Excerpts Specific to Leadership from the:

Visiting Team Report – Middle States Commission on Higher Education

TO

Board, Administration, Faculty, Staff, and Students
Iona College
715 North Avenue
New Rochelle, New York 10801

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Standard: Leadership and Governance

The Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education published by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education states: “The primary goal of governance is to enable an educational entity to realize fully its stated mission and goals and to achieve these in the most effective and efficient manner that benefits the institution and its students. Institutional governance provides the means through which authority and responsibility are assigned, delegated, and shared in a climate of mutual support and respect.

During the past several years, Iona has gone from a disastrous lack of appropriate leadership to an exceptional new leader by the courageous and wise actions of a dedicated Board of Trustees. This transition is the stuff of a future Harvard case study on the way things are supposed to work when a crisis befalls an institution. Key players assessed the situation with cool intelligence. They came forward, embolden by a steady moral compass, and did the right things. They self-reported a succession of events that were clearly wrong. They faced the embarrassment and shame that the revelation of these events caused the institution they loved. They were honest, humble, and convinced that repairing the harm done to Iona could only be accomplished by total transparency and solidarity with the faithful members of the Iona family. They accepted the pain and suffering required to do their jobs for the good of others.

While handling the aftershocks of these events, the new president began forming his team, setting his objectives, and assuming the role of leader. With supportive Board assistance he not only oversaw the clean-up operations, but began a strategic planning process that has reinvigorated the campus community. There is a palpable sense of enthusiasm among the campus community today. Faculty and staff are focused upon their shared responsibilities for the academic goals of the strategic plan. Enrollment and finance leaders are designing new strategies for the growth and strength of Iona. The roles for the various components of the college have been clarified and articulated. It is not yet heaven, but it is clearly on the right path of integrity, honesty, and mutual solidarity on a mission of great service – the education of future ethical and compassionate leaders.

We commend the entire Iona campus community for a gracious example of how to respond to difficult challenges.”
Standard: Mission and Goals

Standard: Integrity

Integrity means “at one.” A person has integrity if the heart, mind, body, and spirit are at one with each other. An institution of higher education has the virtue of integrity if it is at one with its very nature. Iona College defines itself as “a caring academic community, inspired by the legacy of Blessed Edmund Rice and the Christian Brothers, which embodies opportunity, justice, and the liberating power of education. Iona College’s purpose is to foster intellectual inquiry, community engagement, and an appreciation for diversity. In the tradition of American Catholic Higher Education, Iona College commits its energies and resources to the development of graduates recognized for their ethics, creativity, and problem solving abilities; their independent and adaptable thinking; their joy in lifelong learning; and their enduring integration of mind, body, and spirit.” If the actions of the institution are at one with this mission statement description of itself, then it has the virtue of integrity.

In August of 2011, the incoming President discovered that the former Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs had been reporting falsified data to outside agencies. The college immediately verified the inaccuracies and convened an Executive Committee meeting of the Board of Trustees to disclose the magnitude of the problem and determine next steps. The Executive Committee immediately authorized five actions: the President must self-report this event to all respective agencies posthaste; the Executive Committee reaffirmed its commitment to the new President and the institution; the Executive Committee directed the internal audit firm of the college to conduct a full review of all data reported to outside organizations and submit its findings to the President and the Board; the Executive Committee ratified the suspension of the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs; and the Executive Committee endorsed the President’s recommendation to appoint the then Dean of Arts & Sciences as Interim Provost, effective immediately. These decisive and firm actions by the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees began the process of returning the institution to a state of integrity.

Issues of integrity are not always as dramatic as these, but they are all important.

Closing Statement:

“Iona College is experiencing a burst of creative energy leading to healing, refreshment, creative collaboration, and solidarity. The Board of Trustees has sparked this energy by its decisive and strong actions in the face of wrongs committed by a small number of key members of the community. The new President is providing clear and solid leadership that is open, honest, collaborative and transparent. The students are vibrant and excited about becoming graduates of this fine institution. The faculty are heavily involved in accepting their rightful roles within the governance structure of the institution. We feel assured that the best years for Iona College are yet to come.”