

International Christian University

Peer Assessment Report 2009

**Dr. Grant H. Cornwell
President
The College of Wooster**

Introduction

This was my second consultation with International Christian University. My first visit was arranged at the invitation of Dean William Steele in 2005 as ICU was beginning to undertake fundamental reform in both the curriculum and administrative organization. The purpose of the current visit, at the invitation of Professor Junko Hibiya, Vice President for Academic Affairs, was to assess the status of the reforms, offer observations on progress, and recommendations on areas requiring attention.

Topic 1: Academic Reorganization

As recommended by the administration and endorsed by the faculty in April 2006, the six divisions of the College of Liberal Arts were eliminated as organizational units; in their place 16 departments, each offering a major/majors in the field of study, were created. This new organization forms the groundwork for the new curriculum, addressed below, and is a structure for ICU which better reflects and supports its mission as a distinctively international liberal arts college.

I am most impressed with the boldness and thoroughness of such a fundamental reform. Universities can behave as institutions resistant to change, both small and large, and the faculty and staff at ICU are to be commended for their openness to reform and their capacity for new vision. Much credit must be given to the leadership for this process and outcome.

There are three areas that require continued nurturing and attention:

- The new structure has led to a proliferation of administrative roles; where there were six divisional heads there are now 16 department chairs. At every university the burden of administration tends to encroach upon the core faculty duties of teaching and scholarly research. Care must be taken not to allow the new structure to make the administration of the academic program more bureaucratic or burdensome.
- The new structure has made the discourse communities among the faculty both smaller and narrower. Rather than faculty from a variety of disciplines having to negotiate their respective visions with colleagues in their divisions, departmental units now share greater commonality of disciplinary assumptions. While this

promises to enable the departments to stay closer to their fields of expertise, and to forge common visions of the discipline, curriculum, and appropriate pedagogy more easily, there is the risk that this will lead to increasing disciplinarity, and this would not be consistent with ICU's liberal arts mission.

- A related concern has to do with the politics of collegiality at ICU. Organizational units will inevitably compete for resources; where there were six divisions there are now 16 departments. Care must be taken to make sure the processes and procedures for resource allocation are inclusive and transparent.

All of these concerns can be well managed by attentive administration and I have every confidence they will be. I wholly support the restructuring and offer these observations simply to indicate where troubles could arise.

Topic 2: Curriculum

The most significant advance of the academic reform was the revision of the curriculum and the pathways open to students for navigating it. Clearly, by ICU embracing the approach to a liberal arts curriculum which is the norm in the United States, whereby entering students are encouraged to explore all fields of inquiry broadly, to build their own integration of understanding, and to focus their studies only after they have found their passions and talent by declaring their major areas of study, ICU has made a profound advance.

What is most striking result is how profoundly this opportunity has resonated with ICU current and prospective students. Applications are improved and current students readily offer that they chose ICU because this new curriculum enables them to make choices, to define themselves, as a part of the educational process. The new curriculum consistent with ICU's mission and it will further distinguish the university from its peers.

There are two issues to be mindful of as the new curriculum takes shape:

- First, departments must examine their course offerings to accommodate the two kinds of students who will enroll: those who already have some knowledge of and commitment to the discipline and those who are searching and sampling. The biggest pedagogical challenge will be at the introductory level, where a single course might have to serve both as an introduction to the discipline for a student seeking to broaden her exposure to areas of inquiry and also for a student who seeks to establish a foundation for deeper study in the discipline.
- Second, while many explorations lead to discoveries, some explorers get lost and confused. Clarity of purpose cannot be compelled and care must be taken to provide guidance to students who are wandering without direction. ICU is well on the path to providing this: see below.

Topic 3: Academic Planning

The most exciting and visionary advance at ICU is the introduction of the Academic Planning Program. The program is designed as a profound complement to the new curriculum since it structures each student's exploration of liberal learning. Rather than leaving students to their own devices to navigate their ways, which would doom some to aimless drifting, the Academic Planning Program cultivates purpose and intentionality. I am most impressed with the vision and intelligence behind this program, which is certainly an international leader in this effort.

Two features of special note:

- First, the e-portfolio that has been developed as a platform for academic planning is nothing short of brilliant. I see it as an international model worthy of acclaim. Its design is exactly on target and much credit goes to those who have worked on this e-portfolio for their leadership on the project. The academic planning essays are well crafted and should lead to increased clarity of purpose for students and more substantive relationships with faculty advisors.
 - There is one concern about how ICU has gone about the development of the e-portfolio. On the one hand, I understand why the decision was made to develop ICU's own platform and what has been developed precisely meets your immediate needs. On the other hand, in the near future you will want this platform to be integrated and interoperable with your course management system and with your registration / degree audit system; faculty advisors and students will want to click back and forth between course schedules, transcripts, course materials, and academic planning essays. By building an isolated system, these functions will be very difficult to achieve in the future.
- Second, the Academic Planning Handbook is similarly an outstanding innovation. By providing mission statements and learning goals for each department, the Handbook enables students to explore with great clarity of purpose.

Topic 4: Innovation, Assessment & Accountability

For the past decade all higher education accreditation agencies in the United States have been preoccupied with educational outcomes assessment and other rigorous measures of accountability. The movement began with crude intrusions and blunt instruments. After a decade of universities working with accreditation agencies, the concern with assessment and accountability has not abated but the efforts have become much more refined and sophisticated.

ICU is poised to become a leader in Japan in this area if it takes its own initiative to build a systematic approach to educational outcomes assessment. Done well, done in a way that is sophisticated and motivated by a genuine concern to improve on an institution's fulfillment of its own mission, assessment can be a catalyst for continuous innovation.

It is especially promising that the recent reform efforts at ICU have put the basic building blocks of an educational outcomes assessment program in place. The basic question is: are ICU students graduating having fulfilled the mission of the university? How do you know? What evidence does ICU have of the extent to which its mission is being fulfilled? Where are its strongest accomplishments? What are the areas of weakness?

To begin to answer these questions, ICU could begin two initiatives.

- First, each department could develop its own rubric for evaluating samples of the senior theses written by its recent graduates, assessing them for evidence in having met the learning goals the department itself set out for its major.
- Second, the Academic Planning Program could develop a rubric for evaluating samples of e-portfolios, assessing them for evidence of development of intentionality and clarity of purpose. In addition, each student, as a final graduation requirement, could be asked to write an essay in which they, themselves, assess the extent to which they have fulfilled ICU's mission, and they could be asked to present evidence that they have met ICU's general learning goals for all graduates.

Were ICU to undertake these initiatives they would certainly be at the vanguard of assessment in Japan. What is more, in an increasingly competitive landscape of higher education, it would give ICU a sharp competitive edge to be able to demonstrate, not just with rhetoric but with evidence, that ICU graduates were achieving the important mission and learning objectives associated with the finest educations.

Topic 5: Science Education in a Liberal Arts Context

Liberal arts colleges in the United States have developed an inquiry-based pedagogy for education in the natural sciences that is demonstrably effective. This is a research-based approach, whereby students from the outset learn scientific method and problem solving by engaging in inquiry.

Again, as a result of the recent reform, ICU is poised to become a leader in undergraduate science education in Japan if the science faculty were to genuinely seek to engage the liberal arts science movement in the United States. There is only good to be gained here, for ICU faculty, students, and the university itself. The road is long and the undertaking would call for significant investment, but if undertaken with will and persistence, ICU could offer a striking alternative to the national universities for students

interested in the sciences. Again, this could be a significant market differentiator and advantage.

To this end, let me recommend that the faculty and administration of ICU and The College of Wooster explore opportunities to collaborate around science pedagogy in a liberal arts context. The College of Wooster is a national leader in this area, long recognized for the high percentage of graduates in the sciences who go on to earn their Ph.D.'s. Recently, *U.S. News and World Report* ranked Wooster in the Top Ten liberal arts colleges in the country for outstanding teaching and this is due in no small part to our advanced practices in undergraduate research and pedagogy in the sciences. Since both Wooster and ICU are committed to international cooperation, it makes good sense for us to explore opportunities to cooperate.

Conclusion

ICU is an exceptionally strong university, made so by bold and visionary leadership, a faculty with an exceptional commitment to excellence in teaching, and wonderful students. ICU is clearly on an upward trajectory. In this report I have sought to identify competitive strengths, offer cautions where warranted, and recommendations of where ICU might next focus its energy to continue its progress.