



Interim Report

Macalester College

Site Visit Team

Ed Chan

Jillian Kinzie

Kathleen Manning

John Schuh

Visit Dates: October 7– 9, 2002

NSSE Institute for Effective Educational Practice

George D. Kuh, Director

Jillian Kinzie, Assistant Director

National Survey of Student Engagement

Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and Planning
Ashton Aley Hall Suite 102 • 1913 E. Seventh Street • Bloomington, Indiana 47405

812.856.5824 • 812.856.5150 (fax) • www.iub.edu/~nsse

Documenting Effective Educational Practice (Project DEEP) Macalester College

Purpose and Overview

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) are working together on an initiative to identify and describe the policies, practices, and cultures of colleges and universities that are unusually effective in promoting student success. With support from Lumina Foundation for Education and the Wabash College Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts, the Documenting Effective Educational Practice project (DEEP) features case studies of about twenty colleges and universities that have higher-than-predicted scores on five clusters or “benchmarks” of effective educational practice and also higher-than-expected graduation rates. The benchmarks are academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment. The benchmarks are based on how students respond to the questions on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Appendix A contains more information about the benchmarks and the NSSE project.

The institutions selected for study in the DEEP project reflect the diversity of four-year institutions, including large universities, small colleges, urban universities, and special mission institutions. Our aim is to discover and document what these institutions do, and to the extent feasible, how they have achieved this measure of effectiveness. Then, we intend to share with other colleges and universities the educational practices that seem to work in a variety of different settings with different groups of learners and to further our understanding of how institutions of higher education can modify their policies and practices to promote student success. The major findings from the project will be reported in a monograph and other vehicles by NSSE and AAHE. Additional information is available on the web: <http://www.iub.edu/~nsse>

Methods

A time-honored approach to improving productivity is for organizations to identify and adapt distinctive qualities that characterize their successful high-performing counterparts. Analogously, virtually all institutions of higher education can learn valuable lessons from educationally effective colleges. The conceptual framework guiding our work is anchored by a concept called “student engagement.” Although the importance of student engagement has been known for years, many colleges and universities have not had good information about the student experience to know where to best direct their resources and energy to improve undergraduate education. Since 2000, more than 600 institutions of higher education have turned to the National Survey of

Student Engagement to learn more about this important dimension of the undergraduate experience.

Student engagement represents two critical features. The first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities. The second is how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum, other learning opportunities, and support services to induce students to participate in activities that lead to the experiences and outcomes that constitute student success (persistence, satisfaction, learning and graduation). The latter feature is of particular interest, as it represents the margin of educational quality that institutions contribute – a measure of value added – and something over which they have direct control.

NSSE benchmark results were used to help us identify Project DEEP schools. While the NSSE data provide a useful structure for our work, they are not the only topics of interest in this study.

Toward this end, we're using a qualitative case study approach to learn as much as we can about your school and the other DEEP colleges and universities. The research team that visited your campus on October 7-9, 2002 was composed of experienced researchers, administrators, faculty members and advanced graduate students. The team was lead by John Schuh, Professor and Chair, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Iowa State University; Kathleen Manning, Associate Professor, Higher Education and Student Affairs, University of Vermont; Jillian Kinzie, Assistant Director and Project Manager, National Survey of Student Engagement; Edward Chan, Research Fellow, Wabash College Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts. Additional information about the team members is in Appendix B.

The team reviewed many pertinent documents about your school before and during the visit as well as your institution's most recent NSSE results. During the visit we met individually or in focus groups with more than 65 students, faculty, administrators, and others (see Appendix C). Most of these people were identified for us prior to the visit by Dan Hornbach, Provost and Laurie Hamre, Vice President for Student Affairs as being able to represent informative and diverse perspectives on the quality of the undergraduate experience at Macalester.

Following the visit, the team prepared this Interim Report. At this point we're asking that the report be distributed widely prior to our second visit to the campus. The return visits will occur in either Spring or Fall 2003. The primary purpose of the second visit is to discuss and obtain feedback about the Interim Report in order to correct any errors or fact and questionable interpretations. To do this, the team will meet with small groups of people from Macalester in

debriefing sessions to discuss the report with an eye toward identifying and better understanding aspects of the undergraduate experience at Macalester that were not adequately captured and depicted in the Interim Report. We'll also meet with additional respondents who might have alternative or complimentary perspectives.

We are grateful for the cooperation of the Macalester students, faculty, staff and others who shared their time and insights during our first visit. We're especially indebted to Laurie Hamre and members of her staff, particularly Pat Traynor, who arranged our interview schedule and attended to many other details to make our visit productive and enjoyable.

Guiding Principles

Three principles guided our work and the preparation of this Report.

First, the goal of Project DEEP is to document and describe effective educational practices. We're interested in understanding what works and how the institution achieved their success. We are neither interested in identifying institutional weaknesses nor are we in a position to evaluate the institution. As a result, we attempted to emphasize descriptive statements about Macalester.

Second, we attempted to be inclusive and tried to learn the views of as many different groups as time would allow.

Third, our goal was to understand Macalester as students, faculty, staff and other "insiders" experience university life.

We submit this report with two caveats. The first is that we are certain to have not fully captured all aspects of the culture and the practices of the institution. We're mindful that at best this report provides only a snapshot of a moving target; that is, some of what may have been issues at one point in time may now be settled, and new issues may have emerged. Second, in instances where we have misinterpreted factual matters we want to correct such errors in a subsequent version of this report.

Overview of the Report

This Report is organized into three sections. First, relevant aspects of Macalester's history, mission, academic programs, and students are briefly summarized. Then we discuss the major themes using the NSSE benchmarks as an organizing framework. We conclude with some general discussion about the undergraduate experience at Macalester and suggestions for issues we'd like to learn more about during our second visit.

Macalester College: Overview

Macalester College is a private undergraduate liberal arts college that emphasizes academic excellence in the context of internationalism, multiculturalism, and a commitment to civic engagement. Since its founding in 1874, Macalester has maintained standards for scholarship equivalent to those of the finest colleges in the country in a context of high ethical standards and social concerns (Macalester World Wide Web Site: <http://www.macalester.edu>). When asked to identify its peer institutions, members of the Macalester community quickly identified Carleton, Grinnell and Oberlin.

The College is located in St. Paul, Minnesota, in a pleasant urban residential neighborhood of Victorian homes, small shops and businesses. A benefactor provided financial support to maintain the quality of the surrounding neighborhood, and to that end many of the homes adjacent to the campus had been renovated or repaired so that they continue to be attractive and well kept.

The College has an enrollment of approximately 1700 students and is focused on undergraduate education. Four pillars (many at the College don't like this characterization and would prefer something else, perhaps "core values") undergird the philosophy of the college: academic excellence, multiculturalism, internationalism, and service. Brief excerpts from a document entitled "Narrative Summary of Core Values Discussion" (posted on the web on 1/27/00) provide a snapshot of a healthy discussion conducted by alumni, faculty, staff and students, of these values:

Academic excellence: "Educational excellence would include academic excellence and rigor as traditionally viewed, but also would stress the development of the whole person and the lives of all people on campus: faculty, staff and students. According to some members of the core values discussion group, 'educational excellence incorporates academic, social, interpersonal education and leadership training.' Others said this broader value is part of why Macalester is a residential college, and that Macalester would be unlikely to ever abandon this commitment. An intrinsic part of educational excellence would be the development of **healthy relationships** (author's emphasis) between and among students, faculty, staff and alumni. Thus, Macalester would foster life-long learning and the development of responsible world citizens. Educational excellence also was thought to connect more clearly to multiculturalism, internationalism, and service to society than does academic excellence."

Multiculturalism "...was viewed as the inclusion of people from multiple cultures was viewed as the inclusion of people from multiple cultures within the U.S, and study of and respect for these cultures."

Internationalism "was defined as focusing on cultures and peoples from outside of the U.S."

Note these additional observations from the report: “Many participants suggested that multiculturalism and internationalism could be combined into a more encompassing value on **diversity** (author’s emphasis). Valuing diversity would mean promoting respect of differences across cultures both internal and external to the U.S. It would include significant representation of people across many cultures of the U.S. and abroad.”

Service “While service to society was generally viewed as a core value, this term was felt to need substantial clarification. Most agreed that valuing service would mean, as one participant put it, ‘responsibility to myself as well as to the community and society, to give in service.’ Some suggested alternative terms such as **social or civic responsibility** (author’s emphasis). Others thought perhaps service was viewed too narrowly if it refers only to volunteering, when it should include the pursuit of careers that serve society such as teaching or working at the United Nations.”

Over time it certainly is possible that the definitions of these values will evolve and change, but the debate about the meaning of these values is a manifestation of the vigor of the Macalester community.

College Philosophy

The philosophy of the college is to provide high quality liberal arts education while simultaneously exposing students to the issues of the larger community and the world. Classroom experiences, field experiences and internships, international experiences and diversity are woven into a tapestry of experiences that provide robust educational opportunities for Macalester students.

Students

Macalester attracts very able students from across the country and around the world. Less than 70% of the student body consists of domestic white students (the College’s characterization), and 13% of the student body is domestic students of color. About two-thirds of the student body went to public high schools in the United States; the balance of students attended private schools or international schools. As might be expected, the predominant regional affiliation of students is from Minnesota and the upper Middle West, but all of the states in the US are represented in the student body as well as a number of foreign countries. The student newspaper reported (March 2, 2001) the five-year graduation rate as 78.9%.

Residence Life. Macalester is a residential campus. Nearly 76% of all students live on campus; this percentage may grow to 80%. Capacity is approximately 1250. All first year students and sophomores are required to live on campus. Some juniors and seniors also live on campus, attracted to campus, in part, by the food service (“The food is so good” said one senior).

Students and administrators described the residence hall facilities as good places to live and in good repair. Maintenance was characterized as a strength of the residential system. A variety of halls are available, including suite style

housing for upper-class students. First-year students and sophomores live in different buildings than juniors and seniors. Examples of special interest housing include language houses (French, German, Russian, Japanese, and Spanish), a veggie co-op (located beneath the stadium), a chemical free house, and a cultural house (37 Macalester Street).

Four full time live-in staff members provide professional leadership for the halls and a staff of resident assistants (RAs) assists them. Training takes the form of leadership development for these staff. The primary programming thrust is through a series of programs called dialogues. Each RA leads six dialogue programs per year, including such examples as the war on terror as it relates to civil liberties, international diversity compared with domestic diversity, and balancing greed with making a living. Since the students hail from around the world, and tend to have a global orientation, these programs are designed to capitalize on the worldview of the students.

Service. Macalester students are heavily involved in a wide range of service experiences. According to National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data, 86% of first year students and 80% of seniors are involved in service. Some respondents indicated that “service” far too narrowly represents what Macalester College has in mind for its students in terms of how they relate to the world. In fact, one of the goals of a Macalester education is to provide academic excellence so that students can change the world. This conception of service is more wide reaching than volunteering time at the local homeless shelter or tutoring children in reading, although students provide those valuable forms of service to the community, too. The College published a statement about civic engagement and social responsibility in the September 29, 2002 issue of the *New York Times*.

Service learning, a form of service that intentionally links community service with classroom activities, is not as well developed at Macalester as some would like. In that respect, Macalester may be surpassed by some of its peers. Nevertheless, the Community Service Office identifies a wide variety of service opportunities for students and others, ranging from one-time events to weekly service opportunities. Special opportunities for first-year students include the Lives of Commitment Program (sponsored by the Lilly Foundation). The Maction student organization provides service opportunities for all students and is connected to a variety of projects in the Twin Cities.

Macalester students are very civic minded. Student respondents expressed interest in local elections and politics, were familiar with city issues and public service agencies, and valued being near the state capitol. Many students indicated that one of the reasons they chose Macalester over peer institutions (such as Grinnell or Carleton) was because of the urban environment. The city provided a setting for students to engage in public life, primarily via community service. According to one administrator, 89% of the members of the class of 2001 participated in ongoing service as students at Macalester College.

Recreation and athletics. Macalester College is a member of the MIAC (Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference) and of NCAA Division III. Athletic director Irv Cross, a former wide receiver of the Philadelphia Eagles, leads the department. The College participates in a full range of conference sports, although it plays an independent schedule in football.

The size and quality of athletic facilities are something of an issue not only for intercollegiate athletics but also for student recreation and intramural sports. Indoor space is limited and schedules for team practices, recreation and intramurals have to be juggled to accommodate all students who are interested in participating. Intramural sports include such activities as touch football, soccer, tennis, basketball, inner tube water polo and table tennis.

Students who participate in athletics are similar to other students at the College in terms of admission standards, the classes they take, and their commitment to the various elements of the life of the campus. Coaches must actively recruit prospective athletes in some sports, because the athletes would not think necessarily of going to Macalester solely to participate in a sport. In other sports (e.g., soccer), however, the College has excellent athletes who compete very successfully nationally. Coaches have to adjust practice time so that students do not miss classes, but coaches also reported that when athletes have been away from campus to compete in athletic contests that faculty are quite understanding and accommodating.

The extent to which students are interested in recreation and sports was unclear. Some respondents indicated that Macalester students were less interested in participating in recreational activities than students at other colleges, but others reported the opposite. In the final analysis, the following may capture the situation: "This may be a chicken and egg question—if we had better facilities we might attract more athletically-oriented students, but if we had more athletically-oriented students, we might be forced to develop better facilities," observed a member of the coaching staff.

Clubs and organizations. More than 70 clubs and organizations are available to students at Macalester. One student described forming an organization as "ridiculously easy."

Faculty

The faculty/student ratio is 1:11, comparable to peer institutions. Faculty members have received their terminal degrees from many of the most prestigious graduate universities in the country, including Harvard, Princeton, Yale, UC-Berkeley, Michigan, UCLA and Minnesota. Recruitment is not difficult according to one faculty member. The recent applicant pools in this person's department were described as "incredible." Faculty members are attracted to Macalester, according to one faculty member, "to work with students."

The number of staff is lean compared with peer institutions, and faculty teach five courses per year compared with a typical teaching assignment of four courses per year at peer institutions. According to the President, "Faculty,

compared to our more affluent colleagues, work harder.” One-semester sabbaticals are awarded every six years at Macalester compared with every three years at peer institutions.

NSSE Data

A summary of 2001 NSSE data indicates that Macalester’s student engagement benchmark scores fell both above and below those of students from baccalaureate institutions. First-year Macalester student scores were above those of student baccalaureate institutions on level of academic challenge, interactions with faculty members, enriching educational experiences and supportive campus environment. Their score on active and collaborative learning was below their peers. Senior Macalester students had composite scores above their peers on level of academic challenge, student interactions with faculty members, and enriching educational experiences. Scores on active and collaborative learning and supportive campus environment were somewhat below those of their peers.

On the institutional engagement index, first year Macalester students scored above the predicted level on enriching educational experiences and supportive educational environment. Seniors scored above the predicted level on all benchmarks except supportive campus environment. In the section that follows, the five NSSE benchmarks of effective educational practices serve as the framework for organizing our discussion about effective practices at Macalester.

Level of Academic Challenge

Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and quality undergraduate education. Colleges promote high levels of student achievement by emphasizing the importance of academic effort and setting high expectations for student performance. The activities and conditions that promote high levels of academic challenge include:

- students spending time preparing for class and working harder than they expected to meet an instructors standard; and
- courses that demand a significant amount of reading and writing and that emphasize analyzing, synthesizing, applying and making judgments about ideas and information.

In some colleges and universities, expectations about high levels of academic challenge are knit into the fabric of the history and culture of the institution while at others it is reinforced via a well-integrated core curriculum. The hallmark of small liberal arts colleges is that they are, on average, more academically challenging than other types of schools. Among all NSSE schools, baccalaureate liberal arts colleges consistently score higher than other institutional types on this benchmark. Macalester’s results on the NSSE items related to academic challenge are no exception.

Macalester’s high scores in the academic challenge benchmark are reflective of four major themes: expectations for hard work and a duty to

prepare; high levels of assigned reading and writing; classroom dialogues that foster higher order thinking skills; and an environment that emphasizes academics and studying.

Expectations for Hard Work and the Duty to Prepare

Promising Practices:

- High levels of espoused and enacted academic challenge. Academically motivated students choose Macalester because it complements their work ethic; consequently, faculty and staff challenge students at high levels.
- Students are socialized by both faculty and peers to expect hard work and arrive prepared to actively participate in class discussions.
- Seminar format and expectation for classroom dialogue propagates a sense of a duty among students to be prepared.
- Mixed year classes, which may include first-years through seniors, elevate the level of work towards upper division students.
- The expectation to work hard extends beyond the classroom into civic matters.

Academically talented Macalester students arrive on campus expecting college to be challenging. Faculty and student respondents alike characterized Macalester students as academically motivated, with expectations to work hard. As a result, it is not surprising that students devote significant time and energy to studying. Macalester's NSSE data indicate that about 60% of first year students and seniors report spending more than 16 hours a week preparing for class. Almost all of our student respondents affirmed these data in their accounts of accessing "the link" (a study space in the undergraduate library) with their "D key" so they can pull all-nighters, the level of intensity required to read primary source material, and the admission by most students that it is not uncommon to stay in and do homework at least one weekend night.

New Student Orientation, which meets before classes begin, is used to communicate the importance of meeting high academic expectations, exhibiting positive work ethics, and taking academic preparation seriously. The First Year Course, which starts before the regular class session, serves to further reinforce these principles. Although Macalester students apply to the institution expecting to be challenged, no time is wasted in reinforcing these perceptions since the first class requirement in the First Year Course is to read an assigned book over the summer and discuss it on the first day of class. Students credit the First Year Course for helping them prepare for academic life, for shaping their educational experience, and fostering a climate of support.

Students have a strong obligation to be adequately prepared for class. Although students explained that their preparation ethic is motivated by a genuine interest in the material and learning, it seems to be compounded by an overriding sense of duty. "It is a huge embarrassment if you're not prepared for class. You feel like a fool," a senior stated emphatically. She explained, "Students have a huge amount of respect for one another and the faculty. When

you have personal connections with your professor you feel some responsibility.” Furthermore, the course pedagogy requires preparation. Another senior explained that “because the classes are structured as dialogues, it is important to be prepared for class and to have considered opinions on the topic. If you don’t want to be embarrassed in class, it is vital to have read and come to class prepared.” Students felt since they were expected to be equal participants in the classroom dialogue, they must be prepared, have completed the readings and have formulated questions and thoughts on the topic.

Faculty expressed corresponding views about students’ level of preparation for class. A professor of communications stated, “it amazes me how prepared students are. I am surprised by how many students have done the readings. Class attendance is high. Students are highly motivated.” Because Macalester students expect faculty to run their courses as seminars where students are active learners; formal lecturing is frowned upon. As a consequence, Macalester students are, according to one faculty member, “rigid” in their expectations for their courses. Faculty get the message early on that students like to talk a lot in class. (This is problematic when visiting faculty from abroad, who tend to use lecturing as a pedagogical approach, teach at Macalester).

Because Macalester courses have few prerequisites, it is not uncommon to have first-year students in class with seniors. A number of student respondents reported they appreciated having mixed year classes. One senior suggested, “seniors raise the level of dialogue in the classroom.” Professors shared similar views. “The ethos here is that we should teach courses at the level of the smartest student, or just slightly below this... Macalester students know they are smart, and they come here expecting to be challenged. They would not allow us to teach to the common level of understanding in classes,” a faculty member explained.

A junior international student said that intellectual challenges extend beyond the classroom and course work. “There are many challenges here. You have to challenge yourself academically, challenge yourself to understand people from diverse backgrounds, and challenge yourself to understand the community and the world,” explained a junior. Another senior student talked about what he has learned on the soccer field. “Not to downplay academics but what I’ve learned is outside the class. I’ve been encouraged to try and look at things differently. I’ve been convinced that there are better ways than my own. I’ve been challenged because everyone here has opinions and everything is open for discussion.” Perhaps the most meaningful site for challenge and growth is the study abroad program. “You own that experience. From then on you have a reference point that is all yours. You hear people say, ‘When I was in Ireland, Spain etc....’ Everyone’s really proud of their experience,” explained a senior.

The newly established FIPSE grant project to enhance interdisciplinary quantitative reasoning, “QM4PP” (Quantitative Methods for Public Policy) holds additional promise to challenge sophomore students in meaningful ways as they

strive to understand the relationship between quantitative methods and public policy. Four faculty members from various departments across campus identified this project as a vital approach to reinforcing the application of quantitative competencies in a context that appeals to Macalester students.

Faculty, students and administrators at Macalester described how the motivation to promote high levels of student achievement is not just about achieving academic excellence but about encouraging civic engagement. The President explained, “here academic excellence is important but it’s placed within the context of preparing students to be civically engaged.” A senior female student shared a similar view: “It is not just about academics. It is important to think about what you can do for public service. It is in the air here.” Faculty and students identified the goal of being interested in and engaged in the world beyond the campus as one of the challenges and hallmarks at Macalester.

High Levels of Reading and Writing

Promising Practices:

- Students are assigned hefty amounts of reading.
- Faculty members assign a variety of writing assignments of varying lengths.

A senior female continuing on to graduate school said “there aren’t easy classes at Mac. You’re expected to read and write a lot. Classes are built on the reading you’ve done the night before.” Student respondents reported that they averaged between eight and ten required books for each course. Faculty respondents concurred. One faculty member required students in a first-year seminar to read complex primary sources including Weber, Marx and Saussure. A classroom observation of this seminar demonstrated that students had a command of the reading and were capable of engaging in substantive discussion of these texts.

A faculty member in psychology described, “rigor at Mac is not about a hard test. It’s about being able to talk intellectually with peers about course material.” She explained that students took their reading seriously so they could engage with their classmates at high levels of thinking.

Writing is also central to students’ curricular experience. NSSE data indicate that students write a variety of short and long papers fairly regularly. An international student majoring in science acknowledged that more papers are required in the humanities and social sciences, but that science classes also required considerable writing.

Using Classroom Dialogue to Foster Higher Ordered Thinking Skills

Promising Practices:

- Macalester’s seminar structure and emphasis on classroom dialogue demands that students analyze, integrate, and synthesize while de-emphasizing simple memorization and repetition.

NSSE results show that first year students and seniors at Macalester exercise higher ordered mental activities at a significantly higher level than their peer institutions. Macalester students prided themselves on their capacity for complex thinking. Student respondents stated that they strive to understand the complexities of ideas rather than trying to pin those ideas down to their essentials. “You can’t be blind to the complexities and you can’t just have your opinion without backing it up,” explained a senior. First-year students valued the opportunities they were afforded to express their views in class and to “try out” their ideas. Being independent and having well-articulated ideas are the coin of the realm at Macalester.

A faculty respondent described the sophisticated analytic capacity of students as extraordinary. “The connections students make are interesting. They’re two or three steps beyond most undergraduates in their level of analysis and complexity of thinking. They impress me every day.” Faculty respondents emphasized how high expectations for sophisticated classroom dialogue fostered the development of higher-ordered thinking skills. A faculty member explained that complicated interpretation and analysis were modeled and encouraged by faculty and classmates.

A professor of psychology described the directed research projects as perhaps the best example of the high levels of interpretative work required of students. “Juniors complete a directed research project. Students describe the process as nearly effortless because 80% of the work is an intrinsic flow, they can’t wait to find out the results.” Students who completed research projects with faculty had extensive opportunities to exercise their analytic and interpretive capabilities. A number of students described challenging research projects that required great independence, creativity, and complex thinking to complete.

Environment that emphasizes academics and studying

Promising Practices:

- Student culture that communicates, “It’s cool to be smart.”
- Creation of campus facilities that accommodate students’ desires for study space.

Many of our respondents were attracted to Macalester because it is a place they felt students worked hard and were not afraid to reveal that they enjoy academics. “People are excited to talk about classes. If you could be here when the course catalog comes out you’d be amazed. People are eager to see what they can take. Academic work is not seen as a chore,” said a senior enthusiastically. She added, “everyone is excited about learning. If you’re not excited about learning then people don’t pay attention to you.” A first-year student commented that other schools she considered were similar from an academic standpoint but she did not appreciate the amount of “partying” that went on at these schools.

The re-design of campus facilities based on student input have created a variety of study options for students. According to a couple of student affairs

administrators, library study space was designed as if it was a living room, and comfortable chairs in the Campus Center improved the use of these spaces for studying. Furthermore, “amazing” food, lots of natural light, and a coffee bar brought more students into the Campus Center to study and engage in discussions with classmates.

Active and Collaborative Learning

Students learn more when they are intensively involved in their education and are asked to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings. Collaborating with others in solving problems or mastering difficult material prepares students to deal with the messy, unscripted problems they will encounter daily and after college. A number of activities are associated with high levels of active and collaborative learning including:

- asking questions in class,
- making a class presentation,
- working with other students on projects during and outside of class,
- tutoring other students, and
- participating in a community-based project as part of a regular course.

Macalester’s 2001 NSSE scores for this benchmark on both first-year and senior responses were slightly below the average for Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts institutions, though higher than the national average. For the 2001 Institutional Engagement Index, Macalester scored lower than predicted for first-year students on this benchmark, but higher than predicted for seniors (2002 NSSE scores are actually slightly higher for first-year students). There seems to be ample evidence based on our qualitative study that suggests a variety of forms and types of active and collaborative learning occur at Macalester.

Documentation of active and collaborative learning are captured in the following themes: active class participation fostered by a safe environment, academically-based discussion conducted outside of class, frequent group work, and opportunities for applied learning.

Promising Practices:

- Both faculty and students promote and reinforce a culture of intellectual openness.
- Out-of-class space is intentionally designed to encourage group interaction.
- Students are expected to apply their knowledge via internships and other forms of civic engagement.
- Numerous peer tutoring and teaching opportunities promote a student-teaching-student pedagogy.
- Collaborative communication is taught in the First Year Course.

- Faculty and administration promote and model collaboration by involving students in interdepartmental research projects and campus committees and taskforces.

Class Participation in a Safe Environment

One thing that stood out in our conversations with Macalester students was the safe and “open” environment established in classrooms, which allowed for active participation by students. Students described their courses as discussions, where “everyone’s free to talk,” and faculty members do not dominate. A junior described her political science courses as places where students felt comfortable raising challenging questions and sharing ideas. There was a sense that faculty act as facilitator/moderator to foster an atmosphere of speaking up, challenging positions, and respecting diverse perspectives. A senior described that in nearly all her classes, “you can always ask questions in class. You’re welcome to interrupt. Even in lecture format classes, it still moves toward discussion. Sometime professors are really more like facilitators. Students realize at the end of the class that they did most of the talking.” We visited only a portion of one class (Professor Clay Steinman’s first-year seminar COMM 11: “Foundations of Media Studies”); however, it seemed to exemplify the intellectually open and, at the same time, challenging environment we had heard so much about from a variety of students and faculty. The instructor did facilitate discussion, rather than lecture, and the students did seem willing to take chances in responding to the questions on the table, thereby engaging with the text at a high level. (Note: the class was dealing with a fairly complicated reading, Saussure’s “Arbitrary Social Values and the Linguistic Sign.”)

Academic Discussions Outside the Classroom

This safe and stimulating environment has the added benefit of promoting extended discussions of course material outside the classroom into the dining and residence halls. An important curricular structure acculturating students to this practice might be the first-year seminars that include a residential component (i.e., the sixteen members of the class live in the same section of a residence hall and have the same advisor for their first two years); about half of these seminars are residential.

Group Work

Several students and one professor spoke of group projects and presentations as a routine practice on the campus. Computer labs, lounge spaces, study spaces, and areas outside faculty offices all seem designed to encourage group interaction. Moveable tables and chairs arranged in open spaces near faculty offices, comfortable seating in the library, and computer labs with “pod” arrangements, supported group study. Observations of students in these spaces suggest that they’re being used for this purpose. One student described an assignment in an Education course, for which a group of students

had to teach a class session using a specific pedagogical method being studied in the class.

Applied Learning

Administrators and faculty referred to an approach to learning dubbed “action research,” which is utilized at Macalester, as “real world, public scholarship that takes place in the context of a course.” This seems to be an institutional priority related to “*service, or civic engagement*,” one of the four pillars representing Macalester’s mission. Students also expressed this value: “Ruminating too much separates you from the topic. You have to go and touch it,” explained a senior. Another student described her coursework in terms of problem solving and application of knowledge. One example of applied learning at Macalester is the use of “lab” sections for non-science courses (e.g., COMM 11). In addition, several students spoke of having done internships during the summer breaks—an activity supported by the college’s location in the Twin Cities. According to the Internship Program mission statement, Macalester “recognizes internships as an integral part of its curriculum,” and the Program lists several objectives for having students apply their learning in different settings:

1. To provide opportunities for students to examine first-hand, the knowledge and theories learned in the classroom for their wider impact on society and the world at large.
2. To provide opportunities for students to evaluate and apply a body of knowledge and methods of inquiry from an academic discipline.
3. To provide students access to a larger or different “laboratory” of equipment and/or situations not easily obtained or available on campus.

www.macalester.edu/internship/s_b_1.htm

Tutoring/Teaching Other Students

Macalester students have some opportunity for collaborative learning by serving as tutors or being tutored by peers. A few examples of tutoring/teaching other students were mentioned by students. In the MAX Center (the campus academic support center), six students work as multicultural mentors (Student Allies for Academic Success program), eight are math tutors, nine are science tutors, and seven are writing tutors. Students can also work as “preceptors”—essentially, undergraduate teaching assistants. For example, In Professor Steinman’s “Foundations of Media Studies” course, the “writing associate” who is “familiar with the material and has been trained to help you with your writing” is substantially incorporated into the teaching of the class (quoted from the syllabus).

Collaborative Communication

Several respondents referred to academic practices that encouraged collaboration. A political science professor reflected the open-minded attitude at Macalester by pointing to the fact that each faculty member in his department had different pedagogical styles. He described his style as collaborative and characterized by active learning, a balance of group and individual student projects, and an adaptable modular structure throughout the semester.

Another example of collaboration is a FIPSE grant secured to enhance quantitative reasoning (the College does not have a mathematics requirement) by using public policy to engage students in the application of quantitative skills across the curriculum. This year, the policy focus is on school vouchers. Next year the topic will be immigration policy. The intent is for students to develop quantitative proficiency so that they can critique articles, write reports, and understand the quantitative dimensions of any article that might appear in the New York Times. Speakers are brought into the course once per week to discuss terminology and identify common statistical mistakes. This project involves the collaboration of the mathematics department with several departments in the social sciences and underscores the fundamental interest of faculty in providing the kinds of experiences that will serve students well in the learning process.

A political science professor and other faculty described a collaborative approach to teaching and research. Collaborative department research frequently undertaken by faculty and students was the clearest reflection of this approach. He judged both collaborative approaches as “tremendously successful.” In fact, the research efforts were so well done that students were considered to be “junior colleagues rather than gophers” (Political Science Professor). This “junior colleague” approach spreads into the administration as well. A significant student presence on taskforces, search committees, and faculty and staff promotion committees attests to the commitment to student engagement in these activities.

Other faculty and staff attributed the collaboration referred to above as the source of interpersonal communication skills gains within the classroom. Once again, these skills spilled into other areas of campus life with significant gains for student learning and engagement. Collaboration is learned in the classroom, particularly through first-year seminars, and cascades out to other areas of campus (e.g., informal political discussions, residence hall interactions, clubs and organization deliberations).

Student Interactions with Faculty Members

Students see first-hand how experts think about solving practical problems by interacting with faculty members inside and outside the classroom. As a result, their teachers become role models, mentors, and guides to continuous, life-long learning. Activities that support high levels of student faculty interaction include:

- discussing grades or assignments with an instructor,
- talking with faculty about career plans,
- working with faculty on activities other than coursework, and
- receiving prompt feedback from faculty.

Macalester's NSSE 2001 scores for this benchmark were different for first-year students and seniors. Seniors scored slightly higher than the average for Baccalaureate-Liberal Arts institutions, and significantly higher than the national average. On the other hand, first-year students scored slightly lower than the College's peer group, but still higher than the national average. This difference carried over into the 2001 Institutional Engagement Index where first-year students' scores were lower than might be predicted but the seniors' scores were much higher than expected.

Promising Practices:

- Students and faculty enjoy mutual respect.
- Faculty members are engaged with students outside of class, in their offices, and their homes.
- Advising extends far beyond schedule building, to include serious discussions related to the long term plans of students.

The lower-than-expected scores for first-year students on the 2001 NSSE survey for this benchmark do not seem to match the responses from students interviewed. It might well be the case that, after four years at Macalester, students have had much more opportunity to interact with faculty and are even more comfortable in doing so. Another explanation might be that the community norm on this campus is one of extremely high expectations about the quality, frequency, and nature of these interactions. In the Macalester environment, "normal" (as seen through qualitative data) might be "high" in any other environment.

Indeed, we perceived genuine and mutual respect between faculty and students on the campus that produces strong, high-quality interactions between them. According to one professor, student involvement with faculty has a long history at Macalester. As might be expected at a small college that emphasizes the "personal touch," a number of students identified this as one of Macalester's draws for prospective students—there seems to be a substantial amount of both academic and non-academic interaction outside the classroom, including student involvement in faculty research projects. Several students described faculty as accessible and that most faculty practice an "open door" policy, with offices close to classrooms. Though students generally consider advising to be strong, there was some discussion of work to be done in this area at the administrative level.

Character and Quality of Relationships

The most striking and repeated theme revealed during the Macalester site visit was the character and quality of the relationships between students and faculty. Students and faculty declare respect for and interest in each other.

Faculty treat their students as “junior colleagues,” know students by their first names, and know their stories. Administrators and faculty are very positive about the students: “Our students are amazing” (Provost); “So much fun to teach” (Professor); “Students are easy to engage” (Administrative Dean). Students are equally enthusiastic: “Professors that I’ll always be in touch with” (Senior). As a survey of alumni shows, despite low levels of alumni giving, over two-thirds of the class of 1995 maintained contact with Macalester faculty.

The students, as well as the institution, expect faculty to be teacher-scholars—to be at Macalester to teach and work with students, but also to be active in their research. The institution promotes “learning as dialogue” and students expect knowledgeable teachers who are willing to engage them rather than lecture to them. Students serve on hiring and tenure committees and this reflects how students have a stake in those who will teach them. There is also some evidence of faculty holding students accountable in their classes (e.g., calling when absent from class, making referrals to the academic center, MAX Center). The dynamic quality of student-faculty interaction spills outside the classroom into the general Macalester culture. A contributing factor to this dynamism may be what the Provost deems “a positive feedback loop” where engaged students attract engaged faculty who attract engaged students, and so on.

Non-Academic Interactions

Faculty invitations to students for dinners in their homes seem a common practice at Macalester. The school actively encourages this by providing funds (a “virtually inexhaustible” supply). In general, students have the impression that faculty live in the immediate area of the college. Faculty and staff eat among, and sometimes with, the students in the campus dining facility, though there is also a faculty room on the second floor. Although there are classroom facilities in some of the residence halls, faculty members tend not to spend time in these. The George Draper Dayton residence hall was even designed with faculty input—allowing access to the classrooms on the upper floors without having to pass by student rooms—however, there have been mixed results. Faculty tend to prefer to conduct class in traditional academic space. As mentioned above, students do serve on hiring and tenure committees alongside faculty, and faculty have been involved with students in community service and some student organizations (e.g., helping to start the Queer Union).

Faculty-Student Research

The Provost’s office reports an emphasis on student involvement in faculty research and pushes for student-faculty collaborative work throughout the disciplines. Students collaborate with faculty in their research rather than faculty collaborating with students in their research, as is the case at Carleton according to one respondent. One of the Provost’s standard questions to faculty is, “When you do this [in your research], what does it do for students?” Much of

this collaborative work takes place during the summer and is endowment-driven. Funds to support student-faculty research are available through the Beltmann Fund (“support for student-faculty research in the Physical Sciences . . . during the summer by providing stipends for students and faculty”), the Keck Fund (“enables teams of Macalester faculty and students to engage in significant projects over a four to ten week period during the summer”), National Science Foundation grants awarded to Macalester faculty (http://www.macalester.edu/studentresearch/funding_sources.html#beltmann) and grants from the Center for Scholarship and Teaching. The push to incorporate students into faculty research also manifests itself in the perception that teaching and research “feed off one another,” a sentiment embedded in the naming of the Center for *Scholarship and Teaching* (rather than “teaching and learning”).

Advising

Students report fairly strong relationships with advisors, whereas the administration suggested initiatives to educate faculty on the advising process. One student characterized her relationship with her advisors as a “friendship,” and advisors engage students about career and personal concerns. (A different account exists for student relationships with faculty in general: much more academically focused, “not buddies,” delving into the personal only as it affects coursework.) At the structural level, Macalester’s “first-year seminar” format seems to offer an exemplary way to initiate faculty advisement of students and to acclimate new students to the Macalester culture. The format limits enrollment in each course to sixteen students, with the instructor acting as advisor to those students for the first two years (until the student declares a major) and a “writing preceptor” assisting students with their written work. Students beginning at Macalester must take the course in the first semester of their first year.

Supportive Campus Environment

Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relations among different groups of students. The conditions that foster a supportive campus environment include a climate that:

- supports students academically and socially,
- helps students cope with non-academic responsibilities,
- promotes quality relationships among students, and with faculty and administrators.

NSSE data indicate that first-year students find the campus environment at Macalester very supportive. First-year students reported receiving particularly high levels of support to achieve academic success, and that the quality of their relationships with faculty members and administrators was very satisfying. Seniors’ results dipped slightly but still remain above the NSSE national norm. Like the first-years, seniors reported satisfaction with the quality of their relationships with faculty and administrators.

Aspects of the Macalester campus environment that reflect a supportive campus environment include: a beautiful and small campus; connection and coherence in the physical environment; the role of employees in the life of the campus; and its capitalization on unique campus facets to support students.

Beautiful Campus and Engagement

Promising Practices:

- Limited-to-no deferred maintenance in the academic and administrative buildings.
- Use of artwork and sculpture to create pockets of meditative outdoor spaces.
- Careful attention to architecture and design of new buildings to maintain a sense of harmony and integrity between and among the new and old buildings.

The beauty of the campus creates a powerful sense of place. The harmony created within that beauty is expressed in human and physical ways. The Macalester campus can be described as a beautiful environment dominated by brick, classically timeless buildings, exuding coherence and integration. Well-designed buildings give the impression of beauty matched with functionality. Wooden park benches, secluded greens, and private spaces in which to read or engage in conversation create a sense of an enriched surrounding. The furniture within the academic buildings is neither institutional nor bolted down.

The richly-resourced campus gives the impression of care and attention to detail. This is evidenced through a myriad of “nice touches” around campus: no deferred maintenance within the academic and administrative buildings, well-manicured lawns and flower beds, student pictures accompanying announcements about their senior research projects, artwork placed throughout campus, and well-designed academic buildings. A first-year international student commented on the beautiful campus, concluding that Macalester is a “nice place to learn” or, as a senior domestic student said, “I like the place of Mac.”

Connection, Integration and Sense of Coherence

Promising Practices

- Creation of group space to allow points of connection.
- Central location of the new Student Center.
- Attention to the “nice touches” which make people have positive feelings about the institution.
- Commitment of faculty and staff to connect with students in and out of their professional roles.

The metaphors of “nexus” and “connectors” were offered by two administrators to communicate the integration and sense of coherence presence within the college. In contrast to the isolation and disconnection ideas embodied in the old college metaphor of the ivory tower, Macalester staff and faculty

talked about connection and integration as underlying principles for their learning and teaching environment. These points of intersection or nexuses leading to integration, coherence, and connection include campus and community via community service, students and faculty via research, staff to students via personal relationships, alumni to campus via career services and graduate school assistance, faculty and national and international disciplinary communities through research activities, classroom and out of classroom life through conversations in the dining hall, small college to global world through presence of international students and the core value of internationalism.

Intentional efforts were made by student affairs staff to identify and create intersecting points. One student affairs staff member talked about the importance of connecting with students by listening to and responding to their needs and interests. As an advisor to a student organization, she stressed the importance of fostering student initiatives. Another administrator in student affairs explained that the important role for student affairs is assure that students have “another adult who cares” but who is different from faculty who are grounded in the classroom.

Connection was most powerfully expressed through the relationships formed between students and staff and students and faculty. The people at Macalester (students, faculty, and staff) are characterized as “wonderful,” “friendly,” “helpful,” and “great” (first-year international student). This is a place where a senior domestic student can comment, “so many other people have helped me.” A first-year international student who said it was “as if they know you even if they don’t know you,” echoed this sentiment. When asked about forming “lifelong friends” at Macalester, a senior replied that “yes,” she “definitely” formed these types of friends through student organizations. But she added that she had “professors that I’ll always be in touch with.” She considered these faculty members her friends. Likewise, the Provost as well as faculty members commented that student-faculty “friendships” were particularly formed in the context of research collaborations.

Another form of connection cited by an administrator was to “issues bigger than selves.” Whether through community service, career choices after graduation, service work in an intervening year between graduation and work, this connection to larger issues was voiced by a number of students. One has an “obligation to contribute to the rest of the world,” replied a first-year international student. Most telling is the reference to the president as a “public scholar” by a couple of administrators. They believed that this conveyed the idea – from the top – that public service and civic engagement was highly valued.

Student affairs and academic affairs appear to have developed a quality collaborative relationship. One example of the connections between student and academic affairs is the “Macalester College Student Learning Experience.” Materials for this initiative were developed by the two associate deans of students. This document describes the student learning experience for faculty in the form of a syllabus. It includes readings from foundational literature in

student affairs (Perry, Chickering, Cass and others) and also reports on the expectations and experiences of students. This has been presented to a number of faculty groups and is a wonderful illustration of how student affairs staff work with and inform faculty about the experiences of Macalester students.

The Power of a Small Campus Environment

Promising Practices:

- People truly go out of their way to know each other.
- The campus is well designed, easy to get around, with places set aside for conversations.
- Adequate green space is blended with buildings and other facilities, so that while on campus one experiences a respite from the urban environment.
- Faculty offices open directly onto a central atrium in the Science Building. There are no reception areas for students to pass through.
- To facilitate students having easy access to faculty, their offices are situated near the classroom in which they teach. The small size of Macalester lends a power, ethos of support, and accessibility to the campus through which students receive personal, adult attention from faculty and staff. Several students interviewed used the word “accessible” to describe the availability of staff and particularly faculty. An administrator explained that the small classes, human scale nature of the campus, and ability of campus administrators to know and recognize students leads campus employees to “take an interest” in students.

Within this accessible atmosphere, students are treated as individuals rather than research “gophers” or impersonal names on a class roster. Faculty members’ accessibility was cited by students as a major source of high expectations and intense learning. According to a number of administrators, faculty members know students by their first names and are very generous with their time.

Accessibility of faculty and staff makes room for campus policies and practices to focus on “common sense” rather than bureaucratic necessities. In a small place messages get out, consensus on core values occurs, and “phrases” (e.g., “we don’t talk about skills here”) depicting beliefs spread through the community.

The campus is small enough for people to connect to the core values and essential activities of the institution. Communication is made possible in this small community because a high level of interaction among campus constituents is valued and is fostered in small classes where dialogue is encouraged. An important aspect of this accessibility is the Macalester student practice of speaking his/her mind, challenging ideas, and voicing opinions. This practice makes communication meaningful and authentic. Students feel free to contact faculty and staff and express their point of view. As the Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students asserted, “this new generation of students expects the faculty to be Dear Abby.” A senior international student explained, however, “accessibility doesn’t mean you get what you want, but you can have a conversation.”

Campus Climate and Role of Campus Employees

Promising Practices:

- There is a good flow of information from senior administrators to faculty and staff.
- Faculty and staff exhibit an ethic of care toward students.
- Ongoing staff and faculty recognition from all levels.

Engaged students means engaged faculty and staff and vice versa. Several respondents commented that the staff was “lean” or “lean and mean.” The President commented, “The staff is amazingly lean.” This was matched by the sentiment represented by a comment from the Director of the Library that “the staff has always been dedicated.” Macalester’s 5.39:1 student to staff ratio allows for the accessibility described above yet seemed to teeter on the edge of being inadequate. The institution possessed the highest ratio of staffing among peers, according to one administrator. Moreover, faculty members teach five courses per year compared with the normal four course teaching assignment for peer institutions. As is the case with staff, faculty members work very hard.

High morale among faculty and staff is not dependent on abundance of staff positions. Despite a “lean” staff in terms of numbers, high morale and job satisfaction were attributed to the sense that staff members were, according to one administrator, “valued from the top down.” Recognition for a job well done was commonplace and often emanated from the President. Respondents commented that the President readily used language that indicated his understanding of staff responsibilities as well as their centrality to the mission of the institution. Several staff members remarked that a source of job satisfaction was the commonplace recognition for a job well done. This recognition often came in small ways (e.g., an email, \$5 credit for use at the campus grill).

Whether originating with the founding values of the institution, the Midwest location, the “Minnesota nice” mentality, small size of the institution, or other factors, high morale was matched with a positive attitude toward the work environment. The President characterized this attitude in terms of entitlement by saying, “There is a remarkable absence of a culture of entitlement” among faculty, staff, and students. Whether “Minnesota nice” or an absence of entitlement, evidence of job satisfaction and a positive work environment was indicated in such practices as the President greeting us before our scheduled meeting, routine punctuality in regard to meeting times, and easily offered comments about what a joy it was to work at Macalester:

“I couldn’t imagine a better place to work.” – Provost

“I love what I do.” – Student Affairs administrator

“I fell in love with the place.” – President

I’m “extremely happy...can’t imagine being anywhere else.” – Political Science Professor

An additional positive attitude commented upon by the President was the historically driven conservative approach to fiscal concerns. Older faculty and staff remember the “bad years” of the 1970s when the institution was, according to a long-time faculty member, a “demoralized place.” According to the President, “older folks remember the lean times [and are] cautious.”

Unique Means of Support

Macalester is a distinctive environment which many faculty, students and administrators described as having a “special” or “magical” feel. These “magical” qualities are often the center of efforts designed to support the specific needs of Macalester students. For example, the “super smart and socially awkward students” that Macalester tends to attract was cited as one factor that “leads to magic.” On the one hand, students’ high intellectual competence and the fact that “students are easy to engage” leads to magic in- and out-of the classroom, according to one administrator. On the other hand, many students possess low social skills toward their peers, which is often expressed in students’ desire to live alone in the residence halls. As such, the College places on emphasis on programs such as study abroad which can be a life-changing experience for students. These academic and social experiences add polish and self-confidence to students (Director of Residence Life).

Another unique aspect of Macalester is how they support students in terms of discipline and related programming. Much of the “magic” of Macalester, especially related to student life (e.g., residence life, student life programs) can be more clearly seen, in the words of the Vice President for Student Affairs, in what “we don’t have” as opposed to “what we have.” Another administrator in student affairs explained that RAs “are to have a presence, and know students. Policy enforcement is a low priority. Conduct is not a big issue.” There is no judicial board because conduct cases are minimal, repeat cases are rare, and judicial incidents are managed by administrative staff (e.g., hall directors). There is no honor code, no hall councils, and virtually no need for programming in the residence halls. This situation is not viewed as a “deficiency” but as evidence that these solutions to “student problems” are not necessary when students take responsibility for their actions. Also, the high academic expectations appear to mitigate the need for extensive student affairs interventions. Administratively driven responses to student problems and proactive programming or interventions to shape student attitudes are not necessary. In contrast, programs are built which offer “support” for “experiencing success” (Dean of Academic Services).

The existence of a phenomenon dubbed by students and known by administrators as the “Mac Bubble” is also part of the magic of the supportive environment at Macalester. “You’re always feeling like you are living in the Mac Bubble,” proclaimed a senior. Being in the “Mac Bubble” is a metaphor students use to describe the “artificial” environment of college living. According to a junior, “you can do your own thing” in the Mac Bubble. The bubble is “different

than real life...it is a very coherent experience." A first-year student described the bubble as "more ideal than real life." In this protected bubble, students test less accepted opinions, experiment with ideas, and take risks that were less acceptable outside the bubble. Although one student said that this expression has an unnecessarily "bad connotation," Macalester students were savvy enough to recognize that they were in an "unreal" world. A senior international student expressed the irony within this metaphor: one might be "crushed in the real world" by expressing some of the opinions expressed in the bubble. He questioned how then could this approach be preparation for that outside Macalester world?

Enriching Educational Experiences

Complementary learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom augment the academic program. Experiencing diversity teaches students valuable things about themselves and other cultures. Used appropriately, technology facilitates learning and promotes collaboration between peers and instructors. Internships, community service, and senior capstone courses provide students with opportunities to synthesize, integrate, and apply their knowledge. Such experiences make learning deeper, more meaningful and ultimately more useful because what students know becomes a part of who they are. Many activities and conditions contribute to an enriching educational experience, such as:

- talking with students with different religious beliefs, political opinions, or values;
- an institutional climate that encourages contact among students from different economic, social and racial or ethnic backgrounds;
- using technology towards the completion of assignments; and
- participating in internships, community service, learning communities, study abroad, culminating senior experiences, and co-curricular activities.

Macalester's NSSE scores on the enriching educational experiences benchmark are high in comparison to other baccalaureate colleges and national norms. First-year students and seniors rated their experience with regard to the institution's emphasis on encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds and opportunities for having serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity, and who differ in their religious beliefs, political opinions or personal values, as very high. A large percentage of students (more than 80% of first-year students and seniors) are involved in community service, internships, and field experiences, and more than 50% have participated in study abroad, and more than 90% of seniors report participating in a culminating senior experience. The quality of enriching educational experiences at Macalester is further elaborated in the following themes: Diversity and multiculturalism, collaboratively employed technology, academically focused out of the classroom experience, and co-curricular activities.

Diversity and Multiculturalism

Promising Practices:

- Study abroad encouraged and undertaken by nearly half of Macalester students.
- Recruitment and retention of significant percentages of diverse students (11% of the student body are domestic students of color and 14% of the student body are international students).
- Establishment of a student affairs Dean for Multicultural Life and complementary academic Dean for Multicultural Studies.
- Design of a new model for multiculturalism through a presidential appointed Council for Multicultural Affairs (24 people including student representatives) to build campus-wide support and buy-in.

Macalester has employed several means to create an institutional climate that emphasizes acceptance of differences, promotion of a global approach and international philosophy, and incorporation of multiculturalism and internationalism in the institutional core values. After “stuttering” over diversity for a time, multiculturalism has recently been re-defined from an “old” to a “new” model. The “old” model (that is standard student affairs practice) is characterized by provision of services to students of color through special offices (often separated by race although this is not the case at Macalester). The philosophy behind this practice is one of fragmentation and separation. The “new” model taking form at Macalester is characterized by an institutionalized approach to multiculturalism with “clear markers” about multicultural competence, deeper understanding of multiple identities (including the privileges at play within those identities), a recognition of all multiculturalism (privileged and non-privileged), treatment of white identity as part of multiculturalism, and provision of services to students of color throughout the campus rather than through a special office (although the special office will continue).

The new Department of Multicultural Life will employ the new model of multiculturalism through the following activities and goals: develop a clear identity for the new department, identify multicultural competencies (including a “train the trainer” program), and evaluate multicultural programs for current relevancy and usefulness. The new model will challenge aspects of multiculturalism eschewed in most settings including internal oppression, the “benefits” gleaned from existing in an oppressed state, and the “parallel” institution created through the old model. The philosophy behind multiculturalism is viewed “not as an end but as a place to reach for,” described an administrator. Various campus respondents (faculty, staff, and students) discussed multiculturalism, not as a static end point but as a senior international student explained, “a different way of seeing life.”

A respondent reinforced NSSE first-year student data (“Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own”:

Macalester 42%, Baccalaureate Liberal Arts 31%, National 26%) by stating that Macalester students arrive on campus with more experience with diversity than would be expected from traditional age college students. Although students come with more experience with and higher expectations about diversity, the institution is not without its struggles in this area. The same administrator quoted above stated that regardless of gains in the area of multiculturalism, “we’re a Presbyterian institution in the Midwest in a predominantly white neighborhood with a predominantly white staff.”

The typical struggles concerning diversity experienced by most college campuses were exhibited at Macalester. Several international students described the multiculturalism effort as “overrated.” Another senior domestic respondent expressed satisfaction with the campus attitude of openness and acceptance of differences but she stated that white students did not always feel “comfortable” attending activities specially arranged for students of color. As such, diversity of experience was not shared.

Collaboratively Employed Technology

Promising Practices:

- Emphasis on information literacy and fluency within library projects.
- Placement of the Center for Scholarship and Teaching in the library to link those resources and efforts.

Although certainly standard practice for libraries and directors of these facilities, a theme expressed by the Director of the Library was the role of creating an intellectual climate at Macalester through technology and the library portal. The practice of linking technology, critical thinking, and research is identified here as a theme because of the way this development modernizes yet complements the role of a liberal arts education. Technology is not seen simply as a tool or “skill” (“We don’t talk about ‘skills’ at Macalester” – Director of the Library) but as a way to teach and learn critical thinking. In keeping with Macalester’s emphasis, a collaborative approach to information technology through the library portal, subscription search engines, and other information age resources can engage faculty and students in learning which serves a broader purpose outside of the college classroom.

The Director of the Library spoke extensively about the collaboration needed among faculty, students and staff to create a climate of “information literacy” and “information fluency.” The potential for research, critical thinking, synthesis, and presentation possibilities were nearly endless.

The Director of the Library expressed disappointment with the questions on NSSE related to technology. Her perspective was that these questions focused on student use of computers as communication and word processing tools yet failed to capture the full potential of this technology. According to this respondent, there is a vast difference between using a computer and using a computer linked to an institutional network. The latter can expose the

undergraduate student (and faculty and staff) to resources not available through “Google searches” and Internet search engines.

Academically Focused Out of Classroom Experiences

Promising Practices:

- First Year Course as an advising model
- Use of a mission driven philosophy in the Office of Community Service which serves as a “broker or bridge between the community and campus.” – Director of Community Service
- Maximum use of the urban location to create a collaborative effort between the city and college and to obtain service placements
- Availability of academic programs and experiences which provide a global reach and academic excellence (study abroad, senior thesis, honors thesis, foreign language requirement, community service)
- Commitment from campus leadership about the importance of community service and social responsibility.

The traditional college core value of community service, while serving the community well, is expanding at Macalester to become a deeper emphasis on social responsibility and civic engagement. Macalester has an underlying commitment to prepare students to change the world. Although graduates such as Kofi Anan and Walter Mondale are used as role models for transformational change, students discussed more modest ways to change the world. These examples included making an original contribution to science, returning to a home country and putting one’s education to work, and undertaking careers in service (non-profit organizations, government, teaching and so on). A number of our student respondents expressed that the expectation to “change the world” was part of the reason they chose Macalester. A first-year international student came to campus with the attitude that she and her fellow students have an “obligation to contribute to the rest of the world.”

Genuine seamlessness between in and out of classroom experiences builds a sense of integration and unity. Students and staff make little distinction between the learning that occurs in and out of the classroom. Although faculty articulate the importance of learning regardless of in- and out-of-classroom settings, their focus is clearly on more than discipline, department, classroom, and advising. One senior faculty member observed, “faculty members are incredibly generous with their time.”

Community service is one example of how this seamlessness is manifested. According to the President, the core value of community service is being expanded to emphasize “civic engagement” and “social responsibility.” The Director of Community Service echoed the President’s sentiments when she discussed the mission of her office as developing “a lens you [students, faculty, and staff] see the world through” and to develop “an ethic that’s all around you.” With over 50% (800) of students involved in some form of community service per year, a community service program that has “grown” and

“flourished” since 1989 (Director of Community Service), and a solid relationship with community agencies and organizations, the community service effort is a major source of student engagement. This Director emphasized the “connector” function of community service about which she believed, “social change is not rocket science. It’s about connecting people.”

A significant aspect of community service entailed the opportunities created in the urban location. The President challenged staff and faculty to address the question: How can we be better because we are in an urban environment?”

Co-Curricular Activities

Promising Practices:

- Lack of excessive bureaucracy when starting new student organizations.
- Presence of an overly sufficient number of student organizations in which to become involved.

Macalester features close to 80 organizations including club sports. An easily accessible professional staff helps students develop new group charters and acts as resources, advocates and mentors for students. The Macalester College Student Government (MCSG) has a very active presence on campus and charters the various student organizations under eight rubrics. These rubrics include the following organizations: academic, cultural, media, performance, political /social/justice, recreational, religious, and social/service.

With all these opportunities to get involved on campus, students can become engaged in the life of the campus nearly from the moment they arrive. We visited with two first-year students who were members of the legislative body and had spent the previous evening dealing with difficult issues related to recognizing a student organization. A number of students described how involvement in the life of the campus is critical to receiving an education at Macalester. A senior student pointed out, “participation in organizations is important. Lots of students are very involved. Involvement at some level outside of class is necessary for a complete experience” at Macalester.

A senior domestic student commented that student organizations are “central” to campus life at Macalester. They provide an opportunity to make friends among students and faculty and to provide a service to the campus. While discussed far less frequently than classes, faculty-student research projects, and discipline focused activities, student organizations clearly have a central role in engaging students outside the classroom and major.

Student Center

Promising Practice:

- Use of the Center as the only (so, therefore, centrally focused) dining facility on campus. This provides a setting in which the whole campus can gather. A central focus of co-curricular life at Macalester was the new Student Center opened in 2001. Although this student center might appear modest by some

standards (i.e., it lacks a large bookstore or spacious lobby), its central location on campus; deliberately designed balance of curricular/co-curricular, group/individual, and office/public space; high quality food and presence of the only campus dining facility make this building the focal point of student life outside the classroom. Classroom dialogues spill into dinner conversations, and campus organizations make use of “cubbies” to conduct their business.

One of the most universal statements made by student respondents was that the food in the Student Center was “amazing.” Students talked about the “amazing food,” new student center, and high speed Internet in the residence halls as being primary reasons for a resurgent interest in living on campus. These initiatives appeared to be relatively modest compared to the facilities (e.g., state of the art field houses, food courts) and services (e.g., cable TV in the residence halls, all encompassing cash cards, department style bookstores) being built on other campuses. The campus visit team was surprised to hear few complaints about the residence halls (some of which appeared to need renovation and repair) and modest recreational and athletic facilities. According to the student perspective, relatively minor or “small” changes in Macalester student life appear to have extremely positive outcomes. In addition, the typical negative student attitudes held about campus life elements (e.g., food, social life, parking, residence living) seem to be mitigated by an extremely high level of academic challenge.

Lack of a Focus on Alcohol

Promising Practices:

- Student culture reinforces a norm where social pressures take a backseat to academics.

Students commented that there was no need for “keg parties” and other alcohol-focused activities. Macalester students are “way under the national alcohol averages” according to the Director of Wellness Programs. Whereas 44% of all undergraduate students consume alcohol, the average at Macalester is 32%. Macalester students consume an average of two drinks per week; the national average is seven. Although the institution has an old reputation for marijuana consumption, the survey numbers hover around the average. The Director of Wellness attributed these low numbers regarding the high academic expectations and community service mindset in which the “world is bigger than me and my Saturday party.” Students’ comments about life on campus supported the data offered by student affairs administrators. Student respondents believed that there was little pressure to consume alcohol at Macalester. A junior stated, “you don’t have to party to fit in.” According to a senior, “we have fun on a schedule.”

Leadership and the Role of Liberal Arts Institutions

Promising Practices:

- After they receive tenure, it is common for faculty to take on leadership roles in the College.
- Link between community service and leadership created through the core value of and activities surrounding service.

The importance of a liberal arts education in regard to leadership, citizenship, and forming a philosophy of life was openly and comfortably discussed among students, faculty and administrators. Students recounted stories about the leadership they developed through their involvement in academic-related activities. For example, a senior described his work with a faculty member in association with a forum on peace in the Middle East as the source of his leadership development. Like this student, students and administrators did not attribute these essential outcomes to experiences in co-curricular life. Instead, the high expectations of faculty, emphasis on critical thinking, communication of core values, presence of philosophy-influencing classroom content, and presence of an academically rich atmosphere were credited with conveying leadership and citizenship. Perhaps, at engaged liberal arts institution like Macalester, personal attributes (e.g., leadership, citizenship, responsibility, altruism) often conveyed through the co-curriculum are more readily conveyed through academic means.

In fact, leadership from the faculty was an expectation at Macalester. This expectation provides role models for students as well as creates an atmosphere of service. An engaged environment leads to the expectation that faculty will exert leadership. The current Provost explained that his faculty leadership prior to being appointed provost was provoked by a former President who said, “This is your place – you have to get involved.”

Institutional Locale and Community Collaboration

Promising Practices:

- Community service link to the urban local environment.
- Use of public transportation to create links to downtown St. Paul and Minneapolis.

The College’s urban location is embraced as a community commitment, central principle in campus programs (e.g., community service), and an admissions asset. Nearly all of our student respondents mentioned the urban location of Macalester as an asset. According to a senior, being near St. Paul afforded him “great opportunities to do things I wouldn’t have been able to do at another place.” Another senior added that there are “always things to do....a perk of being in a city.” The fact that Macalester is a small college in an urban environment creates community service opportunities, connection to the core values through relationships with the urban environment, and an environment that students felt was energetic, lively, and attractive.

Additional Observations on Why Macalester Works

Macalester College is an effective institution for a variety of reasons. Many of them are listed above. But others also contribute to the effectiveness of the College. Among these are the following.

Macalester College is an institution where the members of the institution (faculty, students, administrators, staff and others) understand and can articulate what the College is attempting to accomplish. As a consequence, institutional members are able to focus on how what they do can contribute to advancing the institution, rather than questioning the direction of the institution in the first place. Over and over again we met with institutional members who identified the “pillars” of the College. Their definitions of what these meant to them were consistent with others at Macalester.

A corollary to the first conclusion is that Macalester appears to behave very consistently with what it communicates to prospective students, faculty and others who are contemplating joining the College. In short, the anticipatory socialization for new members is extremely accurate and as a consequence there are few surprises for newcomers. This, too, allows new members to “hit the ground running.”

Macalester College has done an excellent job of assessing how its location (in the Twin Cities) can contribute to an excellent education experience for its students and faculty. The College makes excellent use of its location in an urban area. It is a classic example of the conclusion that anywhere can be a good place for a college, if the College takes advantage of its setting. Macalester College certainly does that.

Macalester College has high standards, but undergirding these standards is support. Students work hard, but faculty and others are available to help them when they stumble. Faculty members are expected to be self-motivated teachers, but support and counsel are available to them to become splendid instructors. Administrators work hard in providing an environment where the work of the College can be accomplished, but students and faculty express their appreciation for the hard work and good communications skills of administrators.

Macalester College is a place where excellence is the norm. That is the standard to which all members of the community hold each other, and excellence is exactly what results at this extraordinary place in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Next Steps

Although site team members gained important insights about the undergraduate experience at Macalester, a three-day visit does not provide adequate time to develop a comprehensive and complete understanding of all aspects of that experience. Hence, during the second visit, the team would like to explore a variety of areas related to the five NSSE benchmarks. Of particular importance are the following:

1. The team wants to learn much more about co-curricular experiences and their impact on certain aspects of undergraduate education. In this regard, the team wishes to meet with staff in the office of Student Activities and to meet with students involved in organizations including Maction and other leadership groups.
2. It is obvious that Macalester is providing a wide range of support services as part of its unwavering commitment to multiculturalism. In this regard, the team wants to learn more about diverse students at the College and to gain a greater understanding of the Council for Multicultural Affairs, and the initiatives of the office of the Dean for Multicultural Studies.
3. Team members are also very interested in knowing much more about how Macalester promotes such high levels of academic challenge. In this regard, team members would like to meet with appropriate faculty and students and conduct more classroom observations.
4. During the follow-up visit, team members would like to meet with additional students and faculty, particularly those who may not be as “academically engaged” as those with whom we met during the first visit.

In closing, the DEEP site visit team enjoyed and learned a great deal from their visit and we sincerely hope that this report is helpful to members of the Macalester community as the institution continues to focus on excellence in undergraduate education.

Appendix A: NSSE Information

The National Survey of Student Engagement

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is supported by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts and is cosponsored by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and The Pew Forum on Undergraduate Learning. The NSSE project provides colleges and universities with valuable information about students' views of collegiate quality by annually administering a specially designed survey, *The College Student Report*.

The Report is a versatile, research-based tool for gathering information that will focus local and national conversations on learning-centered indicators of quality in undergraduate education.

The Report is useful in several ways:

- institutional improvement – as a diagnostic tool to identify areas in which a school can enhance students' educational experiences and student learning.
- benchmarking instrument – establishing regional and national norms of educational practices and performance by sector.
- public accountability – documenting and improving institutional effectiveness over time.

Designed by national experts, *The College Student Report* asks undergraduate students about their college experiences – how they spend their time, what they feel they've gained from their classes, their assessment of the quality of their interactions with faculty and friends, and other important indicators. Extensive research indicates that good educational practices in the classroom and interactions with others, such as faculty and peers, are directly related to high-quality student outcomes. *The Report* focuses on these practices.

The Report is administered each spring to random samples of first-year students and seniors at public and private four-year colleges and universities. It can be completed either via a traditional paper questionnaire or on the World Wide Web. A demonstration of the Web version and a copy of the paper version of *The Report* are available at www.indiana.edu/~nsse. Almost 500 colleges and universities participated in NSSE 2001 and NSSE 2002.

The random sampling method ensures that the results are comparable, meaningful, credible, and usable for institutional self-study and improvement efforts as well as consortium comparisons and national benchmarking. After your institution provides a student data file and customized invitation letters, NSSE handles the sampling and all aspects of the data collection including

mailing surveys directly to students, collecting, checking and scoring completed surveys, and conducting follow-ups with non-respondents.

Guidance for the NSSE project is provided by a national advisory board comprised of distinguished educators and a technical advisory panel made up of experts in institutional research and assessment.

Appendix B: DEEP Team Bios

Ed Chan

Ed Chan is currently a research fellow at the Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College. He has taught writing and literature courses at the University of Rochester, the Rochester Institute of Technology, and Wabash College. His doctoral work is at the University of Rochester. His current research areas are twentieth-century American literature and culture, race studies, utopian and science fiction, critical theory, and film.

Jillian Kinzie

Jillian Kinzie earned her Ph.D. in Higher Education with a minor in Women's Studies at Indiana University, Bloomington. Kinzie is currently serving as an Assistant Director with the National Survey of Student Engagement. Prior to this, she held a visiting faculty appointment in the Higher Education and Student Affairs department at Indiana University, and worked as assistant dean in an interdisciplinary residential college and as an administrator in student affairs. Kinzie has co-authored a monograph on theories of teaching and learning, and has conducted research on women in undergraduate science, retention of underrepresented students, and college choice.

Kathleen Manning

Kathleen Manning, an Associate Professor, has taught at the University of Vermont since 1989 in the Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) graduate program. Since 1997, she has been the coordinator of the HESA program. In 1992, she received the Kroepsch-Maurice Award for Teaching Excellence, a University-wide teaching award. During the spring 2003 semester, she will undertake a Fulbright Fellowship at Beijing Normal University in China.

Dr. Manning conducts research and writes in the areas of organizational theory, qualitative research methodology, and cultural pluralism. Published books include *Rituals, Ceremonies and Cultural Meaning in Higher Education* (2000), *Giving Voice to Critical Campus Issues: Qualitative research in student affairs* (2000), and *Enhancing the Multicultural Campus Environment* (1992, co-authored with Frances K. Stage). She currently has a book contract with Brunner-Routledge to publish *The Research Process on Campus: Approaches and Methods* (co-edited with Frances K. Stage). Dr. Manning has a Ph.D. in higher education with a minor in anthropology from Indiana University; a M.S. and Ed.S. in counseling and student personnel services from the State University of New York at Albany; and a B.A. in biology from Marist College.

John H. Schuh

John H. Schuh is professor of educational leadership at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa where he is also department chair. Previously he has held administrative and faculty assignments at Wichita State University, Indiana University (Bloomington), and Arizona State University. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in history from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, and his Master of Counseling and Ph.D. degrees from Arizona State.

Schuh is the author, co-author or editor of over 180 publications, including 17 books and monographs, 45 book chapters, and 90 articles. Among these are his most recent monograph, *Using Benchmarking to Inform Practice in Higher Education* (co-edited with Barbara Bender), and *Involving Colleges* (with George Kuh, Elizabeth Whitt and Associates). Currently he is editor in chief of the New Directions for Student Services Sourcebook Series and is associate editor of the *Journal of College Student Development*.

Schuh has made over 180 presentations and speeches to campus-based, regional and national meetings, and has served as a consultant to 40 colleges, universities, and other organizations. Among his many honors, Schuh has received the Contribution to Knowledge Award and the Presidential Service Award from the American College Personnel Association, and was selected as a Pillar of the Profession by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators in 2001.

Appendix C: Individuals Interviewed

Vice President for Student Affairs

Students: 28

President

Provost

Vice President for Library and Computer Services

Athletic director and staff (15)

Department chair/faculty member:

Faculty Members: 6 (Mathematics, Education, Psychology (3), Political Science)

Assistant Dean of Students

Director of Max Center

Director of Lilly grant

Associate Dean and Director of Residence Life

Director of Center for Scholarship and Teaching

Assistant Directors of Campus Programs (2)

Director of Institutional Research/Associate Provost

Director of Library Services

Dean of Multicultural Life

Associate Director of Health Education

Dean of Academic Programs

Director of Community Service