CHAPTER NINE
What We Have Learned
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This self-study turned out to be more than an exercise. It proved to be a valuable learning experience. For one thing, in bringing together people who work in different sectors of the university, it made us a more cohesive community. For another, it guided us in thinking about what we do—and how we can improve upon those processes.

One of the first benefits of studying our organization was to realize that we needed to do a better job of providing access to key documents. On one hand, we knew that, in somewhat scattered fashion, a number of strategic planning documents were available and that the Office of Institutional Research conducted some environmental scanning. But, on the other hand, as we prepared for the self-study, we realized that accessibility to important planning documents was an issue. We became concerned that significant papers might reside in only one administrator’s file and that they might be lost or overlooked when that individual left that office. We decided that SharePoint would be a good way of preserving and providing wide access to crucial planning documents. The call went out to cull these documents. It was the self-study process that led us to this realization and hastened the electronic archival of key documents at a shared site. We plan to maintain this website as a permanent feature.

Another early realization was that, while the University’s Mission Statement was readily, easily, and universally accessible, college Mission Statements were not. Rather than cite in our self-study report the difficulty of accessing college Mission Statements as an opportunity for improvement, we decided to simply “fix” the problem right away. Consequently, students should have no difficulty in finding a college’s Mission Statement once they have reached the college’s home page.

As we worked through the five criteria, we recognized that there were numerous opportunities for us to improve upon what we do. We have, in fact, ended each of the Criterion chapters (3-7) with a section titled “Opportunities”, and we have developed the following plan to deal with these opportunities for improvement.
We are committed to keeping the Self-Study Steering Committee active. It will meet no less than twice a semester to address the various “Opportunities” identified in this document. In approximately two years, the Self-Study Steering Committee will issue a report covering most, if not all, of the items listed as opportunities in the earlier chapters (3-7) of this self-study.

By this means, we plan to capitalize on the self-study process. We pledge to address the concerns we have identified and to make a good faith effort to actualize improvements.

While we are proud of the robust learning environment at Marshall University and the accomplishments of our faculty and their contributions to their profession and to the communities they serve, this self-study experience has brought into focus a number of areas we can improve upon. For example, beyond the Marshall Plan, our general education curriculum is somewhat complicated and therefore subject to some misunderstanding by advisors and students. As a result, a Core Curriculum Task Force was established at the end of the fall 2005 semester and began to meet at the beginning of the spring 2006 semester.

We believe we have been successful with the assessment of student learning at the institutional level, but we have not been as successful in the assessment of student services, such as advising, and learning resources, as well as in the area of institutional effectiveness. As we have observed earlier in this report, each of the criterion committees has identified opportunities for improvement.

Among the more significant observations are the following:

- We need to make greater use of assessment information to improve faculty development programs
- Within the five-year Program Review process we need to evaluate Certificate programs
- Our role in an increasingly global society needs to be more clearly articulated in our mission/purpose statements
- Marshall needs to work with secondary schools to better prepare students to attend college and to benefit from a life of learning
• We need to investigate ways to measure and document Service Learning in credit courses

We have learned that although *Owning the Opportunity: MU-2010* was an energizing planning activity in which we identified 60 or so goals, we did not develop specific strategies to accomplish those goals as an institution; rather, we left that task to each administrative area. Nor did we develop clear measurements to determine if we were accomplishing our goals. The strategic planning process we had been using was not flawless.

Our new President is taking a dynamic approach to build on past work and accomplishments with the goal of making Marshall University a leader in higher education.