How to Conduct an Institutional Effectiveness Audit of Administrative Units: A Case Study

Braden J. Hosch, Ph.D.
Central Connecticut State University
New Britain, CT

This paper presents a case study of a small public comprehensive university’s efforts to improve institutional effectiveness through an initiative to review and restructure the assessment system of its administrative units. Drawing upon theories about management process controls, the paper outlines how unit review processes were evaluated and procedural changes were made to provide useful assessment results.

Introduction

Environmental pressures on higher education institutions for accountability to demonstrate efficient use of resources and to improve educational effectiveness have generated significant focus on assessment of the academic enterprise, with a well-placed emphasis on student learning outcomes (Banta, 2003). As American higher education grapples with increased global competition as well as changing student populations, such efforts should continue to advance in order to produce more graduates who can think creatively and compete in a global economy (Florida, 2004; Friedman, 2003). At the same time, attention to the operation of administrative or “nonacademic” units, ranging from the registrar to advancement to purchasing, has generally not risen to the same level, especially in terms of identifying outcomes for student learning or in other areas and assessing the extent to these outcomes have been achieved. Attention to the effectiveness of administrative units, however, is necessary to advance the institutional mission and achieve excellence (Keller, 1983).

This case study presents how a small public comprehensive university in the south conducted an examination of the effectiveness of its practice of administrative units providing annual reports or “program reviews,” which served as the basis for monitoring their effectiveness. The evaluation project identified three primary intended outcomes from the review: (1) promote institutional effectiveness through a focus on outcomes at the unit level, (2) improve unit performance and management, and (3) demonstrate compliance with accreditation requirements.

The end result of the evaluation led the institution to revise its guidelines for annual reports prepared and delivered by administrative units. The resulting standardized guidelines were designed to:

- Provide readers with an overview of the unit’s overall performance as well as areas of strength and weakness as determined by a research-based assessment program;
- Serve as a management tool to track and improve performance;
- Transmit and justify requests for resource allocation for the next fiscal year; and
- Comply with accreditation requirements.

1 Braden Hosch is the Director of Institutional Research and Assessment at Central Connecticut State University. In the spirit of full disclosure, the current research does not pertain to Central Connecticut State University but rather was conducted in 2006-07 at a small public comprehensive university in the south.
Background

While significant attention has been paid in recent years to the review of academic programs and their educational effectiveness, the body of literature devoted to the review of how administrative units achieve their intended outcomes is slight by comparison. Beginning in the late 1980s, institutional researchers called some attention to the need to examine the effectiveness of administrative units, both calling for more sustained evaluation of administrative services and offering some strategies for conducting a review (Wergin & Braskamp, 1987). In the late 1980s, the University of Maryland College Park developed a set of guidelines for a review process of administrative or “nonacademic” units using a modified self-study approach (Brown, 1989; 1990). Some of this direct application has also been summarized for an approach that can be generalized more widely (Brown & Reichard, Setting and evaluating objectives and outcomes in nonacademic units, 1989), and in the past several years, some institutions (Boston College, 2007; University of Iowa, 2007) have initiated far-reaching administrative program review guidelines and procedures, although this practice does not appear to be widespread.

As Brown observes, a significant limitation of the intensive self-study approach is the level of resources required to carry them out, and because of their extensiveness, it is impossible to conduct them every year. This shortcoming can limit the flow of valuable information to decision makers who need to monitor these units and make decisions about resource allocation and program development to achieve strategic ends.

Since the advent in the last decade of significant changes to accreditation standards that emphasize institutional effectiveness and outcomes assessment, universities have been even more pressured to demonstrate effectiveness of administrative units. The Southern Association for Colleges and Schools, for instance, requires that an institution “identifies expected outcomes for its … administrative and educational support services; assesses whether it achieves these outcomes; and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results” (SACS, 2004, 3.3.1). The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2006) as well as the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (2005) have provisions for institutional effectiveness related to student services and operations that indicate a similar focus on outcomes and research-based assessment processes are certainly expected.

Outside of the higher education sector, examination of processes for monitoring and improving the performance of organizational units has been more thorough. These processes are characterized as management control systems (Anthony, 1965; Simons, Levers of control: How managers use innovative control systems to drive strategic renewal, 1995). These systems take on various forms, but as Simons (1999) suggests, effective management control systems are best characterized as “formal, information-based routines and procedures managers use to maintain or alter patterns in organizational activities.” (p. 6). These systems tend to share several salient functions:

1. They convey information with a focus on data that can be used for decision-making.
2. They represent formal routines and procedures that include the collection, recording and analysis of data on a regular cycle.
3. They convey information useful to managers or those at higher levels of the organization (as opposed to operational day-to-day information useful to someone on the production line)
4. They include information that can be used to maintain performance or make changes in organizational activities.
Importantly, these systems include a feedback loop (Otley, 1999), and there is empirical evidence that success in planned organizational change lies in part in well-developed management control systems (Ford & Greer, 2005). Aside from personnel evaluation, application of management control systems has been much less formalized in the public sector because of the challenges faced by not-for-profit organizations that may have diverse or ambiguous goals and value structures as well as wide ranges in expertise among unit-level management (Tankersley & Grizzle, 1994).

In higher education in particular, management control systems are often operationalized by means of an annual report. Such reports are often produced for an immediate supervisor and may be used in some fashion, but the extent to which they convey regularly collected data about the unit that has been fashioned into useful information to serve as the basis for decision-making has not garnered significant attention.

**Institutional Context**

In the early spring of 2006, this small public comprehensive university began an examination of the annual reports prepared by administrative units on its campus. The impetus for this study had its roots in two external pressures as well as one internal change.

First, like many other regional accreditors, SACS, the regional accreditation body for the university, had revised its guidelines for the reaffirmation of accreditation in the past decade. These new guidelines required administrative units and programs to identify outcomes, assess through research the extent to which these outcomes were accomplished, and use the findings to improve programs and services. Before the review of administrative annual reports was conducted, campus constituencies were uncertain about, if not skeptical that, current practice fulfilled these requirements.

Second, the University had been required by the state to complete an annual Baldrige-style accountability report. This report focused heavily on institutional performance indicators but also a description and analysis of processes and systems that were designed to promote quality and continuous improvement. These areas included (1) Senior Leadership; (2) Strategic Planning; (3) Student, Stakeholder and Market Focus; (4) Measurement, Analysis, and Review of Organizational Performance; (5) Faculty and Staff Focus; and (6) Process Management. None of the guidelines in these reports specifically required the institution to report on or to examine how administrative units function or report results. Nevertheless, the overarching focus on processes that promote quality raised questions among the senior leadership of the institution about the effectiveness of the annual reporting system.

Finally, within the University the academic departments had been required by the Chief Academic Officer to report the results of their efforts to assess student learning outcomes in their annual reports. In addition to assessment results, these reports included typical enrollment and faculty metrics, faculty and program accomplishments, and budget requests for the year. To provide feedback, the Academic Council reviewed these reports annually, and the Academic Assessment Committee reviewed these them on a three-year cycle. On the administrative side, however, no formal review cycles were in place, and so implementation of a similar review cycle to the administrative units in the institution seemed like a logical extension of a review process that appeared to be producing results.

From inception to implementation of the revised guidelines for administrative annual reports, support from the senior administration was critical in success. The University’s Chancellor was interested in identifying in a very transparent way the institution’s strengths and weaknesses,
communicating these “warts and all” to relevant constituencies, and developing ways to make the institution better. The other senior leaders shared this philosophy and also generally agreed that the current system was not providing them or the managers who worked for them with optimally useful information.

**Methodology**

From this context, the institution’s Office of Institutional Effectiveness – a unit responsible for institutional research and assessment – undertook a comprehensive evaluation of the program review process for administrative units, offices, and programs and the University to determine its effectiveness in promoting quality and the extent to which the process will meet new SACS accreditation guidelines.

A proposal with a timeline was presented to the senior administration. It should be underscored that the purpose of this project was not to identify strong or weak programs but rather to identify strengths and weaknesses in the overall program review process. This proposal listed the following questions to be answered from the evaluation of the program review process:

- How many program review reports are submitted each year?
- Who reads reports and what kinds of feedback do they give?
- To what extent do reports identify goals and objectives for outcomes?
- To what extent do reports document a research-based assessment process?
- To what extent are assessment results used for improvement?
- To what extent are assessment results tied to the budgetary process?

The proposal also listed the intended outcome of the evaluation project, which was to implement a program review process that:

- Produces useful results about outcomes that are used for
  - Program improvement
  - Resource allocation
- Is valued by all stakeholders
- Is manageable and sustainable
- Demonstrates compliance with SACS Principles of Accreditation 2.5. and 3.3.1

The guidelines for annual program review reports that were developed as a result of this project appear in the Appendix.

Following a discussion of the need for this project, members of the senior administration agreed to forward to the IE Office copies of program review reports for 2003-04 and 2004-05 of units housed in their division. These reports were archived in electronic format on a password protected web site. Forty-two separate units and divisions were represented in the archive. Thirty-six program review reports (five were Division-level summaries) were archived for 2003-04, and 37 program review reports (five were Division-level summaries) were archived for 2004-05, for a total of 73 program review reports in the evaluation study. In all, 33 units or programs had a program review report for both years. This total represented about 90% of all annual program review reports; it was not deemed necessary to have 100% of the program review reports to develop an accurate picture of the effectiveness of the program review process.

A rubric with 16 items judged to be important elements of program review reports was developed – some of these items were deemed to be minimal requirements for inclusion in a program review.
report, while others were judged to be elements that would be optimal for directors and senior leaders to monitor program quality and effectiveness in a meaningful way. These items were divided into three broad categories: (1) Mission, Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes; (2) Assessment; and (3) Closing the Loop: Improvements and Resource Allocation.

As a way to anchor the rubric, brief descriptions of each item were listed on the evaluation instrument (see Figure 1). The rating scale allowed reviewers to indicate whether specific elements were “Not Present,” “Developing,” “Developed,” or “Exemplary.” A representation of this rubric is provided in Table 1. In addition, the evaluation instrument allowed for reviewers to indicate noteworthy positive and negative features of individual reports as well as any other relevant comments.

Staff members in the IE Office were trained on the use of the rubric and rater responses were normalized through group review of four program review reports from 2003-04 and 2004-05. Reports were divided by unit roughly into thirds so that three staff members were assigned to evaluate reports of 11-13 units from both years, or about 20-25 reports. The rubric was placed online using the TLT Flashlight web-based survey package in order to capture data electronically without additional data entry. This evaluation process was especially convenient since the program review reports had already been placed in the online program review archive. In practice, because one member of the office was absent for extended periods of time in early 2006, two reviewers read closer to half of the reports. In all cases, a reviewer read a unit’s 2003-04 submission as well as its 2004-05 submission. The Director of Institutional Effectiveness read all 73 program review reports from both years. In some cases, where elements appears difficult to rate, reviewers would consult and determine joint ratings, at times referring to reports from other programs to make ratings consist. This resulted in some reports being read by three reviewers rather than just two. The structure of this process allowed for each report to be read and reviewed at least twice by a member of the IE Staff.

Results from these reviews were gathered electronically using TLT Flashlight, an online survey package, and exported into Excel and SPSS for analysis. Data were included for a total of 151 evaluations of 39 discrete programs over two years where available. Rater consistency indicated reasonable reliability: exact agreement was observed among raters in 70% of all cases, and in 25% of cases ratings differed only by one increment on the scale. The inter-rater reliability in this case was acceptable (Pearson’s \( \rho = 0.644, p<0.001 \); Cohen’s \( \kappa = 0.45, p<0.001 \)) for the purposes of establishing relative strengths and weaknesses of the system of annual reports, but not reliable enough to compare among individual reports.

Mean item values were calculated for each item on the rubric in order to compare overall performance and identify strengths and weaknesses in the system. Values were assigned to ratings as follows: 4=Exemplary, 3=Developed, 2=Developing, 1=Not Present. All ratings from both 2003-04 and 2004-05 program review reports were averaged for each program and programs and scores were developed for each area of every program using the following ranges: 3.50-4.00=Exemplary, 2.51-3.49=Developed, 1.51-2.50=Developing, 1.00-1.50=Not Present. It should be underscored that these ratings are most reliable in describing the program review process as a whole and are less reliable in their descriptions of reports from specific programs. However, even in cases where evaluators disagreed, these differences were just one level apart, except in 5% of cases, and typically these disagreements were in the middle ranges, i.e. one evaluator indicated that the element was “developed” while another indicated that it was “developing.”

Finally, members of the senior administrators were interviewed to gather a sense for how the reports are used, how feedback is provided and what resources are devoted for improvement.
## Figure 1. Contents of the Evaluation Rubric

*Evaluation scale: 4=Exemplary, 3=Developed, 2=Developing, 1=Not Present*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Mission, Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mission Statement</strong>&lt;br&gt;A general statement is provided about what the unit or program does and what role it plays in the university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Measures or Performance Indicators</strong>&lt;br&gt;Clear, quantifiable, and summarized data that demonstrate the success -- effectiveness, efficiency, or health -- of the unit or program are listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Operational Goals</strong>&lt;br&gt;Broad statements of what the unit intends to do on an ongoing basis (not goals for a specific year) are listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Operational Objectives</strong>&lt;br&gt;Measurable subcategories of each goal (not objectives for a specific year) are listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcomes (Goals and/or Objectives)</strong>&lt;br&gt;What clients (students, faculty, staff, or others) do as a result of the program or unit’s activities is listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Linkage to University Mission or Strategic Plan</strong>&lt;br&gt;Unit or program mission, goals, objectives, or outcomes explicitly mention which section of the University mission or strategic plan they address.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Assessment</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment Section</strong>&lt;br&gt;A section of the report is devoted to assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Measurements are Research-Based</strong>&lt;br&gt;Data are provided to demonstrate success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trend Data is Provided</strong>&lt;br&gt;Data are provided for more than one year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comparative Data is Provided</strong>&lt;br&gt;Data from comparable institutions or units is provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Measurements are Linked to Operational Goals, Objectives, or Outcomes</strong>&lt;br&gt;The data provided are explicitly connected to an operational goal, objective or outcome listed in the report to show how effectively it has been implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major Strengths and Weaknesses are Identified</strong>&lt;br&gt;The report shows which goals, objectives, or outcomes are most successfully and least successfully accomplished</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Closing the Loop: Improvements and Resource Allocation</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program Changes or Future Plans are Based on Assessment Data</strong>&lt;br&gt;Actions taken by the unit are based on findings from the assessment process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategies or Planned Actions for the Upcoming Year</strong>&lt;br&gt;Specific courses of action planned by the unit or program for implementation in the next academic year are listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resource Allocation Aligned with Program Goals, Objectives, Outcomes</strong>&lt;br&gt;Budgetary requests are linked to program goals, objectives, or outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resource Allocation Based on Assessment Data</strong>&lt;br&gt;Data are provided to support requests for budgetary increases</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings

Major findings suggested that the preparation of reports had become a part of the institutional culture, but aside from a few common factors, reports varied widely in contents and in usefulness. Overall, the results of the evaluation study identified five major findings:

(1) broad-based participation in the review process;
(2) common book-ends to reports, with a mission statement at the beginning and budget requests at the end;
(3) varying levels of feedback and oversight;
(4) underdeveloped accreditation compliance items, including weak or absent:
   - statements of expected outcomes,
   - linkages to the university mission or strategic plan,
   - research-based measurements,
   - description of program changes based on assessment results, and
   - resource allocation based on assessment results;
(5) absence of additional useful features such as
   - key measures/performance indicators,
   - operational goals,
   - operational objectives or outcomes,
   - consistent use of trend data,
   - broader use of comparative data, and
   - identification of major strengths and weaknesses.

Overall, program review reports submitted in 2004-05 and 2005-06 at the institution were found not to contain several elements required for a reaffirmation of accreditation by SACS. For only three items – Mission Statement, Strategies for the Upcoming Year, and the presence of an Assessment Section – were 70% or more of the ratings in the developing, developed, or exemplary range. For over half of all units or programs (those ranked #7-16), evaluators indicated the element was “not present” in their reports, and importantly, this set of missing elements includes outcomes, resource allocation, identification of program strengths and weaknesses, and making changes based on assessment data. Table 2 provides a summary of all ratings.

While in most areas, ratings remained constant or increased only slightly from 2003-04 to 2004-05, ratings indicated modest improvement from 2003-04 to 2004-05 program reviews in only two areas at statistically significant levels. These areas were 1) identification of strategies or planned actions for the upcoming year ($\eta^2 = 0.148$, $p<0.01$) and 2) the alignment of resource allocation with program goals, objectives, or outcomes ($\eta^2 = 0.156$, $p<0.05$). In both of these cases, however, it is important to observe that the level of improvement was nominal, with only 43% of ratings in the developed or exemplary range in 2004-05 for the former and 12% for the latter.

Given that the institution did not make a concerted effort to adjust program review requirements or processes during this period, it is not surprising that improvements in only two areas were observed, and that these changes over a one-year period were nominal in any case. To the extent that the University takes steps to adjust the program review process, however, these initial evaluations may serve as a baseline from which improvement can be measured.
Table 2. Overall Summary of Ratings of Program Review Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Not Present</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Developed</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mission Statement</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
<td>149</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Strategies or Planned Actions for the Upcoming Year</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>149</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Assessment Section</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>150</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Measurements are Research-Based</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>148</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Key Measures or Performance Indicators</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>149</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Operational Goals</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
<td>149</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Trend Data is Provided</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>148</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Linkage to University Mission or Strategic Plan</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>147</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Outcomes (Goals and/or Objectives)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
<td>148</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Operational Objectives</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
<td>149</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Measurements are Linked to Operational Goals, Objectives, or Outcomes</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>150</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Resource Allocation Based on Assessment Data</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>145</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Major Strengths and Weaknesses are Identified</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>148</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Program Changes or Future Plans are Based on Assessment Data</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>150</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Resource Allocation Aligned with Program Goals, Objectives, Outcomes</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>148</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Comparative Data is Provided</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
<td>148</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Program summary scale**: Exemplary=3.5+, Developed = 2.5-3.49, Developing=1.5-2.49, Not Present=Below 1.5. Program summary items represent weighted mean ratings for units of all reviews for both years of program review reports evaluated.

**Ratings summary scale**: 4=Exemplary, 3=Developed, 2=Developing, 1=Not Present; Target Mean = 3.00. The ratings summary represents the unweighted aggregate mean of all ratings.

Table 3. Improvement from 2003-04 to 2004-05 in Strategies of Planned Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies or Planned Actions for the Upcoming Year</th>
<th>Year of Program Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2003-04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Present</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed or exemplary</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Improvement from 2003-04 to 2004-05 in Resource Allocation Based on Assessment Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource Allocation Based on Assessment Data</th>
<th>Year of Program Review</th>
<th>2003-04</th>
<th>2004-05</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Present</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed or exemplary</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the material that follows, findings from the evaluation of each program review element are discussed in some depth. In addition to a chart showing a distribution of ratings, one or two examples are provided which are representative of program review reports in which the particular area was “developed.” Aspects rated as “developing” are also provided to exemplify particular aspects that could be further expanded or solidified. In the instances rated as “developing,” the name of the unit and other identifying material has been redacted in order to preserve the report’s function to identify weaknesses in the program review process rather than weaknesses in specific reports.

Mission Statement

The mission statement was far and away the most developed aspect of the administrative program reviews that were evaluated in this study. A total of 90% of mission statements were rated as “developed” or “exemplary,” with another 7% identified as “developing.” These statements did a good job of describing what the unit or program does and what role it plays in the university. The best statements offered an overview of the major functions of the area and how these functions fit into the university mission as a whole.

“Developed” Example:

**Office of Student Activities**

The primary mission of the Office of Student Activities is to identify and effectively address the social, educational, and recreational needs of students at various stages of their personal development through leadership and citizenship training programs, quality entertainment, community volunteerism, educational programming, and intramural and recreational activities for a diverse student body with a broad set of interests.

“Developing” Example:

**Program 1**

The [Name of Unit] supports the mission of the University by providing the most efficient level of quality, personalized service to all constituents. The [Unit’s Division] is committed to continuous quality, personalized service to all constituents. We are committed to continuous improvement while working within the appropriate federal, state and University system regulations.

The examples above with “developed” mission statements identify in two sentences the primary services or programs offered by the unit as well as some relationship to students and/or the university’s mission. Readers can discern these primary functions and purpose of the unit from this broad overview presented in the mission. By contrast, the removal of the name of the example of the program or unit from the mission statement rated as “developing,” poignantly highlights that the basic functions of the unit are not well-defined, and it is impossible to discern the unit’s identity from the text of the mission itself. The gestures toward quality, customer
service, and continuous improvement are important organizational values, but they do not help to define who or what the office or program does.

### Strategies or Planned Actions for the Upcoming Year

Strategies or planned actions for the upcoming year were rated as “developed” in 38% of the program review reports that were evaluated, “developing” in 48%, and not present in 15%. This category includes future plans, such as specific projects or actions that the unit has planned but is distinct from unit goals, objectives, or outcomes (all discussed below) which should reflect ongoing activities that derive from the unit’s mission.

#### “Developed” Example:

**Academic Support & the First Year Experience**

For 2005-06, the Academic Support Services and the First-Year Experience Office plans to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Obtain CRLA Level 1 Certification and make that available to tutors during training in Summer 2006.
2. Pilot Supplemental Instruction in two courses with Professional Tutors serving as SI Leaders.
3. Identify a comprehensive plan for Learning Communities (to be piloted in Fall 2006).
4. Pilot a program for students provisionally admitted to the university (Summer 2006).
5. Create remote Academic Success or Academic Excellence Centers in [residence halls], and identify additional areas for future centers.
6. Continue to develop a network of Professional Tutors by hiring tutors for Reading and Political Science.
7. Develop a reading resource area within the Writing Room.
8. Continue to grow and develop the First Year Seminar by adding additional sections of the course and piloting a Peer Leader program (Fall 2006).

#### “Developing” Examples:

The major goal for this department for 2004-05 is to train necessary administrators in accessing relevant sections of the [internet resource]. Training will also need to be provided to [group of employees] if the [name of item] module is completed during the year. Another goal is to add a web page for the office.

In the “developed” example above, the planned actions for the Office of Academic Support and First Year Experience separately list discrete objectives or activities along with some idea of how the plans will be carried out. The “developing” examples articulate planned actions, although each of these could be developed with additional specificity, such as an indication of method and depth of activity, purpose, and/or time frame. Additionally, the second year reports for most areas often did not address the extent to which these specific plans were executed.

### Assessment Section

The evaluation study indicated that 85% of program review reports had an assessment section of some sort, but this section was rated in the “developed” range in just less than a third (30%) of all reports, while about a sixth (15%) of report ratings for the assessment section were in the “not present” range. It is important to observe that the evaluation rubric for this particular item was perhaps the least well-defined, asking evaluators to judge the extent to which “a section of the report is devoted to assessment.” Thus, this overall evaluation may be more representative of the extent to which an assessment section of any sort was present in the report more so than the
quality of these sections. Nevertheless, the common inclusion of an assessment section in most reports indicates a broad recognition that assessment carries importance, even if the execution or communication of these evaluation practices could be improved upon.

“Developed” Example:

Public Safety (Overview of Contents)
Type Service/ Activity - Table of Frequencies
Law Enforcement – Discussion of activities w/ stats
Qualitative Measurements – no data provided but acknowledged this was not done
Summary of Crime Occurrences – Table
Fleet Safety - Discussion
Physical Plant Security - Discussion
University Housing – Time Usage
External Program Involvement – List of activities

“Developing” Example:

The average GPA for students [in Program/Unit] increased from 2.4 to 2.7. Survey results indicate 83% of the students completing the survey attributed an improvement in their grades to their increased use of the [Program/Unit]. [These two sentences represent the entire Assessment Section of the Program Review Report]

The quality and depth of assessment sections varied widely. While the better examples noted above were typically 3-5 pages long and organized by program goal or outcome with tables and/or charts, the weaker assessment sections were ½ page or less, and data provided often was not connected to goals, objectives, or outcomes. The findings from the evaluation study would tend to reflect the comments of one Vice Chancellor who stated in an interview that report preparers tend to “talk around assessment rather than use it.”

Research-Based Measurements
In the area of research-based measurements, only about a third of programs presented their findings in a way that demonstrated that research had been conducted in the assessment of the program. In general, reports that provided convincing quantified assessment results or summarized qualitative feedback were considered to have “developed” research-based measurements; this was true in a third (38%) of reports. Under half (43%) of the reports provided some data, but efforts to provide research-based were still developing. In a full quarter of the reports, research-based measurements were not provided at all, and were considered “not present.”

“Developed” Example:

Operations (Fleet Management)
Management of fleet vehicles at [the University] has become an increasingly complex task as vehicles spend more time on the road, leaving little downtime for upkeep. Last year our sedans averaged ___ miles each, and the vans and busses averaged ___ miles each. Due to increasing fuel costs, the reimbursement rate for vehicle usage by departments increased from 23.5 cents per mile to 28 cents per mile for sedans and 32 cents per mile for the vans and bus. Other fleet developments included an update to the vehicle use policy, and purchase of a new sedan. A new mini-bus has been ordered and is expected to arrive in November. The matrix below provides a general overview of vehicle use and current mileage. [Table of vehicles, use type, and mileage]
“Developing” Example:

The [name of survey] was taken by 499 students, the largest number of students to ever complete the survey. It was offered on-line for the first time and prizes were awarded through a drawing for those who provided their names for the drawing. The survey provided up-to-date information on [student behavior in area]. [No data or results provided; no appendix for survey findings]

In the better examples, data were provided in table or chart form. While there is still room for improvement for these measures, such as by providing the actual average miles or by averaging visits per day, the presentation of the data clearly demonstrates the data were collected and to some extent, what they mean. By contrast, in the weaker example, the report importantly notes that research was conducted by means of a survey but offers no picture of the overall findings or what was found that was important.

Key Measures or Performance Indicators

Key measures or performance indicators were defined for evaluators as “clear, quantifiable, and summarized data that demonstrate the success -- effectiveness, efficiency, or health -- of the unit or program are listed.” Essentially, this feature serves to indicate the success of the program or unit at a glance. For about a quarter of programs these key indicators were deemed to be reasonably “developed,” and they were judged to be “developing” for almost another half (48%) of programs, but the remaining quarter (28%) did not provide key measures or performance indicators. Further, this item was weak even in the most advanced program review reports, with the maximum rating awarded at 2.8 out of 4.0.

“Developed” Examples:

International Programs (Study Abroad)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2003-04</th>
<th>2004-05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of [institutional] programs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of students participating in [institution’s] programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prague</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of students participating in non-institutional programs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional scholarships awarded for study abroad</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Developing” Example:

The [Program Name] continues to result in solid numbers of [clients] as well as much better working relationships. The [specialized program] was introduced at [Location 1] in 1998 and approximately 175 students are presently participating in this program. [Location 2] and [Location 3] have also [specialized] programs [at their locations]. We have spent a great deal of time continuing to foster relationships related to the [specialized] programs at these [Locations]. [This indicator] has been an up and down affair recently, with a decrease in Fall ’03, a modest increase in Fall ’04, and another decrease in Fall ’05. More effort will be paid to this effort – especially now that the [Staff Employee Position] is not consumed with the effort to revamp our [Process]. [No additional data or accompanying charts were provided]

Reports in which key measures were found to be just developing or not present shared several characteristics: 1) data were buried in prose or not specifically provided, 2) data collected were not linked to important unit goals or objectives, and/or 3) trend data were not provided (see 17
below). Most importantly, a reader could not glance at the example in which key measures or performance results were rated as the “developing” or “not present” and easily discern important performance trends.

**Operational Goals**

The evaluation rubric defined operational goals as “broad statements of what the unit intends to do on an ongoing basis (not goals for a specific year),” and while about half (49%) of programs were developing these in some way, only about one out of five (19%) were rated as “developed” or “exemplary” in this area, while these operational goals were considered “not present” in about a third (32%) of the reports reviewed.

**“Developed” Example:**

**[Named] Science Education Center Goals**

A. Goal for K-12 Student Programs: Students will experience the richness and excitement of knowing about and understanding the natural world.

B. Goal for Community Outreach Programs: The CSRA community will actively support initiatives of the RPSEC through volunteerism and sponsorship.

C. Goal for Teacher Programs: In-service and pre-service teachers will deliver rigorous, standards-based content that challenges students to achieve at high levels in science and mathematics.

D. Goal for the RPSEC Staff: Fully fund the staff positions needed to carry out the RPSEC mission.

**“Developing” Example:**

One of our goals is to strengthen the entire [program name at University]. We plan to do that by making ourselves available to more professional development opportunities so that we can bring this information back to all of our [constituents]… we have been very vocal regarding the integral role [our staff] play in the development and retention of our students. … We also plan to present a [program area] training session facilitated by one or two of the most respected [area] “gurus” associated with the [name of the professional association]. We also continue to offer training/information sessions on a variety of topics and explore/investigate the best way to get this information to our [constituents].

The example of developed operational goals valuably divides the general mission of the unit into 3-5 areas and provides verb-driven actions that capture the primary activity associated with the goals. Further, these goals are valuably formulated as outcomes, stating what clients will do rather than what the program or program staff intend to do to promote these outcomes. The operational goals presented “developing” represent action items planned for the upcoming year but not an ongoing and sizeable portion of the unit’s purpose. Further, the goal to strengthen the entire program is vague and presumably continuous improvement is an expected result for all units. More typically, developing operation goals were buried in reports, not verb-driven, or not consonantly derived from the unit mission statement.

**Trend Data**

Trend data was identified as a “developed” characteristic of fewer than one out of five (18%) of program review reports, while it was rated as “developing” in another quarter (25%) of them. In many of these cases, however, only two years of data were provided – hardly a trend, but the gesture represents a key recognition on the part of this handful of programs that consistent year-to-year comparisons of performance are important. A clear majority (58%) of report, however,
provided no trend data at all, instead offering only an annual snapshot of quantifiable unit activities.

“Developed” Examples:

**Campus Support Services**  
State Procurement Card (Visa)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Liaisons</th>
<th>Cardholders</th>
<th>Transactions</th>
<th>Expended</th>
<th>Avg. Transaction Amt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>5570</td>
<td>$952,278</td>
<td>$171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>5450</td>
<td>$906,899</td>
<td>$166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>6386</td>
<td>$742,513</td>
<td>$116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Developing” Example:

[Specific examples deliberately not provided]

Reports that provided trend data at most offered four years of data, and two or three years was more common. These reports were typically more effective in conveying change over time than reports that simply made claims about change without providing data or by providing data only in prose. Most frequently, however, reports provided only annual snapshots of their performance data and also made readers actively look for these tables or charts. A reader who wished to examine annual change in unit performance would have to assemble multiple years of program review documents for the unit of interest and cull through the reports to assemble trend data, assuming indicators or data collected did not change from year to year. For instance, it is relatively easy to see that the amount of expenditures using credit cards declined between 2002-03 and 2004-05.

**Linkages to University Strategic Plan or Mission**

Only a few reports provided specific links between their program review reports and the University’s strategic plan or mission. Only 13% of programs had linkages to the strategic plan that were considered “developed, while 38% of reports were considered “developing: in this area. In half (50%) of the reports, linkages to the strategic plan or the university mission statement were considered “not present.”

“Developed” Examples:

**Marketing & Community Relations**

Publication - During the 2004-2005 year, the office added several new publications including a multicultural campus life brochure, an honors program brochure, and the alumni newsletter, which directly correlates with strategy 6.g.6.b. of the strategic plan.

Marketing - The office also develops an annual university-wide marketing plan. This plan is based on the strategic plan and is an encompassing plan for the entire university. Included is a marketing plan for the Continuing Education program, including the design and distribution of a bi-annual comprehensive catalog. This effort relates directly back to objective 5.e. of the strategic plan.

[This is not an exhaustive list from the report]

“Developing” Examples:
The overarching charge of the [Unit Name] is to provide internal and external constituencies with an accurate and complete understanding of how the institution is advancing its mission to “challenge students to acquire and develop the skills, knowledge and values necessary for success in a dynamic global environment.” [No other mention or connection to mission statement]

In the best cases, such as in the example above, the reports specifically mentioned a goal and strategy listed in the 2003 Strategic Planning document but did not reference material in the annual updates of the Strategic Plan. Connections to the university mission statement were somewhat less concrete, with occasional mentions that the unit supports the university mission, but it was often unclear from the report how this support was provided or accomplished. It should be observed that “linkage” can be a particularly ephemeral quality to measure, although a matrix of goals, objectives, and/or outcomes could have been provided to show connections.

Outcomes
Outcomes represent what clients, such as students, faculty, staff, or others (but not unit staff) do as a result of the unit’s efforts, programs, or activities. Explicit statement of unit- or program-level outcomes is now a requirement for re-accreditation through SACS (3.3.1). Fully two-thirds of reports did not present outcomes of their unit or program activities. In just over a quarter (27%), outcomes were considered developing, and in just 7% were outcomes considered developed or exemplary.

“Developed” Example:

**International Programs**

Goal 1. Students will have access to information about study abroad opportunities. Faculty will have guidance, coordination and administrative support for faculty-led study abroad programs.

Goal 2. International students will have thorough knowledge of federal regulations governing international students; students will be able to achieve their educational goals and feel connected to the institution and the community.

Goal 3. Students will strive to understand the impact of globalization and diversity on society. Students will seek involvement with people from other countries and cultures. Students will gain better knowledge and appreciation for diverse cultures through international and multicultural programs.

“Developing” Example:

To encourage and facilitate a greater connection between [program clients], their mentors and the campus community. Initiate earlier first contacts with [program clients], increase program presence and increase retention of [program clients].

In the developed examples, outcomes significantly begin with phrases like “students will” or “faculty will.” The developing examples identify program actions or strategies but do not mention the outcomes. In cases, where program strategies are identified with some specificity, the transformation to outcomes requires only a grammatical shift, e.g. “program clients will connect with their mentors.” Measures of success thus become not activity (what the unit staff do) but results (what the students, constituents, or clients do).

Operational Objectives
For the purposes of this study, operational objectives were considered to be measurable subcategories of each ongoing unit or program goal, not specific activities or objectives for a specific year. Only 7% of reports were rated as “developed” or “exemplary” in this area, and these reports were also rated highly in the area of operational goals, since the articulation of goals
was a prerequisite for objectives to represent subcategories of each goal. Another fifth (17%) of the reports were rated as “developing” in the area of operational objectives, and the operational objectives of the remaining three quarters (76%) of the reports were considered “not present.”

“Developed” Example:

[Named] Science Education Center Goal A:

A. Goal for K-12 Student Programs: Students will experience the richness and excitement of knowing about and understanding the natural world.

Objective A1: Provide high quality, hands-on programs in science, mathematics, environmental education, and technology for K-12 students throughout the [region].

Objective A2: Implement effective classroom practices that promote equity in access and opportunities for a diverse group of students (including low achieving students) to learn science, mathematics, environmental education, and technology.

Objective A3: Assist low performing schools with enrichment opportunities for students, professional development for teachers, curriculum development and strategic planning.

“Developing” Example:

[Specific examples deliberately not provided]

Reports that most effectively conveyed operational objectives broke operational goals down into component parts, such as in the example for the Science Education Center above. In this case, the goal for the desired student experience is accomplished through an ongoing provision of programs, the implementation of effective classroom practices, and assistance to low performing schools. Most importantly, these areas are articulated in a more specific manner than is the overarching goal, the program deems these specific objectives to be measurable in some way. While it was not possible to provide “developing” examples of operational objectives without identifying the program which had adopted them, often these objectives exhibited shortcomings such as 1) being too focused on a specific, not ongoing action, e.g. offer this workshop in 2004-05, 2) not being linked to overarching goals, 3) not being verb-driven, or 4) not being measurable.

Measurements Linked to Goals, Objectives, or Outcomes

Linking measurements to goals, objectives, or outcomes is a valuable practice because it helps ensure that what is measured is important by relating what is measured to the stated aims of the program or unit. Nevertheless, only about one out of twenty (5%) of reports were rated as developed in this category, while another 15% of reports were deemed to be developing. By contrast, in four out of five reports (80%), this linkage was not found to be present. Units and programs may make choices to report available data rather than important data, and in this respect, current assessment practices may not be serving units well in providing data that is useful in determining how well major functions are performed.

“Developed” Example:

Office of Institutional Effectiveness

3.2. Develop and maintain assessment practices to measure the extent to which learning outcomes are achieved.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2003-2004</th>
<th>2004-2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of Majors Reviewed by</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Committee</td>
<td>1=Missing, 2=Approaches, 3=Meets, 4=Exceeds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurement</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Developing” Example:

Staffing Analysis
(Student to [staff member] ratio is approximately 917 to 1)
The [program/unit] permanent staff consists of the following seven members:
• (Full time staff) = 8
• (Part time staff) = 0
• (Student employees) = 2-3
[What follows is A) position descriptions of each staff member, B) number of students served, C) number of other clients served, D) mention of planned surveys without linkage to a previously stated goal, objective, or outcome]

In the developed examples above, the reports provide specific data linked to a stated goal or objective, allowing readers to determine the extent to which goals have been met. The developing example, on the other hand, gestures toward a workload analysis, not an evaluation of how goals or objectives have been met.

Resource Allocation Based on Assessment Data
Since program review reports serve as vehicles to transmit budget requests, the linkage of such requests to assessment data would provide compelling evidence for the need for resources to be allocated to a given area. Indeed, the SACS Resource Manual specifically indicates that continuous improvement processes should be “strongly linked to the decision-making process at levels, including the institution’s budgeting process” (SACS, 2005, p. 9). Nevertheless, more than four out of five program review reports (83%) did not make a case for budgetary needs with the assessment data provided. In instances where budget requests were supplemented with assessment data, those linkages were “developing” in 15% of cases and “developed” in just 3% of them.

“Developed” Example:

Human Resources
Needs: Human Resources Specialist who focuses on technology and benefits.
The total number of employees for Fall 2004 is 501. This includes 346 permanent employees and 155 temporary employees. This does not include student employees, which number in the 200’s. We need additional help with benefits administration and we need to revamp, and then maintain, a [University] database necessary for various HR information requests. We need to continue to support [personnel time tracking system] and the on-line application process. We need someone with strong technological skills. The salary for a full time person would be $23,222. While I believe we need a full-time person, a 20 hour per week person would still be of great help. That salary would be $11,611. The HR Office at [name of comparative university] has 4 full time positions, with only a slightly higher number of permanent employees (475). They do not handle Affirmative Action, training or payroll issues with students.

“Developing” and “Not Present” Examples:

Carpeting for [program area]
New carpeting is badly needed in [rooms] and the hallways adjacent to the [program area]. The carpet is worn out and cleaning it no longer makes a difference. The wear and tear on the facilities is showing and we sometimes get negative comments on this issue.
Program 2
Addition of a new office laptop. [No intended use provided; no linkage to intended outcomes provided]

The “developed” example provides evidence from a comparable institution to justify its request for an additional position. The first “developing” or “not present” example establishes a need to replace worn carpet but only tangentially links this need to assessment data. The second example mentions only the budget request with no supplementary information or data about what indicator or area the requested laptop is intended to improve.

Major Strengths and Weaknesses Identified
The identification of major strengths and weaknesses in the unit or program as identified by collected data is one of the most significant and valuable outcomes of assessment. Nevertheless, in most program review reports, this feature was rated as “not present” in five out of six instances (85%) and developing in 13% of reports. In just 3% was the identification of major strengths and weaknesses rated as “developed.” The general absence of this feature of program review reports is indicative of the relative use-value of the assessment data collected and its deployment in program improvement, suggesting that additional training in the ends of assessment as well as assessment methods may greatly improve the utility of program review reports to advance programs.

“Developed” Examples:

Office of Institutional Effectiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary of goal/objective evaluation</th>
<th>COUNT</th>
<th>Obj. #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Green Targets Achieved or Project On-Time</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>All Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amber Approaching Targets or Project Behind Schedule</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.4, 2.4, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Targets Missed or Unsatisfactory Progress</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5, 3.2.a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Developing” Example:

[Specific examples deliberately not provided]

Even in the “developed” example above, some additional summary and work on the reader’s part would be required to identify that the unit had been most successful in Goal 4 - Research, and least successful in accomplishing Goal 3 - Assessment. “Developing” examples were largely unavailable in a meaningful way. These findings about the administrative program review process would seem to indicate a broad acknowledgement that assessment is important but a failure to conduct assessment in such a way that the data provide useful information to direct resources toward targeted areas that need improvement. Additionally, these findings may suggest that administrators preparing the reports could be hesitant to admit programmatic weaknesses. Alternatively, they may not recognize how the end result of assessment activities should result in an identification of both strengths – many of which were noted – as well as areas for improvement, which in general were not discussed.
Program Changes/Plans Based on Assessment Results

Basing programmatic changes on assessment results follows from the SACS requirement that “administrative and educational support services … provid[e] evidence of improvement based on the analysis of those results” from outcomes assessment (3.3.1). The overwhelming majority (83%) of administrative program review reports, however, did not base their future plans upon evidence gathered in the assessment process, and only in about one out of five reports (18%) were the linkages between plans detailed in the reports and the results assessment rated as “developing” or “developed.” These results suggest that data gathered from assessment practices and plans for future actions or programmatic changes are not as firmly connected as they should be and that 1) assessment data currently collected may not be useful for developing future plans, and/or 2) future plans may not be developing in the context of assessment data.

“Developed” Example:

Operations
III. Goals [just one example provided here]
Development of capital improvement plans to satisfy long-term space needs in [various] buildings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Square Footage per FTE Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median 4-Year Colleges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Our] University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Developing” Example:

Utilizing the information received in surveys and evaluation of programs, this office has made changes to various programs:
• [Activity 1] – A limited number of [program offerings] are now available off-campus at [Location 1]. We have also utilized [Location 2] for two [program offerings]. Also, more [type of program offerings] are now being offered. The [group] continues to develop the [types of offerings].
• [Activity 2] – To accommodate [clients] in a more efficient manner as well as our [type of providers], [Activity 2] has moved to a [time frame] format for [type of offerings]. This allows the offering of more [offerings] within this time frame, as well as offering them in a more timely manner. They also began offering [another type of offering] to meet the needs … of interest to this population.
• [Activity 3] – We will continue to re-evaluate our [Activity 3] program. In the future we may move toward using our [type of Activity 3] program more heavily.
• [Activity 4] - We need to rethink the [Activity 4] format, the marketing, and the cost in light of the attendance this [period of time].

While the “developed” example provides an indicator to show a disparity between the University and other institutions, it would be more convincing if a by-building breakdown were provided. The “developing” example gestures toward use of assessment data in formulating plans, but a more concrete linkage between plans and data is desirable.

Comparative Data Provided

Comparative data for administrative units can be particularly difficult to come by, and many are hampered by the absence of an effective professional organization that can assist in the development of benchmarks across institutions. In almost nine out of ten (88%) program review
reports, raters indicated that comparative data were “not present.” In the few reports where such data were provided, however, the measures appeared quite convincing and also useful in terms of making the case for changes or for demonstrating efficient or effective operation.

“Developed” Examples:

Operations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Square Footage Per Employee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housekeeping</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Developing” Example:

[Specific examples deliberately not provided]

In some areas comparative data are available through state agencies, such as CHE, and in others, a unit’s professional organization may provide some assistance, such as through a national survey of clients or data sharing service. It should be emphasized that in the short term the use of comparative data in program review reports for many units will likely be a best-practices ideal and may serve as an aspirational model for developing meaningful assessment metrics.

Resource Allocation Aligned with Goals, Objectives, or Outcomes

Alignment of a program’s goals, objectives, and/or outcomes with its budgetary requests represents a desirable feature of program review reports for administrative units. Such alignment could assist with prioritization of how resources are allocated in the development of the annual budget and would provide a useful method to monitor the effectiveness of budgetary decisions. In the reports reviewed for this study, no raters indicated that the alignment between needs and program goals, objectives, or outcomes was “developed” or “exemplary,” and fewer than one out of six (13%) were rated as “developing.”

“Developed” Example:

[Specific examples are unavailable.]

“Developing” Example:

[Specific examples deliberately not provided]

As a result of the general absence of this feature in program review reports for 2003-04 and 2004-05, there are no examples provided above although a model of a hypothetical request appears on page 27. It is important to observe, however that reports that did not explicitly articulate goals, objectives, or outcomes elsewhere in the report could not be considered to have developed alignment of requests for resources with goals, objectives, or outcomes.
Discussion and Conclusion

The findings from this institutional effectiveness audit appear that the university had implemented an annual program review process that informed resource allocation to some extent and featured a pervasive acknowledgement of the importance of assessment. Nevertheless, the usefulness of the assessment activities conducted or data collected were limited by a general absence of outcomes, trend data and comparative data, and strong linkages to the budgeting process.

Indeed in interviews, Vice Chancellors observed that they used these reports to summarize budget requests for their division, but then the process of sorting through these priorities was left to the collective expertise of the members of the resource allocation committees. During these discussions, Vice Chancellors – who saw themselves as champions of their areas – felt they were reasonably well-equipped to argue for priorities within their areas, but most acknowledged that on the whole, the budgeting process was not demonstrably tied to assessment practices or specific unit-level goals. One senior administrator even remarked that funding priorities at times were determined by “whoever yells the loudest.”

Further, the level of feedback provided back to managers was uneven. In some Divisions, Vice Chancellors had all directors and managers review all reports. In others, feedback was provided only by the Vice Chancellor, and often only in cursory form. In other instances, the reports were not discussed at all. In essence, these annual reports as a management control system provided some information to higher levels of the organization, although the value of this information was limited in many cases. Further, in many cases little information was provided back down to the manager and unit that prepared the report.

The end result of the audit was to offer several recommendations to the senior administration to implement in the upcoming academic year. Four of these are broadly relevant to this case study

1. **Archive all program review reports online.**
   The online repository of program review reports was deemed to be useful by the senior administrators and campus budget committee to more easily access materials needed for making decisions about resource allocation. These individuals were granted access to this archive even while the study was being conducted.

2. **Develop and post online the guidelines for program review.**
   Following the presentation of the findings, the University developed a written list of guidelines for program review reports that provided unit directors with more guidance about expectations and content (see Appendix). This list was posted to the internet. In an ideal setting, the process by which these guidelines are developed would have included significant input from senior administrators as well as feedback from mid-level managers who prepare these reports, but in practice it was deemed more important to develop the guidelines quickly and implement them rather than wait an additional year.

3. **Develop a formal feedback mechanism for improvement.**
   The report recommended adoption of a formal review cycle to provide feedback to report preparers and the senior administration about the quality of the assessment process and use of results (although not the quality of results themselves). This process could entail a formal Administrative Assessment Committee that uses a peer-review process to evaluate program review reports on a multi-year cycle, much as the institution’s Academic Assessment Committee did for academic units.
4. **Provide training to managers and directors.**
Directors who prepare the report received formal training and professional development about how to compile a program review report, including the development of goals and objectives, identification of outcomes, design of indicators, selection of assessment methods, tracking and reporting results, and using results for improvement. This training was provided by staff in the IE Office. Further, the structure of reports revealed some managers would benefit from professional development in office productivity software, especially in creating tables and charts in MS Word and MS Excel. In some instances, insufficient technical expertise with productivity software may have limited the extent to programs and offices develop useful assessment practices.

The framework outlined in this case study for conducting an institutional effectiveness audit of administrative units should not be considered exhaustive but rather as a starting point. What is most important for an institution that is interested in the effectiveness of their assessment, monitoring, and reporting systems is to identify what the system should do. For this particular institution, features such as outcomes and a research-based assessment process were mandated by the regional accreditor, but some of the other items, such as feedback and key measures of performance indicators were judged by senior management to be important to the institution.

Higher education institutions will likely concentrate more and more on change management and improvement as pressures for accountability appear to increase. In this context, a focus on all aspects of institutional effectiveness, including the efficacy of administrative units and reporting systems, will likely assume even greater importance, and university officers responsible for institutional research and assessment will likely assume more prominent roles in conducting these sorts of evaluative studies. The far-reaching nature of such investigations point toward a need for institutional researchers to expand their skill sets in terms of research methodology as well as leadership capacities to help prompt institutional change and improvement based on the studies they conduct.
Works Cited


http://www.bc.edu/offices/irpa/apr.html


http://provost.uiowa.edu/faculty/policies/criteria.htm

Appendix: Guidelines Developed Following the Audit for Annual Reports from Administrative Units

Each office and program at the institution is expected to prepare an annual program review report following the format given below. These reports are intended to accomplish the following:

- Provide readers with an overview of the unit’s overall performance as well as areas of strength and weakness as determined by a research-based assessment program
- Serve as a management tool to track and improve performance
- Transmit and justify requests for resource allocation for the next fiscal year
- Comply with Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1 of the SACS Principles of Accreditation (2004, rev. 2006)

These reports will be submitted annually in the fall and reviewed by the senior University administrator responsible for the Division. Reports may also be shared with members of other campus groups and committees, and they will also be posted online in an electronic program review archive.

Section 1. Data and Key Performance Indicators

Tables presented in this section should represent clear, quantifiable, and summarized data that demonstrate the success, effectiveness, or efficiency of the unit or program. Five years of trend data should be provided (if these data aren’t initially available, begin in 2006-07 and add data for five years). Wherever possible, it is recommended that these indicators be linked to the unit’s assessment system.

All reports should present 5 to 10 tables and must include Table 1.1 as presented below with appropriate budgetary information for the unit. This table should be cut and pasted into the report (notes may be excluded).

Table 1.1 Financial Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Expenditures(a)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTE Students(b)</td>
<td>2,703</td>
<td>2,773</td>
<td>2,823</td>
<td>2,802</td>
<td>2,724</td>
<td>2,801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditures per FTE(c)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional lines as needed (d)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Total expenditures for the fiscal year represents all actual expenses, including salary and benefits as of June 30.
(b) The number of annualized full-time equivalent students is calculated by the IE Office each year based on 12-month credit hour production. The most recent year is projected based on Fall FTE.
(c) For each year, divide the dollar amount in cell (a) by the corresponding amount in cell (b); round to the nearest dollar.
(d) For units that have client- or student-based operations, it will be valuable to add lines for these activities and use them as divisors for total budgetary expenditures. For instance, the Admissions Office might include a line for the total number of new students who enrolled each year and a line for total expenditures per the number of new matriculants.

Tables 1.2 and Following

An additional set of about 4 to 9 tables should present data chosen by the unit or office director in consultation with the senior administrator responsible for the division. These tables should provide the “big picture” about the unit’s activities or performance over time (preferably 5-6 years).

Section 2. Mission, Goals, and Objectives for Outcomes

This section should list the unit’s mission, goals, and objectives for outcomes—the unit’s objectives must be phrased as intended or expected outcomes.
Mission
Provide the unit’s mission statement. A mission statement should define what the unit does and why it exists. Good mission statements are short, focused, clear, and easily understood by someone outside of the unit (Stern, Drucker, & Hesselbein, 1999).

Goals
A list of the unit’s broad areas of activity and emphasis should be provided. Goals listed here should provide general statements about the unit’s major ongoing operational activities, not goals for a specific year. Well-written goals employ a strong action verb. Goals may be written as outcomes, though this is not a requirement.

Objectives
Specific statements of what the unit intends to do on an ongoing basis (not objectives for a specific year) should be listed. Objectives should be measurable and must be written as outcomes. Outcomes represent what clients, such as students, faculty, staff, or others (but not unit staff) do as a result of the unit’s efforts, programs, or activities. Well-written outcomes have “clients” or “students” as their grammatical subject and also employ a strong action verb.

Section 3. Assessment
This section of the program review report should provide a research-based examination of the extent to which goals and objectives were accomplished. The intent of this section is to identify the unit’s relative strengths and areas for improvement based on evidence collected throughout the year in a systematized assessment program that ideally places the unit’s goals and objectives in rank order in terms of success.

Based on the material presented in this section, a reader should know what a unit’s strengths and weaknesses are based on the data presented about the unit’s effectiveness. It is expected that the unit will have some areas that are relatively weaker than others; the purpose of this section is to show that these areas have been identified.

This section should be organized by the objectives stated in Section 2, not by assessment instruments or methods. Data identifying relative strengths and weaknesses should be presented. Plans to address areas for improvement should be provided in Section 6 (below).

The assessment section of the program review report should be no shorter than one page in length and may be somewhat longer. Whenever possible key assessment indicators should be linked to data presented in Section 1 (simply refer to Table 1.x). Additional tables and graphs should be provided as needed to illustrate how effectively the outcomes have been accomplished. Complete assessment findings may be included as an appendix.
Section 4. Accomplishments
Provide a bulleted list of accomplishments for the year being reviewed.

Section 5. Obstacles
Provide a bulleted list of obstacles for the year being reviewed.

Section 6. Future Plans
Provide a description of plans to address areas for improvement identified in the assessment section. A bulleted list of additional future plans should also be provided.

Section 7. Needs and Budget Requests
Cut and paste the table below into this section for each budget request for the upcoming year.

### Budget Request Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding Request</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Unit-Level Objective (number and description)</th>
<th>Relevant Assessment Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One-Time</td>
<td>Recurring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[List the Request Here]</td>
<td>[$ Amount]</td>
<td>[$ Amount]</td>
<td>[Paste Relevant Unit-Level Objective Here]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Example Budget Request (Office of Institutional Effectiveness)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding Request</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Unit-Level Objective (number and description)</th>
<th>Relevant Assessment Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One-Time</td>
<td>Recurring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tableau Software – Visual Analysis for Databases (1 License)</td>
<td>$746</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>4.2.2. Provide ongoing research support for the Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and other senior administrators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Formal Studies</th>
<th>Presentations (Internal)</th>
<th>Presentations (External)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>