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INC.**

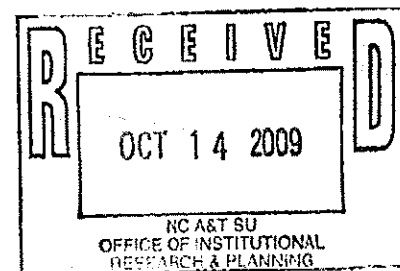
**UNIVERSITY STUDIES PROGRAM  
NORTH CAROLINA A&T STATE UNIVERSITY  
GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA**

**SEPTEMBER 27<sup>TH</sup> - 29<sup>TH</sup>, 2009**

**REPORT, EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Review Team:**

**Emily L. Moore, Ed.D., Chair  
J. Herman Blake, Ph.D., Asst. Chair  
Betsy Barefoot, Ed.D.  
Heather Wathington, Ph.D.**



## **Introduction**

The University Studies Program (UNST) at North Carolina A&T State University (University) is a uniquely designed effort to deliver general education to students. In addition to freshman and sophomore level courses, the program also includes a developmental course, a series of "cluster" courses, and a proposed capstone course. Its goal is to take students through an interdisciplinary four year program designed to prepare them for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century world. When established in 2006, Faculty Senate approval included a provision the program would be externally reviewed within three years.

Scholars for Educational Excellence and Diversity, Inc. (Scholars) was engaged to conduct a review of UNST and report their assessment and recommendations to the administration of North Carolina A&T State University. The reviewers analyzed available documents and conducted an on-site visit September 27-29, 2009.

## **The Charge**

The University administration requested that Scholars conduct an on-site visit after a study of documents and materials. The charge to Scholars was to

- Submit a final written report based on benchmark information and findings from the on-site visit.
- Provide a set of recommendations based on the current program evaluation, benchmarking information, and interviews.
- Recommend resources needed for future directions and proposed recommendations.

In the conduct of the review Scholars was asked to give special attention to specific issues and concerns

1. UNST interdisciplinary curriculum for breadth of knowledge and coherent rationale within the context of the institution's mission and benchmark general education programs.
2. Transfer of credit.
3. Co-curricular program components.
4. Expected student learning outcomes and assessment of outcomes.
5. Faculty qualifications and credentialing.
6. Administrative structure and managerial operation.
7. Budget
8. Overall institutional satisfaction with UNST.

### The Review

The review involved an analysis of a wide range of documents on the University as well as UNST; conference calls with University personnel; and an on-site visit. We endeavored to gain an understanding of the background and deliberations that led to the establishment of UNST as well as its more recent operations. The documents revealed that the UNST program was the result of a series of discussions at the University seeking to institutionalize a bold new initiative toward educational opportunities for students.

The on-site visit permitted us to meet with members of the University, as well as review additional documents. In the course of our visit we attended several UNST classes; interviewed campus executives and administrators; support staff; and major University committees. We also conducted open forums with University faculty as well as students. Included were separate sessions with the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate; the UNST Faculty; and faculty members of the Department of English. Our records show we heard from approximately sixty students and one-hundred forty faculty members—some of whom attended two or more sessions.

The schedule for the on-site visit is in Appendix B.

### The Findings

#### UNST Core Curriculum

The core curriculum has four broad learning outcomes:

1. Broad-based critical thinking skills
2. Effective written and oral communication skills
3. Appreciation for diverse cultures
4. Commitment to ongoing civic engagement

These learning outcomes are widely articulated in other colleges and universities as goals of general education programs that value liberal learning. They seem appropriate for a university that seeks to prepare 21<sup>st</sup> Century learners for the world they will inherit.

To accomplish the delivery of these four broad outcomes University Studies identifies seventeen specific general education learning objectives within eight knowledge areas. The knowledge areas are:

- Communication
- Analytical reasoning
- Application of scientific methods
- Multicultural relations within a global society

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- Historical and social processes within a changing world
- Artistic and literary understanding
- Ethics and social responsibility
- Healthy lifestyles and behavior

These knowledge areas are the principle pillars of the curriculum. The vertical design of the curriculum is intended to ensure that students encounter the learning objectives throughout their entire undergraduate education. To that end the objectives are supposed to be embedded in the foundation courses; the theme cluster courses; as well as the service learning and capstone projects.

#### Foundation Courses

The five foundation courses—experienced in the first year—incorporate three to four of the learning objectives in each course. The foundation courses are coherent and well-crafted—the curriculum is reasonably consistent with exemplary general education programs in other institutions.

Determining if and how these learning objectives are achieved is no simple task and the University Studies program has assiduously conducted assessment of student learning in the foundation courses. Faculty members utilize a series of rubrics in all of the foundation courses to help the program evaluate student learning. Over time most of these rubrics have been refined and improved.

In addition to faculty rubrics that assess student work for each course University Studies has employed a number of other assessments—namely Criterion, a student writing evaluation; classroom response technology (clickers); and pre- and post-tests. Based on university reports these assessments have been used extensively; in some classes learning is assessed weekly. These formative assessments provide feedback to faculty and demonstrate how well students have grasped classed material.

There are two additional academic offerings which complement the foundation courses:

*University Studies 100:* This course is traditionally offered as an "orientation-advising" course and is found on campuses across the nation. It is designed to familiarize students with university work and help them adjust to a new learning situation. UNST 100 is currently taught for one credit hour (one contact hour per week). Several members of the Council of Deans told us they had developed their own offerings of this course to help students become familiar with their faculty and programs. We believe that discipline-linked versions of UNST 100 differ from the planned expectations and reduce the impact of the overall University Studies Program.

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*Supplemental Instruction:* Supplemental Instruction (SI) is a voluntary student-led academic support program. It has been used in colleges around the world as an intervention that raises levels of academic performance and persistence. University Studies has adapted a limited version of SI as part of their effort to increase student learning. SI has been attached as an additional class to UNST courses. It is required of all students and is being facilitated by UNST faculty. As well, faculty receive no additional compensation and the students receive no additional academic credit.

This initiative, as constructed by UNST, omits the essence of the SI design: peer-led, pro-active, collaborative learning that is knowledge based and non-threatening. The usual program focuses on courses with high failure rates, rather than upon students in general. The UNST design is not Supplemental Instruction.

Persistence of First-Year Students at NC A&T State University

We feel it is important to note the pattern of student persistence. The University Factbook 2010 shows a decline in the continuation of first year students from 2000 to 2005. By 2005 the University was losing almost one-third of its students in the first year. Since then first-year persistence has risen modestly.

While this hopeful increase in persistence cannot be easily attributed to University Studies, the program effect cannot be dismissed and thus, merits serious consideration. The NC A&T State data from the Spring 2008 National Survey of Student Engagement gives some insight to underlying factors. In recent years the data show modest increases in three measures:

- Student-Faculty Interaction
- Active and Collaborative Learning
- Level of Academic Challenge

These patterns of persistence and student engagement give perspective to our review.

Theme Clusters

Beyond the foundation courses students are required to enroll in a cluster of courses organized around a common theme. These courses are expected to enhance the liberal learning of the first year of study as well as introduce students to more of the specific learning objectives of a comprehensive and coherent education.

Currently there are four theme clusters:

- Science, Technology and Society
- Energy, Environment and Society

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- Community, Conflict and Society
- Health, Lifestyles and Society

Each of the clusters consists of a wide range of disciplinary and University Studies courses at all levels. Primarily they are organized and taught by the faculty of individual colleges, but University Studies courses are also incorporated in them. The theme clusters are also assumed to incorporate the learning objectives of the general education program.

In general the theme clusters are severely lacking in fulfilling the goals of general education at North Carolina A&T State. There is no consistent rationale or academic/intellectual vision for each of the clusters. Furthermore it is unclear how the theme clusters deliberately and systematically incorporate the UNST learning objectives. It appears there is a reluctance of colleges and departments to design and offer well-conceptualized theme clusters that are integrated into the interdisciplinary focus of the UNST curriculum.

Assessment within the theme cluster courses appears to be uneven at best. We are unclear if faculty are using assessments. If so, what are faculty assessing and how are the assessments being used? Unlike the foundation courses widespread use of assessment is neither well-documented for the theme clusters nor were the results made evident to the evaluation team.

Co-Curricular Program Components

Students must complete fifty hours of service learning as part of their graduation requirements. This is the only co-curricular component of the University Studies program. It is expected to infuse civic engagement and social responsibility into the undergraduate curriculum and create "intentional learning environments where students can apply their academic knowledge to real world situations" [Evaluation Report, 2007, p. 21].

The service learning component is supposed to address the learning objectives 10 and 17:

Interact effectively with people from diverse cultures.

Recognize behaviors that place individuals, families and communities at risk.

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However we found no evidence of a direct link between service learning and UNST courses. As currently implemented service learning is actually volunteer service without intentional learning.

There does not appear to be an assessment of how the fifty hours of service learning reinforces student learning objectives. The absence of this assessment fits with our observation: student volunteer activities seem disconnected from academic learning.

### The Capstone

Student learning through University Studies is expected to culminate in capstone courses that integrate their general education knowledge with their overall academic experience. We understand that students will meet this requirement for the first time in 2010. Some academic departments already require a capstone for their majors.

However, it appears that planning and development of senior capstone courses has not begun, and existing capstone courses are not integrated with University Studies. Consequently an assessment of capstones for general education student learning outcomes has not been designed.

### Transfer of credit

Questions and concerns about transfer of credit reflected a high degree of uncertainty, confusion, communication and poor advising. Students complained bitterly about losing credits when they transferred from other institutions. In particular one student spoke about transferring from a highly ranked university in another state and losing a year because credits did not transfer.

We were unable to get a clear understanding of the source and accuracy of these problems. The UNST clearly explains the policy for transferring credits into the general education program. Furthermore the Deans Council informed us that each College had authority to approve credits for students transferring from institutions in another state.

There were additional concerns related to the transferability of UNST courses to other institutions. We were unable to determine the degree to which this is a problem. However, it is our general opinion that these issues can be reasonably resolved with more effective communication, cooperation and advising.

### Faculty Qualifications and Credentialing—UNST

In general we found the UNST faculty to be an impressive group. They are talented, energetic and clearly dedicated to the program and particularly to their students. Several of the faculty have adjunct or limited appointments and are therefore ineligible for tenure. Even those with appropriate credentials do not have appointments in their disciplines

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within the colleges of departments. Their numbers have been augmented with the recent appointment of three tenure-eligible faculty.

In order to protect and advance these faculty tenure-track positions must be created for them. These should include courtesy or joint appointments between University Studies but principally aligned with an appropriate academic unit. There should also be clear and unequivocal expectations of faculty with regard to teaching, research and scholarship. Such expectations will ultimately strengthen classroom teaching as well as raising expectations of faculty and students.

We attended three different foundation courses and observed them closely. In each course the professors were knowledgeable about their subject matter and learning objectives. They sought to challenge students and engage them in the learning process. The faculty also exhibited an impressive—although implicit—understanding of how they function as role models as well as teachers.

We felt that in some degree faculty dedication was attenuated by limited pedagogical skills. In one case the professor was not successful in engaging students as they held private conversations or slept while the instructor was writing information on the board. One student—speaking generally to nobody in particular before the professor entered—said “I hate this class. If I hadn’t paid for it already I wouldn’t be here.” Engaging students with such attitudes and limited skills takes gifted pedagogy.

#### Administrative Structure and Managerial Operation

The University Studies Program is seriously hobbled by the combination of a convoluted administrative structure and a conflict-ridden managerial operation.

North Carolina A&T State University has experienced a serious leadership vacuum as the result of rapid changes in senior leadership. In the past five years the campus has had at least three Chancellors and three Provosts. In addition there are numerous interim positions at the decanal level and above. Under the best of circumstances such a situation would be problematical. It is particularly consequential for University Studies because of the current administrative structure.

Although University Studies is a program—lacking department or college status—it is led by a Dean who sits on the Council of Deans and reports directly to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. The Dean has responsibility for leadership and management of the program.

The organizational chart indicates there is to be a UNST Advisory Board. It has never been established.



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There is also a University Studies Committee that appears to be moribund. Its role and responsibility has not been articulated in the documents.

The principal academic oversight body for the University Studies program is the Faculty Roundtable, a committee comprised of two representatives from each school/college. The Faculty Roundtable advises the Dean of University Studies on courses, strategies for improving the quality of the program, and actions needed in response to specific requests from other academic units. All evidence indicates that even though the Faculty Roundtable meets and deliberates, it has been superseded by initiatives that ignore its existence and responsibilities. Indeed, it appears to be without the vision, strength and power needed to properly accomplish its goals and advise the Dean of University Studies.

Our review of the UNST Organizational Chart revealed a lack of clear statements of roles and responsibilities for various committees. They lacked the authority to implement the limited responsibilities assigned to them—particularly in the case of the Faculty Round Table. They do not evaluate faculty or administrators, thus they lack the power to hold people accountable for their actions.

In our view the administrative structure is void of coherence, responsibility and direction. In a higher education community where consultation, cooperation and persuasion are the normal and expected processes for problem-solving and decision-making the organizational structure designed for University Studies was fraught with insuperable problems from the very beginning.

The management and leadership of University Studies are vested in a Dean who has organized and developed the academic program and recruited many of its faculty and staff.

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This unfortunate development has been exacerbated by the frequent changes in University leadership. Therefore there have been no reliable mechanisms for mediation, conflict-resolution and definitive decisions.

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**Budget**

Information received was not sufficient to comment on the adequacy of the current UNST budget or the budgeting process.

**Institutional Satisfaction**

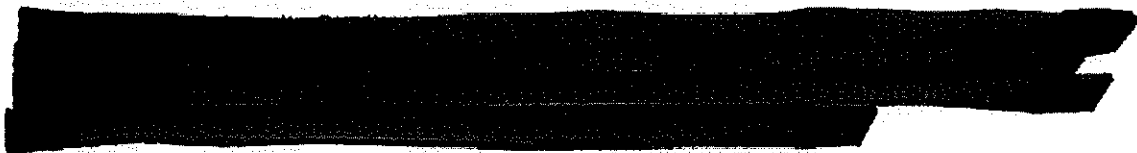
University Studies is a major part of the educational experience for undergraduates at NC A&T. This is recognized by all constituents. While we heard many criticisms and complaints the program also received many accolades. The conclusion is mixed.

Most of the students ultimately gave a positive assessment even after sharp criticisms. They recognize the program has deepened their intellectual understanding and broadened their academic horizons.

The faculty—speaking through several forums—were critical of parts of the program, but in general supported the goals, aims and processes involved in providing a general education. Some faculty have specific criticisms of the program—particularly in its mathematics and English offerings—but these are concerns that can be managed and corrected.

Faculty who were leaders in the early conceptualization of a new and creative approach to general education felt their extraordinary vision had become mired in controversy and their hopes were dashed. While they felt University Studies had many merits it has become isolated and far from what they originally envisioned.

Administrators and staff also cited the strengths of the University Studies. Recent budgetary decisions—permitting additional faculty hires—in an era of resource constraints are unequivocal evidence of institutional satisfaction.



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**In conclusion, we find:**

- University Studies is a "segmented" program. Students acquire general education goals in the foundation courses but not in the overall program.
- The evaluation/assessment efforts in the foundation courses are excellent and substantiate the value of the courses.
- The theme clusters, service learning and capstone components as currently configured make limited contributions to the general education goals of University Studies.
- The University Studies faculty are well-credentialed and competent to fulfill their academic responsibilities.
- The organizational placement of University Studies within the administrative structure of the university hampers the effective management of the program.
- The Dean of University Studies has provided superb direction in developing the program, selecting faculty, and instituting comprehensive course assessment.

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**Recommendations**

1. The University should emphasize student learning, persistence and graduation as the essential criteria in further review and evaluation of general education efforts.
2. The University administration should review its general organizational structure in relation to the placement of University Studies.
3. The University Studies faculty should receive unequivocal administrative support for security of employment, professional development, and a learning-centered teaching environment—including reasonable class size.

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4. UNST and Student Affairs should ensure that students learn about UNST during the admissions process as well as orientation. The curriculum should not come as a surprise to students.
5. The rationale/relevance of UNST, or any general education curriculum should be made clear to students using language they understand.
6. The basic structure of the University Studies Foundation Courses should be maintained, but strengthened through careful integration of additional emphasis on mathematics, English and writing.
7. The emphasis on assessment and evaluation on student learning in general education courses should be sustained and improved.
8. UNST should develop faculty forums to discuss the learning objectives, assessment of outcomes, and continued development of effective pedagogy.
9. UNST 100 should be integrated into the other foundation courses. Its specific learning objectives can be effectively incorporated into existing courses.
10. Theme clusters—as components of general education—should be evaluated and either strengthened or eliminated. As presently organized they have limited value to general education and liberal learning.
11. The service learning requirement should be effectively integrated into UNST foundation courses as well as Student Affairs.
12. The need for supplemental instruction should be reviewed. It may reflect the preparation and quality of entering students, and/or the effectiveness of the pedagogy in UNST courses. There can be a more effective response to the need.
13. Capstone courses should be developed/and or improved by thoughtful linkages to University Studies and the core learning objectives.
14. The University administration should provide visible leadership in resolving the conflicts between University Studies, the Faculty Senate, and the Academic Units. University Studies should be sustained but there needs to be much more communication, cooperation and mutual support.
15. The University administration should develop a comprehensive plan to integrate University Studies, Student Affairs and Academic units (Colleges/Departments) into a program based on the High Impact Practices of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, including the current efforts toward Service

Learning and Supplemental Instruction. These high impact practices include such strategies as:

- Learning Communities
- Collaborative Learning
- Peer Counseling/Advising
- Undergraduate Student Research

### Appendices

#### **A: Student-Faculty Perspectives**

**Students:** The Student Government Association (SGA) organized a special session to permit students to voice their views about UNST. It was attended by approximately 50-60 students with many of them addressing the team on a variety of questions posed by SGA as well as the evaluators. Some, but not all, of the issues emerging from the students were:

- Students do not understand the rationale behind the UNST curriculum in particular and liberal education in general. One comment typified the group, "I had no background on University Studies and came into it blindly." The lack of understanding of general education is common among students at all universities. Students dislike required courses outside of their "major" and see them as something to "get out of the way." We found the documents explaining the curriculum (syllabi, FAQs, etc.) used academic jargon and expressions that tended to obscure the reasons why students were required to enroll in UNST courses.

*Note: UNST 100 is intended to explain the UNST curriculum to students. Because so many students take variant versions of UNST 100 offered by different colleges, consistent explanations of the UNST curriculum are likely compromised and result in limited student understanding.*

- In general students came to an appreciation of the UNST foundation courses. While there were complaints about course content as well as pedagogy, students stated they acquired good skills in the courses—particularly critical writing, analytical reasoning, and global views.
- Students in STEM majors generally expressed dissatisfaction with UNST foundation courses. They felt the program delayed entrance into their majors

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and left them frustrated. In several cases this expression was followed by positive statements of learning in two courses: African American Experience and the Contemporary World.

- Some students felt the courses were not demanding enough. One even compared them to the courses experienced in high school. Several stated they knew how to "finesse" good grades in the courses.
- The theme clusters are a source of confusion and dissatisfaction. The advising between UNST and academic departments about theme clusters was a major concern. Students received contradictory information and often ended up taking the advice of peers over that of faculty. There was confusion about whether the clusters are related to their majors. They also complained about the inability to change clusters without starting over.
- In general students were supportive of UNST. They felt it made valuable contributions to their learning and the problems could be fixed without starting over.

Faculty: The Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate provided us with an organized list of concerns about the University Studies Program. In addition we met with several faculty committees. We also held an open forum for all faculty to express themselves. As well we held general discussions with the University Studies faculty and the English Department. We met with approximately 140 faculty during our on-site review. Some of the key concerns of faculty were:

- The authority of the UNST Faculty Roundtable vs the Faculty Senate Curricula Committee
- Qualifications of the UNST faculty
- Adequate number of required UNST courses in English and Math
- Overlapping and competing courses in UNST and Departments
- Insufficient number of theme clusters
- Insufficient number of writing courses or opportunities for students who need them
- Too few faculty to teach foundation courses
- Class sizes too large for effective teaching
- Confusion about how to advise students between UNST and majors
- The remedial nature of some UNST courses

We found the UNST faculty to be talented, energetic and well qualified to teach the foundation courses. Their dedication to students is impressive and encouraging. There was a strong desire to move away from controversy so they can re-focus their attention on students and teaching/learning.

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**MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY**

North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University is a public, doctoral/research intensive, land-grant University committed to fulfilling its fundamental purposes through exemplary undergraduate and graduate instruction, scholarly and creative research, and effective public service

**University Studies Assessment Team Schedule**

University Studies (UNST) is the interdisciplinary general education curriculum of North Carolina Agricultural and State University and provides the intellectual foundation for the University's degree-granting programs. Its goal is to provide students with a framework for critical inquiry that serves as a foundation for continuing academic development and life-long learning.

**Sunday, September 27**

9:30 Arrival – Team Chair, Dr. Emily Moore  
Dr. J. Herman Blake

11:00 Campus Tour and Team Room (Hodgin) Dr. Lea Williams  
Karen Courtney

2:00 Arrival – Dr. Betsy Barefoot  
Dr. Heather Wathington

3:00 Team Meeting

5:00 Team Dinner and Meeting

**Monday, September 28**

7:30 Leave for campus

8:00 - 8:30 UNST 130 Analytical Reasoning

8:00 - 8:45 UNST Faculty Roundtable Committee (13 members)  
Hodgin 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Conference Room

9:00 - 9:45 General Education Revision Executive Committee - Drs. Robert Davis,  
Sanjiv Sarin, Scott Simkins, Hodgin 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

10:00- 10:30 Dr. Deborah Barnes, Former Interim Associate Dean, UNST  
McNair 226  
Dr. Tracey Ford, Director, Center for Academic Excellence

11:00 – 11:50  
Provost Alton Thompson

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**11:00 – 11:50 (cont.) Ms. Denise Iverson Payne, Executive Director, Student Development**

**Dr. Yvette Underdue Murph, Associate Vice Chancellor, Enrollment Management**

**12:00 -12:45 Box Lunch and Team Debriefing, Merrick 129**

**1:00 -1:45 Faculty Senate Executive Committee  
Merrick 128**

**Dean Joseph L. Graves, Jr, UNST (Merrick 129)**

**2:00 – 3:00 General Faculty Forum  
Merrick Auditorium 125**

**3:15 – 3:45 English Department  
Merrick 128**

**4:00 – 5:00 UNST Faculty Meeting**

**5:00 – 5:45 Return to Hotel – Break**

**6:00 – 7:00 Student Forum  
Stallings Ballroom, Memorial Student Union**

**7:30 – 9:30 Dinner at Marriott Hotel - Team Meeting: Findings and Review**

**Tuesday, September 29<sup>th</sup>**

**7:30 Leave for Campus**

**8:00 – 8:45 UNST 110 Critical Writing Hodgin 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor (2 classes)**



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**8:00 – 8:30am Dr. Lea Williams Associate Vice Chancellor Institutional Planning and Assessment**  
**Dr. Sullivan Welborne, Vice Chancellor, Student Affairs Hodgkin 2<sup>nd</sup> Fl**

**9:00 – 9:45 Deans' Council**  
**Dowdy 304-A**

**9:45 – 11:00 Team Meeting - Dowdy 304-A**

**11:30 – 12 noon Debriefing: Dean Graves, Dr. Lea Williams, Dowdy 311**

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**Johns Island, South Carolina**

**Review Team**

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Vice-President, Scholars for Educational Excellence and Diversity, Inc., Johns Island, South Carolina

Formerly: Founding Provost (Dean), Oakes College, University of California Santa Cruz; President, Tougaloo College, Tougaloo, Mississippi; Eugene M. Lang Visiting Professor for Social Change, Swarthmore College; Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Education, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis; Professor of Sociology and Director of African American Studies, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa; Scholar in Residence and Founding Director, Sea Islands Institute, University of South Carolina Beaufort

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**Johns Island, South Carolina**

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