

## Introduction

Cotley College is a two-year independent liberal arts college for women located in Nevada, Missouri. Virginia Alice Cotley founded the College in 1884 on the belief that women should have the same educational opportunities to develop their potential as men. In 1927, she presented the College as a gift to the P.E.O. Sisterhood, a philanthropic educational organization dedicated to furthering women's educational opportunities. Today, Cotley is the only nonsectarian college in the United States owned by women for women.

Cotley's status as a women's college remains firm. Historically, women's colleges have provided excellent opportunities for the development of their students' potential. According to information compiled by the Women's College Coalition, the record of these colleges in producing female scholars, scientists, Congresswomen, and corporate leaders exceeds the record demonstrated by coeducational institutions.

At Cotley the advantages of the environment at a women's college are complemented by the values of the P.E.O. Sisterhood. These values include a strong belief in the intellectual and leadership abilities of women. Originally a small college society, P.E.O. chose to expand off campus soon after its founding at Iowa Wesleyan College in 1869. From its inception, the P.E.O. Sisterhood has taken an active role in promoting educational opportunities for women. The organization supports Cotley and four other projects. The

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Educational Fund, established in 1907, makes loans available to women pursuing higher education. The International Peace Scholarship, initiated in 1949, provides grants for women from other countries for graduate study in the United States and Canada (and are awarded to a limited number of international Cottey students). The Program for Continuing Education, established in 1973, gives financial assistance to women who resume studies due to changing demands in society and in their lives. The Scholar Award, established in 1991, presents significant scholarships to women who are pursuing advanced degrees or are engaged in study and research. More information on the P.E.O. Sisterhood is available on their Web site: [www.peointernational.org](http://www.peointernational.org).

The academic tradition at the College is rooted in the liberal arts, and Cottey dedicates itself to preparing its students for transfer to baccalaureate-granting institutions. The College offers the Associate in Arts and the Associate in Science degrees through a broadly-based foundation in the liberal arts. No majors are selected by students, although academic advising is based on their prospective majors at other institutions.

Cottey's faculty are highly qualified, with most holding either the doctoral degree or the terminal degree in their field. The average class size is 13; the student/faculty ratio is currently 9 to 1.

Cultural diversity is an important dynamic at Cottey--students learn to appreciate differences and form friendships with women from across the United States and around the world. Each fall the College enrolls approximately 325 students from 38 to 40 states, one or more Canadian provinces, and 15 to 20 other countries. With the exception of Missouri, which has comprised approximately 13 percent of the student population for the past two years, no one state is represented by more than ten percent of the total student population.

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The attractive and well-maintained campus is located in a pleasant rural setting on the western edge of Nevada, the seat of Vernon County. The location in a small Midwestern town, free from many distractions found in large urban areas, allows for a special sense of community. The physical plant includes 12 buildings on an 11-block campus, President's House two blocks east of campus, and a lodge on a nearby 33-acre tract of land (B.I.L. Hill) belonging to the College.

### **Accreditation History**

Cottey College was accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) on March 27, 1941. The College has maintained accredited status continuously since then. Comprehensive on-site evaluations occurred in 1973, 1983, and 1993. The 1983 visit was followed by a focus visit in 1986. The 1993 on-site evaluation recommended continued accreditation until 2003. A brief history of Cottey appears in the Catalog (pp. 5-6.)

### **Audience for the Self-Study Report**

The primary audience for the Self-Study Report is the members of the consultant-evaluation team that will visit Cottey April 28-30, 2003. The College's constituencies--faculty, staff, students, trustees, alumnae, and members of the P.E.O. Sisterhood--are also important audiences, as they were involved in the evaluation and analysis necessary to produce the report.

### **Self-Study Process**

In December 1999, Harold M. Ross, then vice president for academic affairs (VPAA), distributed a timeline for the self-study process. As planned, the President appointed Dr. Ross as the coordinator for the self-study in the spring of 2000, and he developed the self-study plan during the spring and summer of 2001. The President appointed a steering committee in September 2001, although it was not the existing Campuswide Planning Committee as

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originally suggested in the 1999 outline. Following is a list of the committee membership:

- Anne Bunton, Professor of Economics and Business, Chair of the Social Science Division
- Catherine Campbell, Professor of French, Chair of the Humanities Division
- Rosemary Fowler, Professor of Chemistry, Chair of the Science and Mathematics Division
- Dyke Kiel, Professor of Music, Chair of the Fine Arts Division (in July 2002, replaced Donnalynn Collings, Professor of Dance, Chair of the Fine Arts Division, 1999-2002)
- Michael Emery, Associate Professor of English
- Mary Kitterman, Vice President for Academic Affairs (replaced Harold M. Ross, July 2002)
- Mari Anne Phillips, Dean of Student Life
- Janie Bossert, Assistant Dean for Academic Administration, Registrar
- Nancy Kerbs, Coordinator of Institutional Research
- Emily Bayyouk, Class of 2003
- Kelly Carroll, Class of 2003

At the first meeting of the steering committee, the goals for the self-study process and the self-study plan proposed by the VPAA were discussed and approved. The goals and the plan were distributed at a faculty-administrative staff meeting in October 2001. (See Appendix 1-A for a copy of the self-study plan and original goals.)

The criteria for accreditation provided the basis for the organization of the self-study. Participants included draft writers, section coordinators, and review sub-committees. Draft writers provided pertinent data, wrote rough drafts for their assigned sections, and submitted them to the coordinators for each section. The section coordinators assembled the rough drafts into a readable narrative for their assigned section, producing the first draft of the report. The self-study staff assistant worked with the section coordinators to reduce and refine the narrative into a second draft, sending it by sections to 12 review sub-committees. The committees met in February 2002 to discuss

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progress on the second draft. (See Appendix 1-B for a list of draft writers and section coordinators.)

Members of the steering committee chaired the review sub-committees and selected the sub-committee members. Each faculty member served on a committee, along with several staff members. Staff areas represented included professional, secretarial, technical, service, and maintenance. Since the draft writers were closely associated with the areas and programs outlined in the drafts, this process allowed for an objective and thorough review of the second draft. (See Appendix 1-C for a list of sub-committees and membership.)

During the week of March 18, 2002, review sub-committee members received a draft of the section, information on the appropriate criterion and general institutional requirements, and a sheet to make notes about the four themes on which the the steering committee sought comment: accuracy of information; appropriate criteria and general institutional requirements addressed; any omissions; and any other comments or suggestions. Those themes also guided the meetings, scheduled during the week of March 25. The chairs of the sub-committees submitted notes from the meetings to the self-study staff assistant, the week of April 1. (See Appendix 1-D for a copy of the notes sent to review sub-committees members.)

On May 13, 2002, the VPAA and self-study coordinator announced his resignation, effective at the end of the month. The President appointed Nancy Kerbs, coordinator of institutional research, as self-study coordinator. At its meeting on May 16, the steering committee members volunteered to use the comments from the review sub-committees to transform the second draft into a more evaluative document that carefully considered the pattern of evidence of the criteria. Another change in committee membership took place when the chair of the fine arts division resigned due to the relocation of her spouse. She was replaced by the newly elected chair of that division.

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In November 2002, the third draft of the report was reviewed by five focus groups (one for each criterion) comprised of faculty, staff, and students selected by the steering committee. During the week of November 4, the group members received a draft of the criterion they would review along with notes on the patterns of evidence for the criterion, an explanation of what makes a self-study evaluative, and a list of questions with space to make comments. (See Appendix 1-E for the list of questions and a list of focus group members.)

The self-study coordinator attended the meetings to take notes on the discussion and incorporated suggestions into the fourth draft of the report. On December 20, members of the Self-Study Steering Committee and the President's administrative council were sent copies of the fourth draft for their comments and suggestions. The final draft was distributed to the committee and the administrative council and posted on the College's intranet in late January 2003.

### **Goals of the Self-Study Process**

As stated above, the committee approved goals September 2001. As the steering committee prepared to present its progress on the self-study to the college community at the opening meeting in August 2002, the goals were reviewed and recast since the leadership of the process had changed. Discussions during July established the following goals to guide the process through the completion of the report and the visit of the consultant-evaluation team in April 2003.

- Demonstrate the ability of Cottey's constituencies to evaluate and analyze the College's effectiveness in accomplishing its mission and purposes.
- Identify Cottey's strengths, concerns, and issues for the future within each of the five criteria for accreditation.
- Identify progress made since 1993 in improving communication.
- Identify progress made since 1993 in articulating and implementing a program for assessing student academic achievement.

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- Consider whether the goals that accompany Cottey's mission provide a framework for an effective assessment program.
  - Gain continued accreditation for ten years.

### **Resources for the Self-Study Process**

Cottey has devoted considerable resources to the self-study process in order to provide the optimal opportunity to evaluate the College's performance related to the criteria. Attendance at annual meetings of the Higher Learning Commission was very useful in conducting the self-study report process and preparing the report. The following people attended the meetings:

March 2002 - Harold M. Ross, Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Michael Emery, Associate Professor of English  
Nancy Kerbs, Coordinator of Institutional Research

April 2001 - Michael Emery, Associate Professor of English  
Nancy Kerbs, Coordinator of Institutional Research

April 2000 - Harold M. Ross, Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Mary Haggans, Chief Financial Officer

In addition, Cottey used the services of assessment and accreditation consultants Jane Hunter and Carroll Bennett. Dr. Hunter is dean emeritus at Western Nebraska Community College and worked in the Chicago offices of NCA when she served as an interim associate director 1996-97. She served as an NCA consultant-evaluator from 1985-96, making 21 visits to colleges. Mr. Bennett served in a variety of positions at Des Moines Area Community College, including chief academic officer. He has visited 33 colleges as a consultant-evaluator, chairing 20 visitation teams, including a team to Japan in 1993. Their advice and constructive comments on assessment and the self-study process were a valuable resource.

Valuable assistance in the technical preparation of the report was provided by Deana Kerbs, administrative secretary to the VPAA, Diane Martin, administrative secretary to the dean of student life, and Amber Rosenberg, Class of 2003.

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## **Surveys**

The Self-Study Report makes reference to several surveys and questionnaires. Following is information about their content and administration. (See Appendix 1-F for copies of the following surveys. More information is available in the Resource Room.)

### **Personal Assessment of the College Environment (PACE)**

In April 2002, the Personal Assessment of the College Environment (PACE) was administered to all 161 employees. Of those 161, 142 (88.2%) completed and returned the instrument. PACE was administered to obtain the perceptions of personnel concerning the College climate and to promote more open and constructive communication among faculty, staff, and administrators. The survey uses a five-point scale. Researchers at the National Initiative for Leadership and Institutional Effectiveness (NILIE) worked with the President to create a survey that would reflect opinions of all personnel throughout the College. The instrument was designed to compare the climate at Cottey to a norm base and to a range of four different managerial systems found to exist in colleges.

### **Understanding the College Goals**

Administered during the fall semester 2002 to faculty, staff, students, trustees, the executive officers of the P.E.O. Sisterhood, and a sample of P.E.O.s and alumnae. The survey seeks information from the individuals in these groups on their level of understanding of the College's goals. There were four levels of understanding. It also asked respondents if the College's goals support the values of higher education, inform decision-making processes, and flow from the mission.

### **ACT Student Opinion Survey**

The ACT Student Opinion Survey (SOS) was administered to first-year students on Assessment Day in 1999 (75%), 2000 (27%), 2001 (79%), and 2002 (83%). The information in parentheses is the percentage of first-

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year students who completed the survey. The SOS identifies levels of student satisfaction with various programs and services and the college environment. Cottey uses the four-year college form because the programs and services as well as the environmental questions match the College's programs more closely than the two-year college form.

### **Cottey Student Mission and Goals Survey**

This survey breaks Cottey's mission and goals statement into its various components. Students are asked to rate how well Cottey achieved its mission and goals with respect to their education. A five-point Likert scale is used, with one being not at all, and five being very much. The survey is administered to students every year since 1999 on Assessment Day

### **Academic Program Questionnaire**

The Academic Program Questionnaire is a survey of alumnae distributed by mail in summer 2001 to the classes of 1991-1998. The survey was mailed to 1,184 former students; 365 responded (31%). It asks former students to respond on a five-point Likert scale (with 5 being the highest ranking), specifying the degree to which their Cottey education helped them progress in each of the Cottey goals. It also seeks information about the former students' experience in transferring to another institution.

### **ACT College Outcomes Survey**

The ACT College Outcomes Survey (COS) was administered on Assessment Day in 1999 (75%), 2000 (27%), and 2001 (79%). The information in parentheses is the percentage of first-year students who completed the survey. In 2002, both first- and second-year students responded to the survey on Assessment Day. The response rate in 2002 was 83 percent for first-year students and 90 percent for second-year students. The COS measures student perceptions of their growth in a variety of dimensions--some of which correlate closely with the goal statements that accompany Cottey's mission.

