CHAPTER ONE: MISSION, INTEGRITY, EFFECTIVENESS

I. Mission (from the Brooklyn College Bulletins)

Brooklyn College is a comprehensive, state-funded institution of higher learning in the Borough of Brooklyn, a culturally and ethnically diverse community of two-and-one-half million people. As one of the nine senior colleges of the City University of New York, it shares the mission of the university, whose primary goals are access and excellence.

Within the context of this broader mission, the particular mission of Brooklyn College is to provide a superior education in the liberal arts and sciences. The college offers a wide variety of programs, both in the liberal arts and in professional and career-oriented areas, leading to the baccalaureate and masters degrees and to undergraduate and advanced certificates.

Distinctive in this liberal arts education is the Core Curriculum, which is required of all baccalaureate students. The Core has long been a national model for general education programs and for faculty and curriculum development. The thirteen Core Studies courses are designed to expose students to the principal branches of learning — the arts, humanities, social sciences, and sciences — and to provide a rigorous foundation for study in a major field.

Through its distinguished faculty, the college promotes excellence in teaching, advances the frontiers of knowledge through research and scholarship, and stimulates creative achievement and intellectual growth.

The overarching goal of the educational experience at Brooklyn College is to provide students with the knowledge and skills to live in a globally interdependent world and the support services to help them succeed. The college also seeks to develop a sense of personal and social responsibility by encouraging involvement in community and public service. It fosters a campus environment hospitable to multicultural interests and activities. Moreover, as an urban institution, it is able to draw upon the myriad resources of the city to enhance its educational mission.

The college seeks to extend its educational mission to graduate students through advanced programs offered by the Division of Graduate Studies. The academic goals of the division build on the college’s tradition of academic excellence in the liberal arts and sciences and in teacher education programs. The division offers studies in specialized areas to serve the growing number of adults who seek to continue their intellectual pursuits and broaden their professional goals. In addition, in order to meet the changing needs of society, the college has developed new interdisciplinary degree and certificate programs as well as new concentrations of courses in existing programs. The college participates in a range of doctoral programs offered by the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, including campus-based programs in the sciences.
II. Integrity

The remarkable response of Brooklyn College to the severe financial pressures under which the college has had to operate in the past decade is an indicator of its real and spontaneous commitment to the above-described mission. This resilience runs through the many units and departments of the college and may be the best evidence of the integrity with which it remains faithful to its core ideals. It is that very integrity that has enabled the college to withstand the pressures and find creative solutions for the problems that are affecting higher education throughout the country: downsizing and consolidating of curricula; the bottom line model for education; the general threat to public education in terms of disinvestment by the states; attempts at privatization; concerns about the adequacy of preparation for college work, and the issue of restriction of access.

Some of the special character of Brooklyn College and the affective bond that pulls this community together is captured in President Lattin’s recent address to the graduating class on the occasion of the June 1998 commencement.

I have attended dozens of alumni meetings from San Francisco to Jerusalem. The most repeated phrase I hear is, “If it weren’t for the wonderful education that I received at Brooklyn College, I would not be the success I am today.” Then these alumni often ask about one of their favorite professors. Many have asked me about Professor Hans Trefousse, whom they had for history, and they tell me about intellectually exciting his classes were. They ask about Yaffa Eliach, of Judaic Studies, whom CBS named “Woman of the Year” because of the “Tower of Life” she created at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. They ask about the director of the Wolfe Institute, Robert Viscusi, whose novel, Astoria, won the 1996 American Book Award. They ask about Teo Ruiz, of the History Department, whom the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching named the 1994 Professor of the Year for the entire nation.

…And these wonderful professors have produced an illustrious line of graduates…. The line goes back to such people as Jimmy Smits, the Emmy-Award-winning actor; Alan Dershowitz, the internationally known lawyer; Gloria Naylor, the acclaimed novelist; Stanley Cohen, the Nobel Prize winner winner in Physiology of Medicine; Frank McCourt, the winner of the 1997 Pulitzer Prize for his book, Angela’s Ashes; Lisette Nieves, our Rhodes Scholar in 1992, and Toba Friedman, our Marshall Scholar that same year. (By the way, Brooklyn College is the only public university ever to have both a Rhodes and Marshall Scholar in the same year.) The line includes Senator Barbara Boxer of California and former Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm of New York. In fact, if you look at the New York City Council and State Legislature, you find seventeen graduates of Brooklyn College – more than any other college in CUNY.

Brooklyn College’s ethnically diverse students tend to be extremely hard working. Typically, they carry economic and family obligations more burdensome than those of students
in residential colleges. They are savvy, alert to cant and pretension, not easily impressed, markedly self-respecting and – when offered teaching of substance – ardent to get it. They can be a joy to teach provided one is prepared to give the very best one has to offer.

The proven determination of this faculty and administration to devise solutions that creatively respond to the college’s severest challenges surely comes in part from their daily interaction with this student constituency and their lively sense of its great value. So for example it was when the college was at its lowest point financially that faculty, administration, and students worked together in an extraordinary melding to produce a core curriculum that has become a model for the nation.

In the present period, Brooklyn College is being tested again, and its basic excellence has made it possible for the college to meet the test of adverse conditions. So when the declarations of fiscal exigency forced CUNY colleges to consider retrenchments in 1992 and 1995, Brooklyn College made substantial cuts but decided not to make cuts in faculty or in programs. The strategy ameliorated some of the hurt inflicted by other necessary cuts, such as increased faculty workload, reduction of support in administrative services, and subsequent early retirements. Comprehensiveness survived, and the Core Curriculum, although forced to run classes larger than desirable and to use adjunct faculty in some cases, was essentially untouched.

Despite the reductions in State funding, which prompted the Board of Trustees to respond in 1992 and 1995, by declaring states of “fiscal emergency,” a term of governance that compelled each CUNY college to engage in emergency retrenchment planning, Brooklyn College does continue to provide the education that it has promised in its mission statement and provide it to at least the great majority of students who want to attend. Tuition has stabilized for the time being, and thanks to the caring gifts of many donors, the college is able to offer hundreds of scholarships beyond the financial aid provided by city, state, and federal governments.

The college has raised its admission requirements significantly in the last three years, and they may be further raised by Board mandates in the Fall of 1999, when all entering students may be required to pass all three CUNY assessment tests (in mathematics, reading, and writing), thus effectively eliminating remedial education at Brooklyn College. Nevertheless, it is anticipated that long experience and improvement in remedial teaching will in turn enable most applicants for Fall 1999 to pass the assessment tests before the beginning of the academic year. The summer immersion program of 1998 was highly successful, as will duly be noted. (Faculty members working on a five year plan in 1992 foresaw the strong possibility that budget cuts would cause the demise of remedial courses.) Successful plans for improving retention mean that more students who come will stay. Attempts are underway to increase the number of transfer students. New attention is being given to proven programs for working adult students beginning of returning to college.

The seriousness with which the faculty takes its mission came out remarkably in a session of our first Faculty Day in the spring of 1997. Nine faculty members shared ideas about "the contents of the academic curriculum and the dynamics of its change." There was general agreement that a college of liberal arts and sciences has the following responsibilities: to impart
to students the complexity of knowledge; to teach them to write effectively and to read difficult
texts; to provide students with up-to-date information and ideas; to enable students to attain in-
depth knowledge of one discipline; and to enable students to recognize the various languages of
other disciplines and to ask good questions about them. There is little doubt at this college that
students are not well served by too narrow a training in a specific career, yet, where appropriate,
the training we give in the liberal arts and sciences permits pre-professional training as well.

There are inevitably differences of opinion about curricular development. The five year
plan developed in 1992 suggested that the "college should develop a curriculum with a
coordinated outreach to the borough (i.e. use Brooklyn as a laboratory). As part of this effort,
courses interactive with the people and localities of Brooklyn should be developed." Partly out
of this suggestion a working prospectus called "Brooklyn Connections" emerged a few years
later. The prospectus named four themes for curricular focus: Communications, Community
Studies, Environmental Studies, and Science Education. Within the framework of limited
resources, however, many faculty members saw the multidepartmental collaborations "Brooklyn
Connections" called for as draining resources away from the Core Curriculum and traditional
discipline-based inquiry, as well as from our traditional commitment to a broad liberal education.
Considerable heat was generated and reported in the press. There was a drawing back from
quick action, but an environmental studies program has been approved, and discussions continue
on the other three themes.

It is safe to say that almost all of us agree on the centrality of the Core Curriculum and on
a comprehensive liberal arts and sciences focus. We also agree that our mandate is to serve the
Borough of Brooklyn and the City of New York through a broad array of academic programs.
Almost all of the discussions that have taken place on campus have led us back to those points of
agreement.

The lively interest in curriculum development is one of the signs that the college has
maintained its integrity. Another is the continuing insistence that faculty balance their interests
in research, teaching, and service. A Center for Teaching has been established to provide a space
for ongoing discussion of effective teaching, while the administration now provides released
time to new faculty members so that they may keep working on the research projects they bring
with them to the college.

Other signs of integrity are the maintenance of high standards and the raising of
admissions standards, the institution of an Honors Academy, the forthcoming increase in the size
of the library, the constant attention to technological developments and possibilities. All of these
and more are discussed more fully in the reports that follow.

III. Effectiveness

Since one section of this self-study focuses exclusively on the topic of an outcomes
assessment plan and includes an inventory of current practices of measuring the college's
effectiveness, little need be said here. The goal of the plan described in that section is to develop
a culture of collegial consideration of teaching and learning that will match and blend with the
culture of curricular interest that already exists at Brooklyn College. Integrity and effectiveness should be intertwined measures of access and excellence.

In the course of presenting the current state of the college, the chapters that follow also do present much evidence of the effectiveness of the college's programs.

IV. Planning

A particular aspect of effectiveness worth isolating is Brooklyn College’s planning procedure. The college provided a detailed description of its long- and short-range planning processes in its last Periodic Review Report (see Part VI, Institutional Self-Study and Planning), which was submitted to the Commission on Higher Education in May 1994. The long-range plan, *Brooklyn College: The Year 2000 and Beyond* was developed in 1992-93 through a comprehensive, campus-wide process. It subsumed and extended the five-year plan (1993-98), which had been initiated prior to President Lattin’s appointment in 1992 and completed in March 1993.

To better integrate planning with the varying modes and phases of the budgeting process, President Lattin established an Advisory Committee on Budget and Planning composed of senior administrators, faculty leaders, and student government leaders. This committee, chaired by President Lattin, cooperates and communicates with the college governance bodies (Policy Council, Faculty Council, Council on Administrative Policy, College Personnel and Budget Committee) to keep all campus constituencies informed about important planning and fiscal matters and to receive input and feedback from them.

The Budget and Planning Committee construct worked sufficiently well that, in the interest of economy and efficiency, the President assigned the committee to serve a dual role as the Steering Committee to develop this institutional self study.

Since the distribution of the long-range plan in 1993, the President has produced two progress reports, which have recapitulated the deliberations and decisions of the planning bodies and updated the long-range goals where necessary.

The college’s planning process has been coordinated with CUNY’s Academic Program Planning (APP) and with the annual budget preparation process involving the college, the university, the State Executive Division of the Budget, and the appropriate state legislative committees. The APP report which the college submits to the university’s Office of Academic Affairs at the end of every academic year is reviewed by the university, together with a host of performance and fiscal data, in assessing Brooklyn College’s subsequent budget request. In the most recent cycle, the college submitted its academic year 1997-98 APP report in August 1998 and its fiscal year 1999-2000 technical budget request in September 1998. The college’s budget request for the funding of new initiatives and programs in 1999-2000 was submitted in October 1998. CUNY’s fiscal year 1999-2000 budget request, which includes all of the CUNY campuses’ budget requests, was approved by its Board of Trustees and submitted to the New York State executive and legislative bodies in November 1998. The Governor of the state is expected to release his executive budget recommendations for the State’s 1999-2000 operating
budget at the end of December 1998 or early January 1999. Brooklyn College will receive its operating budget allocation for 1999-2000 after a lengthy review of the CUNY budget request by the New York State executive and legislative bodies and after final adoption by the state legislature of the Governor’s executive budget.

The college’s capital budget has followed a separate, multi-year process and was incorporated in the Brooklyn College Master Plan which was approved by the university in October 1994 and subsequently by the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York. The Master Plan evolved from an earlier Educational Facilities Plan and was prepared by a firm of architectural consultants with broad consultation of the college community. The funding for capital and facilities rehabilitation projects currently underway on the campus total $200+ million. These projects reflect the successful implementation of the college’s long range plans that are specified in both its facilities Master Plan and its strategic long range plan, *Brooklyn College: The Year 2000 and Beyond.*