

CONFERENCE *for* MERCY HIGHER EDUCATION

Georgian Court University Mission Peer Review:

Responding to Need in the Tradition of the Sisters of Mercy



GEORGIAN COURT UNIVERSITY

THE MERCY UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

Mission Peer Review Report

October 27-29, 2019

Team Members:

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Founded in 1908 by the Sisters of Mercy of New Jersey as Saint Mary's College in Plainfield, New Jersey, Georgian Court University witnessed the Sisters' hallmark adaptability to need by offering women access to Catholic higher education at a time when many other options in higher education were barred to women or were not reflective of Catholic values and spirit. Seven women represented the College's first graduating class in 1912.

As the College's reputation grew, so, too, did the need for more space to accommodate the growing student numbers, and in 1923, the site of the Jay Gould Estate in Lakewood, New Jersey was identified for the relocation and renaming of Saint Mary's to Georgian Court College. Over the ensuing decades, Georgian Court continued to expand, earning University status in 2004 and welcoming a fully educational university community in 2013.

At each point in the significant history of Georgian Court University, the needs of the time were identified and responded to in the spirit of the Sisters of Mercy.

The Conference for Mercy Higher Education (CMHE) was established in 2002, also in response to a need identified by the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas: the sustaining and deepening of the Catholic and Mercy identity in higher education within a network of 17 institutions of higher education founded by the Sisters of Mercy in the United States. CMHE's **Mission Accountability Peer Review Process** is an effort to address the responsibility of sponsorship in Catholic higher education and to encourage mutual growth among the Mercy colleges and universities within the Conference.

The Peer Review Process consists of the following elements:

1. A self-study submitted by the institution in advance of a visit by a review team
2. A campus visit by a review team
3. An initial report by the review team sent to the institution for their response/critique
4. A final team report and institutional response shared with the CMHE Board and the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas' Institute Leadership Team
5. A certification of continued sponsorship by the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.

The purpose of the Mission Review is to explore the presence, expression and effectiveness of the core mission of Georgian Court University as this mission is informed by its Catholic identity and Mercy charism. The CMHE Board of Directors hopes that this process will strengthen the presence of *the* Catholic identity and *of the* Mercy charism in the policies, programs, practices and relationships of the University.

The **Mission Accountability Peer Review Team** met with trustees, administration, faculty, staff, and students of University of Detroit Mercy from October 27-29, 2019. Prior to the site visit, the Peer Review Team reviewed the University's *Mission Accountability Self-study*, as well as related documents. The *Self-study* and the additional documents addressed specific questions posed in the Peer Review process. Once on site, the Peer Review Team met with the following groups (see Appendix A for details):

- President Joseph Marbach
- Mission Officer Paul DaPonte
- Students, particularly members of the Mercy Collegiate Society
- President's Cabinet Members
- Advancement and Finance and Administration Officers
- Support Staff
- Members of the Board of Trustees
- Provost and Deans
- Faculty
- Campus Ministry
- Mercy Associates and Sisters of Mercy

We commend the following people for the thoughtful work of their institution's self-assessment and for the organization of the site visit: Dr. Joseph Marbach, University President; the University's Board of Trustees; the administration, faculty and staff of the University; and the self-study co-authors, Dr. Paul DaPonte, Executive Director for Mission and Special Assistant to the President, and Sister Janet Thiel, OSF, Jeff Shaffer, and Evelyn Quinn. Kudos to Paul DaPonte who, early in his tenure as mission officer at the University, was called upon to develop this Self-study.

We also commend the community that is Georgian Court University. We met both faculty and staff who are deeply committed to the University's students. We heard from one member of the support staff that her "job is to meet a freshman and have [them] graduate as seniors." We found this to be a true statement as we encountered and conversed with numerous members of the faculty and staff. That the University's students are aware of and appreciate this commitment on

the part of the community adds greatly to the value of the full educational experience offered by Georgian Court University.

Very evident to the team as well is the presence, the very reality of a deep love of Mercy as it has evolved and unfolded over the years at Georgian Court University. So many members of the University community articulated the treasure that being a Mercy community is for them. The Georgian Court community has developed ways, both subtle and overt, of making mercy real to one another, and the team truly appreciated the opportunity to witness this reality.

What follows are the visiting team's observations about the University's commitment to the Catholic, Mercy mission, with commendations for exemplary practices and recommendations for further growth.

Commendations

The Mercy Mission and the development of the Mercy charism is celebrated by the entire campus community—the University's students, in particular, are exceptionally articulate about the mission and spirit of Mercy and its role in their education.

The **Mission Advisory Committee**, an institutional committee of the University, is comprised of students, faculty, staff and administration and works to enhance the initiatives of the Office of Mission Integration. The very composition of this Committee speaks to the efforts at the integration of mission across all levels of the campus community.

The active role that the Office of Mission integration plays in the **hiring of new employees**, in concert with the Human Resources Office. The hiring of the right person for the role of Human Resources Officer—one who can work well in concert with the mission office, will be essential to the continuance of hiring for mission.

Mission-focused programming, particularly that of Mercy Week and Critical Concerns Week. There is a level of excitement on campus when these weeks are mentioned in conversation and it

is obvious that the campus community appreciates the effort to celebrate the Mercy heritage and meaning.

The Bridge General Education Program that seeks to offer an integrated general education experience grounded in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and the charism of Mercy. The foundation of this program is in three focused courses—Foundational, Cornerstone, and Capstone, in addition to a broad expanse of signature courses and content courses that are either writing-intensive or service-learning focused. The Program is accessible to both traditional and transfer students and exhibits justice to transfer students by this very access. It is evident that the faculty have constructed a core that reflects both the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and the charism of Mercy—and this program is a distinctive mark of a GCU education, evidencing a sense of solidarity in its outcomes.

The requirement of service-learning courses and/or an experiential learning option for undergraduate students.

The creation of **an environment where people feel free to express their faith, both Catholic and those of other faith traditions.**

The faculty and staff of the University demonstrate **one-on-one care and concern for the person.** Student recognize and cherish this as part of their GCU experience.

Students noted that **coursework and interactions with faculty and staff** led to a greater sense of Mercy and understanding of social justice.

The **integration of Mercy Core Values into coursework** across the University. The requirement for faculty to incorporate core values into their coursework and then to reflect on this integration at the conclusion of the particular course is significant.

The Mercy Spirituality Certificate Program, a five-course, graduate-level curriculum for those wishing to be more meaningfully engaged in Mercy. The University's commitment to the Program is noteworthy and underscores an overall commitment to the mission.

Student participation in leadership and advocacy experiences offered by CMHE and the Institute Justice Team, notably the *DC Mercy Advocacy Program* and the *UN Mercy Advocacy Program* as well as student participation in the biennial Young Mercy Leaders Pilgrimage at the International House of Mercy in Dublin, Ireland.

Campus organizations that celebrate, cultivate and develop the Mercy charism, such as the Mercy Collegiate Society, a student organization that exemplifies the work of Catherine McAuley and reflects and advances the University's Core Values. Continuing this society will be important for the future mission-focus of the University.

The Women in Leadership Development (WILD) program dedicated to empowering and inspiring undergraduate women. This is a particularly notable program that lifts women up and encourages leadership—on campus and beyond.

The incorporation of liturgies on campus with a welcoming style—for those unfamiliar with Catholic worship, for student athletic teams, and for other organizations.

The Student Food Pantry on campus for those experiencing food insecurity.

The ways in which the athletic coaches have provided formative experiences for student athletes and have modeled the way of mercy.

The myriad ways in which the University participates within the wider Mercy network—notably, attendance at the Carlow Roundtable and the significant presence of University members at CMHE-sponsored events and programs.

The commitment that the University is making to participate in **Collegium**, an exploration of academic vocation and how this vocation may be realized in a Catholic institution of higher learning.

The Angel Fund that attends to the most vulnerable students and testifies to the investment of faculty, staff and alumni...a merciful, immediate and personal response to student need.

Chart the Course, the **free winter or summer session course** to enable students to complete 30 credits by the end of their first year.

The effort to **integrate restorative justice programs** into student conduct processes.

The expression of **socially responsible investing** to ensure that the University invests in companies and portfolios that support the common good and exhibit a positive impact to society.

Intentional ways in which the University has **assessed mission integration (NSSE, FSSE, etc.)**, particularly through the efforts of the Director of Assessment.

We affirm the University's own recommendation to **establish greater outreach to the Orthodox Jewish community through service opportunities and other community-building activities as well as other local campus partners.**

We also affirm the desire we hear to **have more linkages within the Mercy network with respect to athletics, student affairs and centers for teaching and learning.**

Recommendations

Deliberate and on-going mission formation programs for faculty, students, staff, and leadership and board members. These programs should include a span of time that allows for deep and meaningful conversation, as well as a time frame that allows for the growth of understanding of those participating.

Particular attention to the Catholic, Mercy identity of the University with respect to an **on-going program of formation for the Board of Trustees**.

Deepening engagement of the University community in the unfolding process of mission integration on campus. Because the work of mission involves every member of the campus community, we encourage the inclusive involvement of this community whenever possible.

Development of a deeper integration of Catholic Social Teaching and the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy as part of **service learning within the academic program**, particularly through faculty workshops. Assistance in understanding the process of theological reflection on service experiences would assist faculty and students with contextualizing such experiences through the distinct lens of Mercy.

Time and space for faculty to work together, to reflect together, and to be together. Similarly, time and a dedicated space for support staff to meet and deepen relationships.

Encourage the practice of contemplation, particularly for students who have so little space and time for quiet, reflective practices in their daily routines.

In a spirit of mercy hospitality, **an intentional program of out-reach and inclusion to students and members of the wider community of different religious traditions, and those of no faith tradition**.

Intentional formation for the newly assembled senior leadership team to animate the myriad of ways mission can be integrated strategically and operationally within departments.

Ensure that there is sufficient **faculty and staff input into policies and procedures** that affect the mission.

Continue to develop in **Catherine McAuley's model of Mercy** with variations as evidenced by the founding of the Sisters of Mercy as walking sisters. As Catherine McAuley noted, "Each place has its own peculiarities which must be yielded to when possible." Georgian Court University has a

distinct expression of Mercy that has evolved over time. Attention to this distinctiveness must be appreciated and fostered.

Final Comments

The CMHE visiting commends the Georgian Court University community for its on-going recognition of the rootedness of the University in the heritage of the Sisters of Mercy, and the Catholic intellectual tradition with a decided emphasis on immediate response to need. We affirm and commend President Marbach, his Cabinet, the University Board of Trustees, and the faculty, staff and students for deliberate efforts to be guided by the Mercy heritage and the Catholic identity, and we encourage you to continue your intentionality as a University focused on mission fulfillment through the four strategic compass points of excellence in academics, an exceptional student experience, fiscal health, and operational efficiency/resource use. Most important, we wish to encourage the students of Georgian Court University—you are Mercy’s legacy to a world so very much in need and your clear understanding of the mission of Georgian Court University and your role in bringing this mission into the larger world is inspirational.



CONFERENCE *for* MERCY
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This is to certify that

Georgian Court University

effectively meets the conditions for Continuing Sponsorship
within the Conference for Mercy Higher Education.

January 2 2020

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