Institutional Self-Study

Strengths, Challenges, and Change

Executive Summary in Preparation for the Accreditation Review Team Visit

The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools









Introduction

As an institution of higher education affiliated with the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Ball State University engages in an institutional self-assessment every 10 years. This process results in submitting a formal request for reaccreditation to the commission and participating in an extensive review by a team that spends several days on the campus evaluating our policies, practices, and resources. Ball State is scheduled to host its evaluation team February 9–11.

The self-study process is an extremely valuable mechanism for evaluating institutional growth and development. Internal assessment provides benchmarks against which institutional effectiveness may be gauged as we implement and revise the goals outlined in our strategic plan. The self-study helps to identify challenges facing the institution as well as institutional strengths upon which we might build in responding to these challenges. Furthermore, the accreditation process provides an opportunity to draw upon the expertise of consultant—evaluators who have developed, through their observations at a variety of institutions, a good overall view of the higher education community and knowledge of best practices in a wide variety of areas.

The most important part of the reaccreditation process is productive self-reflection that involves all major university constituencies. Our process began more than four years ago and has involved the work of more than 150 faculty, students, staff, and administrators who have been meeting, compiling data, interpreting patterns of evidence, and drafting sections of our self-study report for two years

to prepare for this visit. This deliberate and strategic self-examination by all major university groups has been extremely productive for us. By carefully assessing the ways in which we conduct our business in the context of our institutional mission and the expectations of both the state of Indiana and the broader academic community, we have taken an important step to ensure that Ball State remains competitive in the higher education arena. In addition, our self-study helps identify new opportunities and emerging challenges, and it helps define the boundaries of future institutional progress.

This brochure is designed to familiarize you with the major areas that the Higher Learning Commission team will review. It also outlines the strengths and future challenges identified by the Ball State self-study groups. The review team will be meeting with a wide range of individuals during its visit to campus. The self-study steering committee hopes you will use this information to prepare for these conversations. A copy of the complete self-study is available in your department and on the Web at www.bsu.edu/nca.

Deborah W. Balogh Director, 2004 Institutional Self-Study



Significant Changes Since the 1993 Self-Study

The 2004 Institutional Self-Study provides a comprehensive description of Ball State University's growth and progress during the past decade. Here are a few of the highlights:

- The College of Communication, Information, and Media was created in 1996 to house four academic units previously located within the College of Sciences and Humanities: journalism, communication studies, information and communication sciences, and telecommunications.
- Building on the university's expertise in selected academic areas, several new centers have opened, including the Center for Media Design, Field Station and Environmental Education Center, Center for Sports Studies, Aquatic Biology and Fisheries Center, Software Engineering Research Center, Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry, and Center for the Teaching of Integrity.
- Following the implementation of selective admissions in 1997, undergraduate applications increased more than 20 percent, and the number of National Merit Scholars, Presidential Scholars, and distinction students rose dramatically. Average SAT scores increased from 986 in 1997–98 to 1040 in 2003, and freshman-to-sophomore retention rose from 69 percent in 1997–98 to 80 percent in 2003–04.
- In 2002 the Policy Center on the First Year of College, sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Atlantic Philanthropies, identified Ball State as one of the top 13 institutions offering exemplary comprehensive first-year programs.
- President Brownell appointed a university-wide Strategic Planning Task Force in 2000, and the Board of Trustees adopted a new strategic plan and mission statement for Ball State in 2001. A Strategic Plan Assessment and

- Implementation Team was appointed in 2002 to begin evaluating the progress on the implementation of the strategic plan.
- The Board of Trustees approved a 14 percent increase in tuition and fees in spring 2002 to offset shortages in state funding support. In fall 2002 the board approved a \$1,000 increase in tuition for all new students entering in fall 2003. Revenue generated from these funds were directed in support of the goals of the strategic plan.
- Several new programs and new tracks within programs were developed between 1993 and 2002, including audiology, digital storytelling, teaching in elementary education, public administration—criminal justice track, geography, adapted physical education, adult and community education—higher education track, accounting, residential property management, social and cognitive processes, and sports journalism.
- The following new physical facilities were completed or under construction between 1993 and 2003: Alumni Center, Art and Journalism Building, Athletic Training Facility, Shafer Tower, Music Instruction Building, and McKinley Avenue Parking Structure.
- The Wings for the Future capital campaign, which ended in 1993 with gifts in excess of \$44 million, spawned a successful bridge campaign to build the Alumni Center. Ball State launched the five-year Above and Beyond campaign in 1997 with the goal of raising \$90 million. At the close of the campaign, gifts exceeded \$112 million.
- External funding for research and sponsored programs grew from \$4.9 million in 1992–93 to \$25.2 million in 2002–03.
- A \$20 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc., the largest grant in Ball State's history, was awarded in 2001 to support the iCommunication project, which focuses on digital media technology education and development.



General Institutional Requirements (GIRs)

The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association requires that an affiliated institution meet a series of minimum requirements. The self-study demonstrated that Ball State University is in compliance with these requirements, listed below:

Mission

- It has a mission statement, formally adopted by the governing board and made public, declaring that it is an institution of higher education.
- ∞ It is a degree-granting institution.

Authorization

- It has legal authorization to grant its degrees, and it meets all the legal requirements to operate as an institution of higher education wherever it conducts its activities.
- It has legal documents to confirm its status: not-for-profit, for-profit, or public.

Governance

- It has a governing board that possesses and exercises necessary legal power to establish and review basic policies that govern the institution.
- Its governing board includes public members and is sufficiently autonomous from the administration and ownership to assure the integrity of the institution.
- It has an executive officer designated by the governing board to provide administrative leadership for the institution.
- Its governing board authorizes the institution's affiliation with the commission.

Faculty

- It employs a faculty that has earned from accredited institutions the degrees appropriate to the level of instruction offered by the institution.
- A sufficient number of faculty are full-time employees of the institution.
- Its faculty has a significant role in developing and evaluating all of the institution's educational programs.

Educational Program

- It confers degrees.
- It has degree programs in operation, with students enrolled in them.
- Its degree programs are compatible with the institution's mission and are based on recognized fields of study at the higher education level.
- Its degrees are appropriately named, following practices common to institutions of higher education in terms of both length and content of the program.
- Its undergraduate degree programs include a coherent general studies requirement consistent with the institution's mission and designed to ensure breadth of knowledge and to promote intellectual inquiry.
- It has admission policies and practices that are consistent with the institution's mission and appropriate to its educational programs.
- It provides its students access to those learning resources and support services for its degree programs.

Finance

- It has an external financial audit by a certified public accountant or a public audit agency at least every two years.
- Its financial documents demonstrate the appropriate allocation and use of resources to support its educational programs.
- Its financial practices, records, and reports demonstrate fiscal viability.



Public Information

- Its catalog or other official documents include its mission statement along with accurate descriptions of its educational programs and degree requirements; its academic calendars; its learning resources; its admissions policies and practices; its academic and nonacademic policies directly affecting students; its charges and refund policies; and the academic credentials of its faculty and administrators.
- Tt accurately discloses its standing with accrediting bodies with which it is affiliated.
- Tt makes available upon request information that accurately describes its financial condition.

Criteria for Accreditation

The Higher Learning Commission specifies that institutions provide patterns of evidence demonstrating that five essential criteria are met. Each criterion is listed in the following sections, and institutional strengths, and anticipated challenges pertaining to each criterion are described.

Criterion I: The institution has clear and publicly stated purposes consistent with its mission and appropriate for an institution of higher education.

- Ball State University Strategic Plan 2001–2006 represents the aspirations of the full range of university constituent groups.
- Cohesion exists between unit strategic plans and the university plan.
- Revised vision and mission statements capture emphases on excellence and learner-centered values.
- Mission, goals, and identity are regularly and clearly articulated to internal and external groups.
- Prioritizing objectives and making the vision, mission, and goals of the institution relevant in meaningful ways

and adaptable to changing conditions are challenges for the future.

Criterion II: The institution has effectively organized the human, financial, and physical resources necessary to accomplish its purposes.

Institutional Organization

- Effective collaboration between internal administrative and governing bodies and between university and external governing agencies is a strength.
- Ball State's administrative organization complements the goals and purposes of the institution.
- A major focus for upcoming years is a smooth and efficient transition to a new University Senate model.

Physical Facilities and Use of Resources

- Ball State maintains a safe and resource-rich learning environment with state-of-the-art facilities in many existing buildings.
- Despite reductions in state appropriations, good stewardship of university resources has allowed the maintenance of a stable student-to-faculty ratio, retention of tenure-line positions, initiation of new capital projects, and provision of high-quality technology.
- The strategic plan mandates alignment of resources to support its goals and objectives.
- University emphasis on technology enables students to graduate with requisite skills needed to function in an information age.
- A weak state economy is likely to lead to further dependence upon external sources of support.

Human Resources

- Teacher-scholar model is integrated within reward systems for faculty across colleges.
- The number of faculty holding the appropriate terminal degree has increased 15 percent since 1993.



- Maintenance of effort data and comparisons with peer institutions concerning faculty compensation demonstrate progress in providing total compensation packages that allow the university to continue attracting and retaining highly qualified faculty.
- Significant decisions regarding benefits, representation in university governance, and voting privileges have better enfranchised contract faculty since 1993.
- Professional development opportunities for faculty and professional, staff, and service personnel are abundant.
- Continued progress is needed to further address lowerthan-optimal faculty salaries and salary compression at senior ranks.
- ≈ Achieving a more diverse faculty is a continuing challenge.
- Job security for well-qualified, experienced contract faculty is an emerging issue.

Criterion III: The institution is accomplishing its educational and other purposes.

Undergraduate and Graduate Learning

- Retention rates, graduation rates, placement rates, student plans for further education, faculty–student collaboration, and indirect/direct measures of student learning demonstrate that Ball State is effectively accomplishing its teaching and learning mission.
- Ball State's assessment plan is an integral activity driving curricular revision and is playing a key role in the evolution of the University Core Curriculum.
- Courses of study are well defined, coherent, and academically rigorous.
- Established curriculum and review committees, primarily comprising faculty, oversee and approve curricular changes and granting of credit.
- Ball State has successfully made the transition to a more selective admissions policy resulting in stronger academic credentials of incoming freshmen and a dramatically

- increased rate of retention from the first year to the second year.
- Graduate education enrollment has experienced significant growth, especially in teacher education.
- Graduate programs have become steadily more strategic in offering and revising courses based upon continuous assessment and through internal and external reviews.
- University Core Curriculum is a model for general education, program development, assessment, and curricular revision.
- Faculty members control the teaching of extended education courses, and they are assisted with the development of materials for these courses by university personnel using the latest technology and delivery systems.
- Ball State supports numerous interdisciplinary research centers that benefit students with interests and needs beyond what single departments can provide.
- Although alignment between undergraduate curricula and the university mission and strategic plan is clear, the alignment of these values with graduate program offerings requires further articulation.
- As the academic assessment plan continues to mature, the institution is challenged to preserve the strengths of a decentralized system while becoming better able to measure some objectives at the university level.
- As extended education programs grow, the university will need to adapt its advising services to better support students in these programs.

Faculty Accomplishments

- Faculty development programs supporting the teacher—scholar model have increased significantly during the past decade.
- The quality and quantity of scholarship and professional service offered by the faculty at the national and international levels are significant.



- External funding for research and sponsored programs climbed to \$25.2 million in 2002–03.
- Ball State must continue to work to ensure new faculty receive adequate guidance about how to integrate the teacher–scholar model in their teaching, research, and service.
- As the university's strategic plan continues to evolve, new sources of financial assistance for research facilities and equipment for beginning faculty will need to be identified to support the scholarly productivity of beginning faculty.

Student Support

- Ball State has received national recognition for academic support initiatives in University College, study abroad opportunities, and out-of-class and cocurricular activities.
- Cooperation between the academic and student affairs divisions has resulted in a set of learning outcomes that are interdisciplinary and developmental in nature and are not limited to learning that occurs only in the classroom.
- Maintaining optimal enrollment levels and continuing to attract academically talented students in the face of uncertain state appropriations continue to be challenges.
- Increasing the competitiveness of graduate student stipends is addressed by the university's strategic plan but continues to be a concern.
- As the university continues to articulate its teacher—scholar model, the institution will be challenged to maintain a balance that is consistent with its mission and resources.

Community Relationships

- Strong academic programs in fields such as education, communication, arts and culture, fitness, social services, natural sciences, architecture, and business have fostered the development of valuable community relationships throughout the state.
- Growth in interdependencies between higher education and local and state economic development initiatives will

- challenge the institution to define the appropriate boundaries for the university.
- Keeping the Ball State message to external audiences alive is a challenge in the absence of a permanent operating budget to support university marketing initiatives.

Criterion IV: The institution can continue to accomplish its purpose and strengthen its educational effectiveness.

- Whether shaping its biennial budget request, addressing fluctuating enrollment, shaping effective marketing strategies, or developing innovative retention programs, the university strategically responds to anticipated and unanticipated challenges.
- Ball State's most recent planning process was inclusive and has become embedded in the university's decision-making processes, including those related to resource allocation.
- Strong academic assessment and institutional research activities inform the university's planning processes and clarify institutional purposes by monitoring and supporting decisions that strengthen institutional effectiveness and reinforce the importance of student learning.
- Alignment of unit plans with the university strategic plan demonstrates the deep commitment of all stakeholders within the institution to a strategic planning framework of operation.
- Through tuition increases, the university is able to dedicate funds to strengthen institutional effectiveness in ways that support the strategic plan.
- The university strategic plan is complex, and maintaining the congruency of unit plans with the overall plan will be a challenge.
- Continuing to find ways to align the university's purposes and student needs in the context of uncertainties in the biennial state-level appropriations process is a concern.



Criterion V: The institution demonstrates integrity in its policies and relationships.

- The value Ball State places on integrity is explicit in the university's mission statement.
- Policies related to maintaining integrity in all aspects of university business are clear, available, and accessible to appropriate groups.
- Such policies keep pace with state and federal regulations and with current practices in higher education.
- To maintain integrity, the university must continue to systematically inform its members of relevant policies in a timely manner.

Responding to Concerns of the 1993 Reaccreditation Team

Ball State's last accreditation evaluation visit in 1993 resulted in the renewal of the university's accreditation. The 1993 team noted several strengths, including the strategic articulation of the institution's mission, the strength of faculty commitment, a university-wide assessment plan, the successful integration of technology in educational practices, good support for faculty development, sound financial management, high-quality physical facilities, positive community relationships, strong student advising programs, and the provision of distance education opportunities. These areas continue to be strengths today.

The 1993 accreditation team also outlined some concerns in its review. These concerns and a detailed analysis of Ball State's responses to them are provided in the complete self-study report. Most of the 10 concerns raised in 1993 are no longer issues for the institution. A few, although diminished in significance, have not been completely resolved and need continued attention. The strategies the

university is employing to address these issues are presented in the self-study report, as is their relationship to the *Ball State University Strategic Plan 2001–2006.*

Request for Institutional Change

Ball State University is requesting permission from the Higher Learning Commission to offer carefully selected undergraduate and graduate courses, credit certificates, and degree programs electronically without geographic boundaries. This request, which will be evaluated by the reaccreditation team when it visits the campus in February, is based on the success of the university's distance education efforts to date and the alignment of the provision of distance education with several goals in the university's strategic plan.



Ball State's Strengths at a Glance

- ➣ Productive, high-quality faculty committed to student learning and scholarship
- Strong academic qualifications of the student body
- Ample opportunities for student enrichment and faculty development
- ≈ Excellent facilities with cutting-edge technology
- ≈ Effective plan for assessment of institutional outcomes
- ∞ Demonstrated integrity in policies and practices
- ≈ Strong and increasing external support base
- Excellent collaborations with the local community and region
- Comprehensive plan for future growth and development