Introduction to the Self-Study Report

Evolution of a University

Ball State University opened in 1918 as the **Indiana State Normal School Eastern Division**. The Ball brothers had purchased the land and buildings of what had been a local college opened in 1899 that had failed financially and closed, and they donated the college to the State of Indiana. In 1922, the Indiana General Assembly changed the school's name to **Ball Teachers College** in honor of the generosity of the Ball family.

In 1925, the institution received its initial regional accreditation. In 1929, the name changed to **Ball State Teachers College**. Though previous attempts to build an institution of higher education had failed in Muncie, Ball State Teachers College established a solid foundation and began to grow.

In the 1960s, the Indiana General Assembly recognized the institution's phenomenal growth in enrollment and facilities and the variety and quality of its education programs and services by elevating the regional college to a university—**Ball State University**. The university continued to grow for several more decades until it reached its current stable enrollment of about 21,000 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in on-campus and off-campus programs.

Ball State was recently classified as a research university, high research activity (RU/H) by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. This was one of the more recent examples of the growth and evolution of Ball State University. See a video about the history of Ball State to learn more about the institution's development.

The Ball family continues to support the institution with a relative serving on the Board of Trustees since the opening of the college. The symbol of Ball State is the winged statue *Beneficence*, which was created to pay tribute to the Ball family. The university continues to honor the contributions of the Ball family with the recent Ball family reunion, which brought many members of the family to Muncie to visit the institution that bears their family name.

Progress from Previous Review

While Ball State met all five criteria in its last accreditation review by the **Higher Learning Commission** in 2003–04, we took seriously the constructive criticism and collegial counsel that the visiting peer review team provided. In particular, the team advised us to make our **strategic planning process** more transparent and obvious to the university community—how strategic planning guides budgetary decisions, within the framework provided by the state, and the relationships among the evolving university facilities master plan, the state's capital funding priorities, and what is ultimately constructed.

We also appreciated the team's support for our **assessment efforts** and accepted the responsibility to continue the evolution of assessment in our culture so it would become an essential element of decision making in all university units. In particular, while respecting the value of assessment at different levels in the university and across all vice presidential divisions, we have tried to maximize the impact of assessment through university-level aggregation and reporting. Similarly, we have continued the redesign of our University Core Curriculum and its assessment.

A final suggestion pertained to **executive communication** between our president and our Board of Trustees. As documented in this self-study report, Ball State's president and governing board enjoy a cordial, collaborative working relationship. The president is the primary conduit of information to the board, and she invites the members of the President's Cabinet to contribute regularly to board meetings. She also invites others—deans, associate vice presidents, distinguished faculty, and students—to provide specific information the board may desire. Substantial evidence exists that the Board of Trustees feels well-informed and able to fulfill its duties and responsibilities.

Transparent Planning

Since 2004, Ball State has engaged in several **formal strategic planning efforts**, as is more fully explained in this self-study report. It is important to nhighlight at this point, however, that each plan was guided by the university's provost and drafted by a task force representative of the entire university community. Each task force invited comments from all university constituencies in several open sessions and targeted specific groups (e.g., students, faculty and staff, trustees, administrators, etc.) in special sessions that included focus groups and retreats.

The task forces proceeded to construct **values statements**, from which followed statements of the university's **vision and mission**. In consistent fashion, **goals and objectives** were then written. Perhaps most important for clear definition and for benchmarking progress, specific **performance metrics** were written. In many cases, these were ambitious measurements that caused us to stretch ourselves, which proved to be important in making the case that Ball State understood that the changing economic environment required us to be creative and to learn to accomplish more with less. These metrics added an impetus for us to "work smarter" as well as harder.

Throughout these strategic planning processes, we reported annually in forums, retreats, in written communications, in special university publications, and in testimony before the **Indiana Commission for Higher Education**, other executive agencies and boards, and the committees of the **Indiana General Assembly** the progress we were making in achieving our objectives and goals through the specific metrics by which they were to be measured. Such transparency about the status of our performance, we felt, both shared information with university constituencies and, hopefully, conveyed to all the seriousness with which we took our responsibility as a public entity to be publicly accountable.

Strategic Budgeting

Ball State's strategic plans have focused on four overarching goals:

- attracting and retaining a higher quality and more diverse student body
- providing those students with challenging and motivating intellectual experiences, including Ball State's signature **immersive learning** experiences
- attracting and retaining the **highest quality faculty** and supporting the learning, scholarship, and engagement they can provide
- synergistically connecting the curriculum, the co-curricular activities, and the
 physical setting of the campus so Ball State becomes a truly vibrant, diverse,
 and intergenerational community

The university's budget has been formulated to support these goals. To be sure, the downturn in the nation's economy has affected Ball State, but we have responded creatively. Despite reductions in state funding, we managed to provide **employee raises** in all but one year and to support **strategic initiatives** by internal reallocation from lower-priority items and by becoming more efficient deliverers of essential services. We have continued to provide **scholarship assistance** to students through existing endowments, augmentations to those endowments, and the continuing generosity of our alumni, friends, and other benefactors. We have taken every opportunity to provide thoughtful input to those who develop and write state funding formulas and have become equally agile in responding effectively to the ultimate policies.

New programs have been funded to provide not only **competitive salaries** for new faculty but also **competitive start-up packages**. Start-up funding is especially important in the sciences and other strategic disciplines. New programs have been funded to increase faculty grant and contract activity, to promote travel to deliver scholarship, and to give students the opportunity to experience making a public delivery of their research. We have just embarked on a set of new programs designed to blunt initially, and reverse ultimately, the effects of **salary compression** at higher faculty ranks.

Cocurricular Opportunities

Ball State has always prided itself on the strength, diversity, and creativity of its co-curricular activities. We emphasize opportunities to build **lasting relationships** and develop **leadership talents** while deepening the process of **self-discovery**. We provide opportunities to develop **healthy lifestyles** and enjoy the company of peers from **diverse backgrounds**. We have set as a goal, for example, 1,000 international students on the Muncie campus and an equal number of domestic students traveling abroad, and we sponsor student-led discoveries of culture, religion, and food. This is part of enriching the community's experience of itself as part of the larger tapestry of the world.

We also sponsor **speaker series** as a university community (e.g., the David Letterman Distinguished Professional Lecture and Workshop Series, Excellence in Leadership Series), and as colleges and departments. We provide opportunities for our own faculty and students to **present their work**—readings of creative writing; displays of architectural designs; acting performances in University and Strother theatres and the Cave; artwork in the Atrium Gallery;

voice and instrumental concerts in Sursa Hall and other venues; poster presentations of research in psychology, chemistry, physics, and bioinformatics; and papers read at annual student conferences in philosophy, religious studies, and history, among many others.

Because these endeavors contribute to the achievement of strategic plan goals and objectives, we fund them. Funding comes from operational accounts, reallocations and savings, the generosity of donors, and sometimes ticket sales. In each case, however, the relationships among **planning**, **budgeting**, **and expenditures** are close and transparent.

Facilities Planning

Ball State's vice president for business affairs and his associates are the stewards of the **University Facilities Master Plan**. This plan reflects the evolving understanding of the university's identity as an educational institution and as an asset of the state. Thus, our plans cannot be isolated from changing state priorities, the progress of science and technology, and the broader needs of society. Our plans must have integrity of purpose, but we must often be entrepreneurial in their execution and flexible in thinking through new opportunities to achieve objectives.

For example, the design for **McKinley Avenue** was well-known, but the order in which buildings were constructed and, indeed, the timing of the reconstruction of the street (and cross streets), its median, and associated drainage and sewer systems were unknown, often dependent upon the priorities of governing authorities at the state or national levels. The construction of the **Marilyn K. Glick Center for Glass**, the pending construction of the **Rinard Greenhouse**, and the planned new **Ball State Planetarium** are all examples of timely contributions by donors to projects that allow the university to develop in desired directions—in each case, expanding the ambitions of our original designs.

Another excellent example is the **campus geothermal project**. The coal-fired boilers in the university steam plant had been coaxed to exceed their life expectancy, and more efficient and ecologically friendly replacements were let to bid. When no bids were submitted, the university reevaluated the situation and set out on an ambitious course to fulfill a longstanding commitment to "greening" the campus by exploring the possibility of replacing all but back-up heating and cooling with geothermal energy. The result was the design of the largest geothermal project of its kind in the country.

Half of the project has been funded and constructed. We are already saving \$1 million per year in operational expenses while slashing our carbon footprint. We continue to seek funding for the second half of the project, which will result in another \$1 million per year in savings and further reductions in our carbon footprint.

At the same time, the Department of Geological Sciences has partnered with the university to study the **long-term impact** of the project using monitoring wells strategically located to provide continuous data on the geology and hydrology of the site. We are confident this research will result in publications by faculty and students and a wealth of practical information for institutions worldwide.

Similarly, although the campus itself is not technically an arboretum, our biology and landscape architecture academic departments are collaborating with the university's facilities planning and management staff to identify and locate plantings that will not only **beautify the campus** but serve as an **outdoor laboratory** for students.

Institutional Assessment

At Ball State, we understand assessment to include, but not be limited to, the development and measurement of **student learning outcomes** and the deliberations and curricular changes that result. Other assessments include the benchmarks for effectiveness and efficiency across all divisions of the university that permit us to be **publicly accountable** for our decisions, their costs, and their benefits. As the self-study report will show, we are mission directed, data driven, and willingly accountable for our policies and actions. We seek transparency in all we do in order to promote beneficial public comment, because **responsiveness** is an attribute of public institutions, and we believe in its appropriateness.

More specifically, the sections of this report will detail **academic assessments** owing to various accreditations, periodic program reviews, program assessments developed by departments where third-party accreditations are not available, and the actions that have resulted from these assessments. We view the assessment process as a dynamic one and are constantly reviewing the adequacy of our measures and the "research designs" in which the measures are embedded. We are alert to the challenges of **new technologies and pedagogies** such as online and blended instruction.

We have modified the distributed model of assessment that left much of the institution's academic assessment in departments and programs without apparent **connection to the university** as a whole. Information on undergraduate assessment flows from departments and programs through academic deans to the provost, or more specifically, the associate provost and dean of University College. Her office is also the repository of assessment information for the new **University Core Curriculum (UCC-21)**. The framework for UCC-21 assessment resides in the governance system. It is under the direct purview of the University Core Curriculum Subcommittee, which reports to the Undergraduate Education Committee (UEC), which also has oversight over the entire undergraduate assessment process. The associate provost is an ex-officio member of these committees.

Graduate assessment flows through both the academic deans and the dean of the Graduate School, and his office is the university repository of information. The Graduate Education Committee (GEC) is responsible for **graduate assessment**, paralleling the UCC and UEC oversight of undergraduate program and core curriculum assessment.

We show equal fidelity to assessment in nonacademic areas. Our **student affairs** division documents in great detail its goals and objectives and measurements of their achievements. The same is true of our **information technology** division. Similarly, our **facilities and maintenance** operations benchmark their performance against nationally recognized standards. Our financial records are externally audited annually. The **university advancement** division sets specific performance goals for alumni affairs and development and the efficiency of their administrative services. These are reviewed annually by the

university's president and the Board of Trustees. Of course, one of the most public assessments of the work of the advancement area was the successful conclusion of the \$200 million **Ball State Bold capital campaign**, which exceeded its goal despite an adverse economic climate.

Education Redefined

When all is said and done, this **self-study for continuing accreditation** will demonstrate that Ball State University is a distinctive, nationally recognized institution of higher education that plans strategically, acts transparently, educates holistically, operates responsibly, assesses relentlessly, and adapts responsively.