



# Report to the Faculty Senate January 2014

Task Force on University Status, Richard Stockton College



THE RICHARD STOCKTON COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY  
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## History of the Task Force

In March 2012, Richard Stockton College successfully completed its Middle States re-accreditation. The Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSA), established in 1887, is a nonprofit, non-governmental organization dedicated to educational improvement through evaluation. During this process, external reviewers highlighted Stockton's emphasis on teaching, commitment to student learning, and support of creative, inter-disciplinary work. Indeed, the college's overall health and growth—at both the undergraduate and graduate levels—prompted evaluators to ask whether Stockton had considered applying to the state for re-classification from a public liberal arts college to a comprehensive university.

In September 2012, Michael Frank, Professor of Psychology and Senate President, brought this question to the Faculty Senate, which formed a Task Force to collect and synthesize feedback from various college communities. Nomination for Task Force members was campus-wide, and intended to ensure representation from different college schools and participation by senior, mid-career, and junior faculty members. The final composition included seven faculty members and three deans:

Christine Tartaro (SOBL, Co-Chair)  
Michelle McDonald (ARHU, Co-Chair)  
Helen Duo Wei (BUSN)  
Michael Hozik (NAMS)  
Kim Lebak (EDUC)  
Robert Marsico (HEALTH)  
Mary Padden (HEALTH)

Robert Gregg (Dean, GENS)  
Claudine Keenan (Dean, EDUC)  
Lewis Leitner (Dean, GRAD STUDIES)

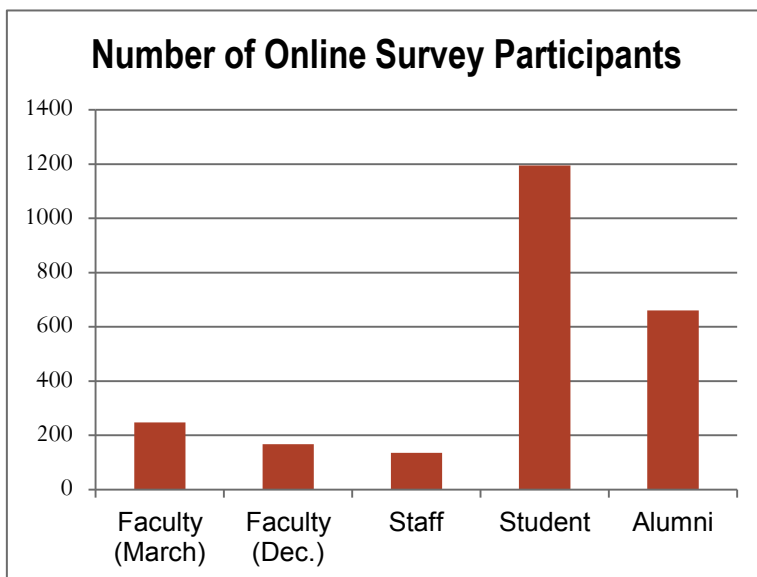


Between September 2012 and January 2014, the Task Force conducted and posted background research, launched surveys to key constituencies with links to the background research, drafted accompanying reports, held a series of town hall meetings during the spring of 2013, offered a preliminary report at the 2013 Fall Faculty Conference, organized subsequent school-specific meetings throughout the fall of 2013, and compiled this final report for the Faculty Senate. Throughout this process, the Task Force has seen its role as one of information gathering, not advocacy. What appears below is what we have been able to collect to the best of our ability for discussion and debate.

## Definition of a Comprehensive University

New Jersey implemented the comprehensive-university application process in 1993. So far, ten institutions have elected to apply.<sup>1</sup> To qualify as a comprehensive university, an institution must meet two sets of qualifications: 1) national standards as a Master's college or university according to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (this is already Stockton's Carnegie classification); and 2) New Jersey's eligibility criteria for a comprehensive university; the latter must have been met for at least five years, and include:

- A broad range of undergraduate degree programs as well as graduate studies leading to masters' degrees in at least 3 areas (Stockton currently has 14 graduate programs);
- Graduate students who demonstrate superior achievement beyond the undergraduate level;
- Faculty whose competence is known beyond the institution; and
- Resources to support graduate education, including laboratory facilities, library support, and financial support for graduate student and faculty research.



## Online Surveys: Spring 2013

The Task Force drafted four online surveys to assess reaction to a potential reclassification of Stockton from college to comprehensive university. Faculty and Staff surveys launched in January 2013, and Student and Alumni surveys were distributed the following month. Two additional abbreviated surveys were circulated at spring 2013 Open House events for prospective students and their parents. Full reports were subsequently posted on the Task Force website:

[http://loki.stockton.edu/~assembly/committees/univ\\_status/index.html](http://loki.stockton.edu/~assembly/committees/univ_status/index.html)

The initial Faculty Survey received 248 responses, a robust number, considering there were 282 full-time faculty and 270 part-time faculty members at the time of the survey. Moreover, respondents represented a diverse range in terms of number of years at the college.

<sup>1</sup> Montclair State University was the first, followed by Rider, Monmouth, Rowan, William Paterson, Kean, Georgian Court, Fairleigh Dickinson, and Jersey City Universities. St. Peters University was the most recent school to do so, completing the process in 2012. Note: In 2013, Rowan reclassified from a comprehensive to a research university, leaving nine current comprehensive universities in New Jersey. In addition to Stockton, New Jersey State colleges who have not sought university status include The College of New Jersey and Ramapo College.

The Staff Survey was smaller, 135 responses, but again, offered broad inclusion in terms of years of employment. Nearly all respondents (94.1 percent) were full-time staff members. Respondents were asked to consider the impact of becoming a comprehensive university on a variety of factors: 1) the institution’s reputation; 2) student recruitment; 3) finances; 4) education and curriculum; and, for faculty, 5) research.

Both faculty and staff perceptions of the impact of comprehensive university status on reputation were very positive (staff at 87.2 percent slightly higher than faculty at 75.1 percent). This survey asked respondents to consider whether they believed such a change would influence institutional standing throughout the state, relative competitiveness with sister colleges, ability to recruit faculty and students, and the perception of current students, alumni, and community partners. Because the impact on reputation was rated highly, it was not surprising that responses to questions about student recruitment were likewise somewhat positive to very positive on both surveys. It should be noted, however, that to the extent the Task Force was able to collect data, colleges that had transitioned to comprehensive universities experienced no sustained change in student recruitment. John Iacovelli, Stockton’s Dean of Enrollment Management, noted that the only impact on recruiting that he was aware of was for the Pennsylvania state colleges when they transitioned, and that was short-lived.<sup>2</sup>

Perception was more divided on the question of funding. While most faculty thought there might be positive benefits for fundraising outside the college (both for individual faculty members at 61 percent and the institution as a whole, at 63 percent), there was more ambivalence or confusion. There were many “I don’t know” responses on the effect of such a change on state funding at 34.3 percent and internal budget allocations at 25.2 percent.

Overall, 59% of surveyed faculty and 70% of staff indicated high support (or between 7 and 10 on a scale of 1-10) for a status transition, another 13% and 21% offered moderate support respectively, while 28% of faculty and 9% of staff reported low support.

Student survey responses on the question of comprehensive university status were stronger still. Just over 1,200 students completed the online survey and students of all levels—freshman through seniors and graduate students—were well-represented. Nearly 60 percent of respondents were transfer students.

Students had the highest rankings about the potential impact on institutional reputation and status as well as student recruitment (averaging 4.28 to 4.5 out of 5 in this section of the survey). They also had favorable perceptions of its impact on education and curriculum; overall, 75 percent indicated high support for transitioning to comprehensive university status, and another 12 percent moderate support of pursuing application.

<sup>2</sup> Pennsylvania state colleges transitioned simultaneously by state mandate in 1983.

## OVERALL RANKING ON TRANSITION TO UNIVERSITY STATUS

(On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being completely against transition and 10 being completely for transition)

	<u>Faculty (March 2013)</u>	<u>Faculty (Dec. 2013)</u>	<u>Staff</u>	<u>Student</u>	<u>Alumni</u>
<b># of Responses:</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>1,206</b>	<b>660</b>
<b>Response</b>					
<b>1</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>553</b>	<b>311</b>
<b>Did not Answer</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>--</b>

There were some student concerns; these focused on the potential impact on class size and parking and spoke to a misunderstanding that becoming a comprehensive university would necessarily result in a larger student body. Some students also expressed apprehension about tuition increases; all of these considerations were addressed at two Student Town Hall Meetings in April 2013.

The abbreviated surveys of prospective students and parents were more focused, asking both groups to indicate on a scale of very positive to very negative (or “I don’t know”) what impact transitioning to a comprehensive university would have on Stockton, whether such reclassification would make the institution more attractive to students, and how it might influence future employability. A total of 493 prospective students and 120 of their parents participated in this survey. Of these, more than 75 percent of the students believed that such a transition would be somewhat positive or very positive (roughly equal between these two categories). Parents’ perceptions were even higher; 20 percent thought the move would be somewhat positive and another 60 percent thought it would be very positive. Such ratios held for the rest of the survey, parents remaining somewhat more optimistic than students. While

66 percent of surveyed students thought a reclassification would make it more likely they would apply, for example, 72.5 percent of parents believed it would make Stockton more competitive. Also, 75 percent of students thought it would positively benefit employability, while 81 percent of parents thought it would do so. Admittedly, these groups, along with the public survey poll, did not have access to the background information provided by the Task Force to various college communities before their online surveys, nor did they have recourse to Town Hall or School Meetings for further clarification and discussion.

The faculty survey asked two additional sets of questions about how such an institutional change might shape undergraduate and graduate teaching, and here too there was a varied response. Scores were more favorable for such a transition's impact on professional studies (56.5 percent) and the library's ability to serve students (43.1 percent), but were lower for the impact on institutional commitment to general studies (38 percent) and particularly for the liberal arts (36.5 percent).

Finally, faculty respondents were asked what such a move might mean for research expectations for promotion and tenure. This was among the most surprising set of results. A significant number of respondents, indeed well over the majority, believed that becoming a comprehensive university would increase research expectations a bit (34.7 percent) or a lot (38.9 percent).

### Town Hall Meetings: Spring 2013

As New Jersey standards for a comprehensive university would neither necessitate changes to the curriculum nor require more rigorous research expectations for faculty, the Task Force opted to highlight these issues in a series of campus-wide Town Hall Meetings. A related third area of concern was the relative impact to undergraduate and graduate programs. Two Faculty and Staff meetings were held during the spring of 2013, and presentations emphasized that should Stockton elect to apply for comprehensive university status:

- There would not be reduction in the number of classes taught, nor a decline or rise in class size;
- There would not be a reduction in the number of general studies courses taught;
- There would not be an effort to hire faculty solely for graduate teaching (there is one exception, our current doctoral program, but all Master's programs hire faculty for both graduate and undergraduate teaching);
- Graduate teaching would not become compulsory; and
- There would be no additional anticipated accreditation required; external reviewers evaluating whether Stockton could be called a comprehensive university would do so on the basis of the college's existing programs and resources.

In other words, the relative balance of teaching, research, and service required for promotion and tenure would remain the same. These are negotiated in the Master Agreement signed with

the state, and standards are determined at the program level, not by Stockton’s classification as either a college or comprehensive university.

Town Meetings were also an opportunity for attendees to raise new questions or concerns. Chief among those articulated by faculty were:

- Impact on student and faculty recruitment—particularly from abroad: Task Force member Helen Wei raised the issue of confusion about the word “college” relative to attracting international students in the first Town Hall Meeting, and it was subsequently reiterated by additional attendees in almost all subsequent public and school meetings;
- Impact on funding: some faculty worried that becoming a university might change our institutional status for grant applications—particularly at the federal level; our research and the Grants Office confirmed that this would not be the case;
- Impact on curriculum, workload, and research expectations: many of these questions arose from enduring confusion over the distinctions between research and comprehensive universities, the latter defined as teaching-oriented institutions;
- Impact on reputation and institutional ethos.

The Task Force used these meetings as opportunities to clarify expectations and emphasize that should Stockton pursue reclassification it would be evaluated on existing programs and standards—as well as how it has operated over the last five years—not on a projected plan of change.

The last concern, however—about reputation and ethos—was as much about image and identity as it was institutional operation, and in some respects was both the most ambiguous and most important emotionally invested element of these discussions. As both those for and against the idea of transition emphasized, names are important as they embody how Stockton chooses to present itself to both internal communities as well as the general public.

### Public Survey: Summer 2013

To gauge public perspective the Task Force commissioned a public survey conducted by the Hughes Center for Public Policy during early summer 2013. The center collected data via telephone interviews from two regions: 1) South Jersey including the counties of Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Ocean, and Salem (810 interviews); and 2) Atlantic County alone (612 additional interviews).

The full report from the activity is posted on the Task Force website, but findings included:

- 83-87 percent thought becoming a comprehensive university would increase Stockton’s reputation in South Jersey and the state;
- 48 percent speculated that it would improve students’ ability to get better jobs after graduation;
- 70-73 percent thought it would enhance the value of a Stockton degree; and
- 22-24 percent believed their children would be more likely to apply.

## Fall Faculty Conference and School Meetings: Fall 2013

While Student and Alumni Town Hall Meetings brought engaged audiences, the spring 2013 Faculty and Staff Town Hall Meetings were more sparsely attended, and some questions and confusion persisted. Many concerns raised at the 2013 Fall Faculty Conference, for example, reiterated preconceptions that the Task Force had attempted to address earlier, but which clearly still remained in the minds of many.

To ensure that all who wished to participate in the dialogue had an opportunity to do so, the Task Force scheduled a final series of meetings, this time at the school level. Not only did such venues offer more chances to discuss these important concerns, but it also allowed conversations to be tailored to the needs and priorities of specific programs and schools. The Task Force held eight meetings between September and November 2013 (EDUC, GENS, NAMS, BUSN, SOBL, HLTH, ARHU, and the Library Staff). Attendance ranged from 12-15 participants in the smaller programs to 25-30 in larger programs. Overall, these sessions included over 150 faculty and staff.

## Final Online Faculty Survey: December 2013

In December 2013, the Task Force launched a second online faculty survey. This was done for two reasons: 1) to gauge the impact of Town Hall and School meetings in addressing concerns about transition (particularly the implications for curriculum, funding, and research expectations); and, 2) to allow faculty the opportunity to modify their responses after they had been provided with more information about the process and potential impact of re-classification.

Participation in this second faculty survey, which ended in January 6, 2014, was more modest than the first—162 compared with last spring’s 248 survey takers. But the results came, the Task Force felt, from a better informed set of respondents. Participants were asked whether they had attended one of the Town Hall meetings last spring, the September Fall Faculty Conference, or one of the School Meetings this fall; 77 percent had done so, and many had been present at more than one such event. Moreover, the survey captured input from some faculty who had not participated in the prior survey—20 percent of those who took the second survey (or 31 out of 162) reported that they were new respondents.

### From the second Faculty Survey: *“Did you attend one of the following:”*

Town Hall Meeting (Spring 2013):	33%
Fall Faculty Conference (Sept. 2013):	85%
School Meeting (Fall 2013):	68%

The three areas of most confusion—the questions about impact on curriculum, funding, and faculty research—saw the most change between surveys. Almost 30 percent of the first faculty survey respondents thought there would be a somewhat or very negative impact on the college’s commitment to general



education, and slightly more held that there would be a somewhat or very negative impact on liberal arts. Roughly a third of respondents of the first faculty survey thought there would be no significant change for either general education or liberal arts. By contrast, 40 and 41 percent of the second survey takers thought there would be no difference for either of these two areas. Just over 23 percent maintained that there would be a somewhat or very positive impact on Stockton's commitment to general education, while 35 percent held that there would be a somewhat or very negative impact. Similarly, 23.4 percent thought there would be a somewhat or very positive impact on institutional commitment to the Liberal Arts, while 34.3 percent thought that transition to comprehensive university status might result in a somewhat or very negative impact.<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, 38.9 percent of the first survey takers thought that becoming a comprehensive university would entail significantly higher research expectations for faculty, and an additional 34.7 percent thought there would be at least a small increase. Only 14.2 percent of the first faculty survey respondents thought expectations would remain the same. In the second survey, however, 26 percent thought research expectations would remain the same, while 38.6 percent thought it would increase some; 25.9 percent, however, maintained that it would increase appreciably.

At the same time, questions that had previously been scored high, such as impact on institutional reputation and student recruitment, remained strong, and in some cases even grew. For example, 75 percent of faculty thought that comprehensive university status would enhance Stockton's reputation in South Jersey, 73 percent thought it would do so throughout the state.<sup>4</sup>

Perceptions for student recruitment also increased. A total of 64 percent believed comprehensive university status would be either somewhat positive (28 percent) or very positive (36 percent) for undergraduate recruitment. Numbers for graduate and international recruitment were higher still at 80 percent for both categories.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> These figures include, for general education: 15.8 percent (Very Positive), 7.6 percent (Somewhat Positive), 20.3 percent (Somewhat Negative) and 14.6 percent (Very Negative). Only one respondent indicated that they "did not know." For liberal arts: 15.2 percent (Very Positive), 8.2 percent (Somewhat Positive), 17.7 percent (Somewhat Negative), and 16.5 percent (Very Negative). Again, only one respondent indicated that he or she "did not know."

<sup>4</sup> Scores on reputation ranged somewhat from impact within the region, state, students, alumni, and community partners, but were high overall, varying only from 63.4 percent from alumni to 75 percent from residents for reputation in the South Jersey region.

<sup>5</sup> Another 31 percent, 19 percent, and 18 percent thought re-classification would have no impact on undergraduate, graduate and international student recruitment respectively, while only 3.1 percent, or 5 respondents, and 1.2 percent, or 1 respondent, thought there would be a somewhat or very negative effect on undergraduate recruitment. No one believed there would be a negative impact on either graduate or international student recruitment.

## Costs

Stockton recently underwent two instances of re-branding, the commemoration of the college's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the transition from "New Jersey's Green College" to "New Jersey's Distinctive Public College." Prospective costs of a potential change in status are drawn from these two name changes, as well as the information the Task Force was able to obtain from institutions that have previously undergone reclassification. Such information is limited, however, and shaped by when the transition occurred, the size and geographic reach of the institution, and whether it was a singular or multi-campus event.

Stockton's recent branding changes required significant reworking of promotional materials (printed and online), as well as more functional goods (such as letterhead, business cards). The Office of External Affairs and Institutional Research estimated that at least \$150,000 would be needed to modify existing college materials, some of which are updated or reprinted annually so would be absorbed as regular operating costs; an additional \$250,000 is estimated for a state-wide marketing campaign. Published accounts of total name change expenses from other schools varied from \$500,000 to \$1 million, depending on the size and location of the school, as well as whether they reflected larger multi-campus transitions.

## Conclusion

The most complicated aspect of this issue is identifying concrete advantages and disadvantages, particularly as many concerns on either side of this debate are not easily quantifiable. Potential benefits include:

- Alignment with Stockton's current reality (as evidenced by its Middle States, Carnegie, and U.S. News and World Report, and Princeton Review classifications—all of which already consider the college a comprehensive university and measure it against other such institutions in their rankings);
- Enhanced recruitment potential, especially for international students and faculty, as well as potential impact on collaborations with institutions of other nations;
- Enhanced recruitment potential for undergraduate students, at least in the short term, as well as graduate students;
- Capturing a perceived increase in status within higher education framework and the general public;
- No change to the college's culture of high contact with students, respect and diversity, nor its commitment to the liberal arts, general education, and research standards set by programs; and
- An opportunity for the institution to show its pride in its accomplishments and successful growth.

But the decision is far from clear-cut, and valid concerns have been raised as well. Many of these focus on concerns over misperceptions:

- While some anticipate that a name change will improve recruitment, the longer-term prognosis is otherwise; becoming a comprehensive university will not likely precipitate a sustained change in the composition or size of the majority of Stockton’s student body;
- Likewise, although some constituencies held that reclassification might help Stockton acquire additional funding from the state, that is unlikely, and fiscal allocation will remain unchanged;
- While some respondents see a benefit to “no change” in teaching load, class size, research expectations, or distribution of resources, others justifiably ask why the move is significant if there is so little impact; and
- Moving from a “good” college to a “mediocre” university; faculty in particular were concerned that rather than a perceived status upgrade, becoming a comprehensive university might raise expectations of potential students and parents, who would be disappointed when they saw no real institutional modifications following a name change.

Perhaps the biggest concern, however, revolves around the implications for reclassification for institutional history, mission, and self-definition. Since its formation in 1969, Stockton has sought to set itself apart from its competitors. Those who oppose transition are apprehensive that if the college becomes a comprehensive university, Stockton may become too much like other state universities and lose its credibility as a “distinctive” institution.

Overall, however, survey data trends suggest support for considering reclassification to comprehensive university status. Among all participating constituencies—faculty, staff, students, alumni, and the general public—there was a majority which supported the transition, and while the margin of this majority varied by group, such responses merit pursuing this question further.

From its inception, the Task Force on University Status recognized that its membership—comprised of faculty and administration—was limited. A broader, pan-college Task Force, including student, staff and alumni members, as well as representatives from outside the campus, is needed to consider a question of this significance. We always, in other words, considered our activities as a first step in collecting information for the Faculty Senate to review. Had there been little interest, or significant resistance, the question of reclassification could have been considered a valuable exercise of institutional review. But as the response trended in favor of transition among all constituencies of campus as well as the general public, the Task Force recommends that the conversation continue under the aegis of a larger college committee.

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## Task Force on University Status Web Address:

[http://loki.stockton.edu/~assembly/committees/univ\\_status/index.html](http://loki.stockton.edu/~assembly/committees/univ_status/index.html)

This website contains the following reports and background information:

### REPORTS

Second Faculty Survey on University Status – Jan 2014

Public Survey on University Status - June 2013

Alumni Survey on University Status - May 2013

Student Survey on University Status - March 2013

Prospective Parent Survey, Open Houses, March 2013

Prospective Student Survey, Open Houses, March 2013

Staff Survey on University Status - Feb 2013

Faculty Survey on University Status - Feb 2013

This website also contains the Faculty/Staff and Student/Alumni Town Hall Meeting introductions and PowerPoint presentations.

Task Force Meeting Minutes are also available on this site.