU has had many of these practices in its curriculum for a long time but is now seeking to diffuse them more widely throughout the university’s programs, increase student participation rates in such activities, and improve the quality of the academic experience in all such areas.

The university is also moving, on its own initiative, to strengthen quantitative learning for all students and the employable skills component of graduate and professional learning. In all of these areas, AU is striving to move beyond simply meeting best practices of peers by addressing difficult issues that are at the cutting edge of higher education and hopes to provide new demonstration programs and innovations that others may adopt.

The self-study also brings to light the importance of advancing AU Project 2030. As the university looks to coming decades, this initiative positions it to identify areas in which the faculty’s expertise is at the cutting edge and in which AU can make high-profile, high-value contributions to global and national research and debates. By focusing on areas of exceptional promise, AU intends to ensure that its resources are concentrated in clusters of interdisciplinary scholarship in which the university can play a leading role in knowledge creation, dissemination, and training in an increasingly complex environment. Also, by improving science facilities, examining program offerings, hiring faculty, and supporting research, the university understands the importance of science and technology to its future.

The university will continue to support research and creative activities, with an emphasis on high-impact research. Many of the recommendations in this self-study report relate to research, whether it be supporting faculty as they transition to the new high expectations or finding ways to communicate one’s successes. The strategic plan also emphasizes engaging students in research, and this self-study has highlighted many of the methods for doing this for undergraduates, and graduate and professional, students. AU is now holding itself to a higher standard for research and the new expectations must be supported and assessed.

AU takes pride in the many accomplishments that it has been able to document in this self-study. It looks forward to using this document as a way to advance its mission and realize its strategic goals.



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