ADVANCEMENT SECTION

REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE VISIT

TO

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY Muncie, Indiana

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FOR

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

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ADVANCEMENT SECTION

I. OVERALL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

A. History and Environment

Founded in 1918 as the Indiana State Normal School, Eastern Division, the institution was renamed the Ball State Teachers College and separated from the Indiana State Normal School in 1922. Having experienced significant enrollment growth, expanded physical facilities, and broadened academic program offerings, Ball State Teachers College was renamed Ball State University in 1965.

Ball State University is a Carnegie research intensive university offering associate, bachelor, master, specialist, and doctor degrees. The Muncie campus provides a residential educational experience, primarily for citizens of Indiana. In addition, the University has been a leader in distance education, delivering off-campus courses and degree programs throughout the state.

Ball State University was first accredited by the North Central Association in 1925. The most recent comprehensive accreditation visit occurred in 1993.

Since the 1993 visit the University has undertaken a number of significant initiatives to strengthen the institution including the development of a new strategic plan with a corresponding implementation and assessment team, the alignment of promotion and tenure guidelines and work load policies with the 'teacher-scholar model' and the pursuit of additional revenues including external grants and contracts and increased tuition which have been allocated to strategic planning priorities. In addition, the University has made significant investments in the professional development of faculty and staff with substantial technological enhancements to the teaching-learning environment.

At the time of this visit Ball State University was in a period of transition in the presidency with the previous president having left the institution in January. The HLC team focused on providing the campus consultations in several areas; namely, governance, assessment and distance education.

II. RECOGNITION OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS, SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS, AND/OR EXEMPLARY AND INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

In support of and as a result of many of the significant changes Ball State University has accomplished, the following accomplishments, significant progress, and/or exemplary innovative practices were noted.

- The advancement organizations and functions of BSU are exemplary, and there are aspects of these that may serve as models for other higher educational institutions. The Alumni Association, University Development, Advancement Services and the University Foundation are all housed in the same model facility, the impressive, state-of-the-art Alumni Center. This integration encourages a coordination of these related offices that has produced impressive results. The leadership cadre is remarkable in their innovative ideas, contact with one another and with the external constituencies, the amount of coordination among units, and their use of technology and information sharing. The database of BSU alumni is unusually complete and well maintained (even at a substantial investment) and allows regular and effective contact with an extraordinary 96% of extant BSU alumni.
- The Teaching and Learning Academy (TLA) for faculty at Ball State University is outstanding and should serve as a model for professional development of faculty. With significant funding, the TLA consists of an integrated curriculum of 38 courses and other activities that encourage/reward faculty development in the areas of learning theory, teaching, technology, assessment, and professionalism.
- With sound leadership and outstanding faculty, the College of Architecture and Planning is commended for their list of accomplishments, partnerships, and vision. With nationally ranked programs and a commitment to revitalizing both Muncie and Indianapolis, this college is poised to make outstanding contributions to the entire state of Indiana, both now and in the future.
- The Entrepreneurship Program in the College of Business is ranked among the top programs in the United States. *U.S. News and World Report's* 2004 survey placed the Ball State undergraduate program at 5th overall and the graduate program at 19th and has also been noted in rankings by *Success* magazine, *Business Week, Entrepreneur* Magazine, and the *Journal of Management*. The University's "Midwest Entrepreneurial Educational Center" includes NASDAQ, Eli Lilly & Co., the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, and Beacon Venture Capital among its several founders and supporters.
- The Division of Student Affairs has developed a model program for assessment and planning. The program includes the development of learning outcomes for each department or program, on-going assessment activities, annual reports, program evaluation, and long range planning at the department level. A locally developed and delivered professional development program permits all student affairs staff to acquire the skills needed to design and conduct assessment activities against previously established planning objectives. A half-time position is assigned to oversee the student affairs planning and assessment program, provide liaison and coordination with the university assessment program, and consult with student affairs on assessment design and program evaluation.

- Assessment activities at Ball State University are extensive and appear to be
 effectively serving the purposes for which they have been developed. All
 academic programs undergo periodic review with sound methods of measurement
 using both internal and external data. The general education program (University
 Core Curriculum) has developed a commendable assessment program.
- The physical facilities of the campus support the educational missions of the university and provide a pleasant, clean and well-maintained atmosphere for its community. Those responsible for the physical plant, including its buildings, HVAC, and grounds are imbued with loyalty to the university and take great pride in their work. They strive to be responsible and responsive to the academic components of the university with the provision of their skilled and competent services. The new music building is an excellent example of a state of the art facility designed for the academic program which will prepare for 'future' employment opportunities in the recording industry.

III. CONSULTATIONS OF THE TEAM

HLC team members provided consultation to Ball State University in the following areas: governance, assessment, and distance education. The following reflect those discussions

A. Assessment

Ball State University long has been a leader in the assessment of student outcomes and the linkage of these outcomes to the improvement of student learning. The Office of Academic Assessment, established in 1987, serves as the focal point for assessment on the Ball State University campus. Assessment occurs at both the graduate and undergraduate levels, by both indirect and direct measures, and of the university core curriculum as well as the academic majors.

Assessment is taken very seriously at Ball State University and, although data collection is decentralized, there is a group charged with responsibility for the review and dissemination of assessment outcomes. Given the importance placed on general education (the core curriculum) as evidenced in the strategic plan and the mission statement, assessment of this component appears central and not ancillary to Ball State's educational process.

Assessment of the general education component of the curriculum assumes that the goals of this component can be distinguished from the goals of the disciplines in such a way that a core course is distinguished from other courses related to the disciplines (with some exceptions). Discussions with faculty, students, and administrators made it clear that the core requirements (including the nine overall goals of the UCC program) may not suffice to make this distinction. While it may be agreed that a simple list of courses under the rubric "core curriculum" may not suffice to identify the distinctive feature of a UCC course, it remains unclear as to

what was distinctive about core courses. Clearly articulating connections among courses that make up the core curriculum is an important step in developing a conceptual framework for general education. Failure to do this could make assessment of the general education component and consequent curricular revisions difficult to discern.

The draft of the University Core Goals for Undergraduate Education provides a more detailed, "robust" understanding of the goals. The model being considered in the draft

- Attempts to address the tension within undergraduate education between a
 core foundation of basic skills, knowledge, and abilities and a liberal
 education to prepare individuals for citizenry.
- Works from an assumption that core goals should reflect breadth, depth (active learning – service learning, study abroad, internships), and cumulative learning (integrative, interdisciplinary, freshman through senior experiences).
- Fosters critical, creative, caring, courageous ways of thinking.

Such an expanded description of the goals could help distinguish a core course from a disciplinary course and in turn, allow better assessment of general (liberal) education. Understanding this difference, however, needs to become a part of the culture of the university community. By developing a more comprehensive understanding of general education by faculty, administrators, staff, parents, and students, a more coherent picture of the university's mission should emerge over time. Since the goal of assessment is to improve student learning, and the draft goals being considered focus on particular student experiences, the future assessment of general education at Ball State appears will become more positive.

There is clear evidence that outcomes from various assessment activities are being used for decision-making within programs and departments and additional changes will improve the efficacy of such programs. Evidence also exists to indicate assessment information has been used to evaluate and revise the University core curriculum. Beyond core curriculum decisions, it appears there may be an "assessment ceiling" where local assessment results remain local. The team suggests that program and department level assessment results be combined so that the university can directly connect assessment to the budget and strategic planning processes. Other suggested avenues that could help BSU move beyond an assessment ceiling include:

• The funding of assessment fellows with small grants to assist or lead integrated revision efforts.

- The development of teaching-learning models with student advisory groups that help interpret assessment findings, especially those findings of a qualitative nature.
- The development of on-line assessment tools for determining outcomes from the electronic field trips as well as the University's serious move into on-line education. The formation of the recent Institutional Data Coordinating Group may also help the university move through the assessment ceiling issue. With all the available local information, it is important that the university develop a transparent means by which important assessment results are directly connected to university planning.

B. Governance

It is commendable that Ball State University Trustees, faculty, administrators, staff and students are all actively involved in the governance process at BSU. Alternative structures are being considered, and with voting to occur on some proposed governance changes in the near future. Officers of the University (Faculty) Senate indicate that they report regularly to members of the Board and also that they are improving their own reporting structure within the Senate. In general, governance is proceeding well and with relatively minor adjustments, the governance of BSU should become even more effective.

Some of the recent concerns expressed during the 2004 NCA/HLC visit can be attributed to current aspects of governance at BSU. With fairly minimal adjustments in BSU governance processes, major overall improvements, including the elimination of some current misunderstandings, should be noticeable.

One notable challenge involves communication, or more precisely, the lack thereof. Improved communication patterns between the Board of Trustees and the central administration and the campus as a whole should be instituted. The following initiatives are recommended by the team members.

• The Chairman of the Board and the President of the university need to establish frequent and clear modes of communication between the two parties. The President should be the major, if not the sole point of contact between the University and the Trustees. With the modern technology media now available, there should be frequent and regular communication between these two primary officials. Such communication will provide the President an avenue for discussion of timely information with the Chairman (or his/her designated representative), who, in turn, can then advise the entire Board and other appropriate agencies or community leaders. Conversely, the Chairman should keep the CEO of the university, its president, apprised of the Board's policies and preferences.

- Related to this, members of the central administration should also keep the
 President fully informed about significant contacts with members of the
 Board. The President of the University is singularly situated as the sole
 member of the university community who is wholly responsible for all that
 occurs on campus, and, as such, needs to be as fully informed as possible at
 all times.
- The top level of the governance organization would benefit from a regular evaluation of the President's performance. It is recommended the Trustees consider the following: Before the annual Trustees' retreat, the President could be asked to present his/her vision of the university for the coming year as well as some more specific objectives and goals which he/she expects to accomplish the coming year – sometimes described as an annual "work plan." Prior to the preparation of this work plan, the President should request that all those who report directly to him, such as the Provost and Vice Presidents, also prepare their reports for this annual retreat with distribution among the senior staff in advance. This will increase communication and coordination of information among members of the central administration. At the annual retreat, such reports would then be presented and discussed with the Trustees. The result would be an improved understanding of activities and plans among all senior-level persons involved in BSU governance. Further, the Trustees would gain knowledge and have a firm basis for the president's performance accountability.
- It is also recommended the Board of Trustees to establish a genuine committee structure. Consisting of three or four members each, two or three typical committees should be established, each related to a major function or operation of the university, for example, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Finance and Facilities, and so forth. Such a committee structure will provide greater contact and information exchange among Board members and senior members of the administration. These committees could be responsible for much of the detailed work that now comes before the Board prior to the meetings of the entire Board. The committees would make their formal recommendations for action to the Board, which would then take final action.
- Communication between the Board of Trustees and the other campus constituencies, mainly community leaders, the faculty, staff and student body, could also be improved with some minor adjustments. Faculty need to believe that the principle of shared governance is respected by the Board and students and staff need to also believe that their voice is likewise heard by the Trustees. Not only should brief reports from each major governance group be given at each meeting of the full Board, but also the representatives from each group should be present at each meeting. Other sectors of the University, such as the Alumni Association president and the Foundation president, might also be similarly included at full Board

meetings. This appearance of openness and inclusion would reinforce substantive aspects of shared governance and help build a more integrated university and campus community.

C. Distance Education

Ball State University has a long history of serving students beyond the Muncie campus. These educational offerings span a wide range of delivery methods including traditional classes, correspondence, satellite TV and Web courses. Student and faculty support is well developed. In order to ensure continued success in providing distance access, there are some issues that BSU may wish to address:

- Roughly half of the School of Extended Education (SEE) offerings serve inmates in Indiana correctional facilities. Tuition is paid via a government paid tuition plan leaving BSU vulnerable to state policy changes that could eliminate such tuition reimbursement and this market. Similarly, programs concentrated in related fields (technology education) are prone to regulatory and industry demands beyond the control of BSU. Continued diversification of program offerings in distinctly different markets and serving unrelated populations will help ensure enrollment and fiscal stability.
- Masters level degree and certificate programs traditionally have been strong
 markets for off-campus programs. The market and public policy demands
 for undergraduate programs should be monitored and, as appropriate,
 explored for added offerings. Masters programs have been the "low hanging
 fruit" but as more institutions enter the off-campus market the competition
 will also force diversification into undergraduate and niche programs.
- The transition from satellite to streaming video will help ensure future market share for BSU. In this process, careful monitoring of availability of high speed Internet connections for current and prospective students is needed to avoid prematurely narrowing the market for programs. It is expected that Hybrid courses and programs with Web, streaming video and some traditional classroom experiences will become the norm for competitive programs.
- Discussions have indicated that BSU has established a ceiling of 10%-12% of total student body enrollment for off-campus program growth. Given that the current cost model brings in more revenue than the incurred costs, consideration should be given to establishing an annual growth rate that would provide continued tuition and state reimbursement growth, but at a rate that would not jeopardize BSU's ability to adequately support the academic and logistical needs of students and faculty. Demographic projections indicate that the traditional on-campus student base will peak in the next ten years and then decline. Growth and further diversification in off-campus programs will position BSU to be an effective competitor in the

lifelong education arena, and especially as traditional students become scarcer.

- As the line between on and off campus students continues to blur, consideration should be given to integrating all admission, registration and fee payment into a single system for both on- and off-campus populations. For example, BSU currently provides Web registration that requires SEE staff to print and manually enter registrations in the student information system. This is time-consuming and can lead to courses exceeding caps if students from both populations are registering simultaneously for the same section. In integrating such functional systems, care should be taken to ensure that the unique needs of off-campus student are accommodated rather than simply forcing theses students into the on-campus business model. Research indicates that adult populations are more demanding and more likely to switch to another education provider if systems are not convenient and effective.
- Augmenting student support services (marketing, recruiting, retention, and general support) provided by SEE to prospective and current students should be considered to ensure both depth of services and expanded hours of service. National research indicates students differentiate off-campus education providers on the basis of services provided more so than by the quality of the academic experience. As enrollment increases, academic departments providing their own student support may be overwhelmed when the volume of additional support needs are combined with demands of oncampus students. Centralized student support becomes less costly when many programs are offered.
- With the expected expansion in program offerings, faculty support for course development, offering, assessment, and revision will need to be scaled forward to meet prospective demand.
- Faculty compensation for off-campus student enrollments of \$50/student starting at low enrollment levels (undergraduate with the 11th student and graduate with the 7th student) is generous by national standards. BSU may wish to consider revision of this standard as part of the planned review of faculty workload.
- Programs selected for off-campus delivery are most often brought forward by departments. In addition, BSU may want to expand this program initiation process to allow SEE to suggest programs on the basis of their work with employers and other interest groups. Unlike campus programs that are largely designed for a general and traditional audience, off-campus education must be responsive to business and non-profit needs.

- Shorter time-frame courses (five to eight weeks in length) have great appeal to off-campus students in order to speed time-to degree or to focus studies in a busy life. Programs designed to offer three five-week courses or two eight-week courses in a single semester should be considered.
- Higher differential fees/tuition for some off-campus programs may be merited. Off-campus fees may be increased if the market will bear the increase (for example, MBAs) or an employer desires customized programs. In other cases, if the public policy need for workers (for example, nursing and teachers) is great, BSU may wish to discount regular fees to encourage specific program enrollment growth.
- Computing and technology support is excellent at BSU. Innovative wireless access programs are indicative of such support. In many cases, Student Affairs departments are prepared to offer services to students who are enrolled in distance education and online courses. However, most departments indicate there is little use of their services. Full implementation of such services requires upgrades in software. Further options will be available as the university develops its capacity of e-commerce functions which has the potential to benefit all BSU students. Finally, in some areas of Student Affairs there has not been a clear decision about the provision of programs and services. It will be helpful for each department and program to know if they will or will not be responsible to serve students who are enrolled in distance education and online programs.
- As technologies continue to converge in the Internet technology space (for example, the move from satellite to streaming video) organizational realignment of once disparate functions may be necessary to consider.
 Telephone connectivity via Internet protocol (VOIP) may require merging the computing and telephony functions.

Summary: Ball State University has demonstrated exemplary leadership in the areas of distance education and assessment. It is expected the institution will continue to be at the forefront in technologically facilitated instruction and in the integration of curricular planning and decision-making with student learning outcomes information. Continued attention to respecting and strengthening the roles various constituencies have in the governance will be essential as the University moves into a period of new presidential leadership. Ball State University can and is expected to meet these challenges in the same positive manner they have addressed challenges in the past.