

Criterion IV

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

Chapter 11: Planning and Assessment

Introduction

This chapter summarizes and elaborates upon the planning and assessment processes at Ball State University, including the history of such efforts and the transformations that have occurred that have been described in other sections of this self-study report. The institution has continued to successfully implement ongoing university-wide planning processes, systematic assessment, effective decision-making practices, and an allocation of resources to support institutional planning. In these ways, Ball State has processes in place that will enable the university to continue to fulfill its mission in the future and to increase its effectiveness. This chapter also will address the following concerns expressed by the 1993 site visit team:

- The lack of evidence for the implementation of the goals articulated in *Ball State University 2000: A Vision for the Future* (Exhibit 14 in the resource room) raises questions about the long run and strategic planning efforts of the university.
- The lack of identification of the budgetary and resource implications of planned reallocations could jeopardize the process.
- The confusion between the desirability of decentralized decision making and the ultimate responsibility of the central administration may lead to misunderstandings and lessen the effective use of resources.

Ongoing University-Wide Planning Processes

The planning processes at Ball State have changed considerably during the past 10 years. The creation of a new university strategic plan that presents visions, values, goals, and objectives is the most notable development during this period. With this plan in place, the university is positioned to act on a publicly stated agenda and to use the plan as a decision-making framework for resource acquisition, allocation, and/or redistribution.

During the 1990s, an era of a university planning council, planning was driven by *Ball State University 2000: A Vision for the Future* (Exhibit 14 in the resource room). Although this document was an attempt to define a university-wide focus, it was generally perceived as a visionary statement rather than a plan for assessment and action. Goals were primarily short-term, and their articulation was variable across academic units. Some units did little formal long-term planning, other than to adjust the request for and/or allocation of resources to meet the external demands of the legislative cycle. Other units formed extensive plans that were not always consistent with institutional priorities. Thus, one of the recommendations of the 1993 reaccreditation visit team was that Ball State work to develop a planning process that was long-term and system-wide.

With the 2002 adoption of a new university-wide strategic plan, an alternative approach to planning emerged wherein appropriations and/or resource allocations are to be tied to effectiveness in meeting the institutional mission, goals, and objectives. This change has created a new institutional climate that is still evolving. Faculty and professional staff now are explicitly charged to help implement and follow through on the stated intentions of the strategic plan. While the process is still too inchoate to have established a predictable cycle, the change in the administrative approach to institutional planning has been well received.

Development of the current strategic plan was guided by broad analyses of the context of the institution, including strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The vision of the university that emerged from this work reflects an aspiration to become a national model for intellectual vitality in a learner-centered, socially responsible community. While not a radical departure from the historical direction of the institution (as noted in Chapter 1 of this report), the vision statement created an overarching framework for institutional planning and was intended to energize a university-wide desire for excellence.

Reactions to initial drafts of the plan were sought from a wide variety of stakeholders, including students, faculty, professional personnel, administrators, alumni, local community members, and state, regional, and national colleagues and leaders. The final draft of the plan was presented to President Brownell in April 2001. Noting that the plan is to be viewed as a "living document" subject to revision as Ball State grows and changes, the president directed the vice presidents of the university to enable and encourage institutional units to support the goals of the plan. Information was communicated to individual units and colleges, prompting them to develop and implement unit-specific plans.

Planning at Ball State has a history of being both formally and informally driven. Historically the most persistent formal aspect of university planning has been the implicit resource allocation procedure built into the biennial legislative funding request cycle. This planning has been framed by strategic initiatives that position the institution relative to other universities in the state. The legislative request cycle is multistaged, involving review by the Indiana Commission for Higher Education, independent ranking of requests by the legislative appropriations committees, and final action by the state legislature as described in Chapter 5 of this report.

In this context, the university must respond to political realities at the state level—a landscape driven by concerns over statewide economic health—and frame financial

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requests to match institutional objectives with the state's agenda. On many occasions, the university has been successful. For example, between 1992 and 2001, Ball State received an annual appropriation for technology upgrades and support to better prepare its students for the workforce. This allowed the acquisition of individual personal computers for faculty and staff throughout the university; the installation of campuswide, building-integrated networking; and the creation of computer labs.

More general informal planning processes include year-to-year planning, which takes place throughout the administrative structure. Regular meetings at all levels within the institution provide the opportunity to develop a greater understanding of issues across the university and to develop strategies for meeting future challenges.

Systematic Assessment

The institutional planning processes and decision making at Ball State are supported by data obtained from continuous assessment at the university and unit levels. Ball State, through its Office of Academic Assessment and Institutional Research (OAAIR), has received national recognition for its assessment activities, which permeate all areas of the university. The OAAIR is a fully staffed, internally funded unit whose mission has expanded to address the changing and increasing demands by both internal and external constituents for student outcomes assessment and administrative decision making.

Ball State uses multiple methods for systematically collecting student feedback. Some of these ongoing efforts include:

- ≈ Alumni Survey
- ☞ Freshman Year Experience Survey
- Making Achievement Possible Survey
- Senior Survey
- **Sophomore Survey Sophomore Survey**
- ∞ Withdrawing Students Survey
- Distance Education Satisfaction Survey

These methods and recent results of these assessments are available as Exhibits 58, 75, and 83 in the resource room. These well-established procedures enable the institution to undertake program-based, department-based, and university-wide assessment, and they continue to be revised and refined to serve and strengthen Ball State's planning efforts. The OAAIR Web site (www.bsu.edu/assessment) provides a comprehensive look at the office functions and summary reports from university-wide surveys.

In addition, Ball State has used both nationally normed and locally developed tests to monitor the academic achievement of students and incoming matriculates. Since 1988 the university has administered the College Basic Skills Examination (C-BASE) to incoming matriculates at summer orientation. C-BASE is a nationally normed, criterion–referenced test of academic achievement in general studies. Incoming matriculates also have been tested for critical thinking skills since the early 1990s, first using the Watson Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal and later the California Critical Thinking Test. The ETS Major Field has been used within several disciplines to obtain detailed, objective indicators of student achievement in specific disciplines. Critical thinking and C-BASE tests also have been obtained from upper–division undergraduates as a follow-up to measures obtained of new matriculates.

Ball State's *Academic Assessment Plan*, available as Exhibit 3 in the resource room, describes the university's current policies and practices. The plan's implementation involves the participation of a number of committees and many academic units. For example, the Academic Assessment Advisory Committee's (AAAC) roles as advisor to the OAAIR are to discuss and explore assessment programs and activities and to identify related issues throughout the university, to disseminate information about university-related academic assessment issues and programs, and to recommend appropriate policies for academic assessment. Information regarding university-related academic assessment is mostly disseminated through reports published by the OAAIR. Policy recommendations from the AAAC are made formally to the Academic Policies Council. Proposed changes originating in the AAAC are perfected by the Academic Policies Council and then forwarded to the University Senate. In addition, major changes in assessment policy may originate from the AAAC, the Office of the Provost or the University Senate.

An important feature of Ball State's assessment philosophy is that it focuses on assessing academic programs rather than individual students. Further, the philosophy requires that assessment be comprehensive across all undergraduate and graduate programs. Assessment is a collective effort, but it is decentralized; colleges are responsible for developing their own assessment approaches. When appropriate, assessment is discipline specific and based on multiple measures. Finally, the information collected is evaluated for its usefulness for students. Assessment information is routinely used to improve individual courses, groupings of courses required for majors and minors, and the specific grouping of courses used for the University Core Curriculum. Assessment results should be shared openly with students; for that reason, students are included in advisory groups.

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As an early participant in student outcomes assessment and with support from the senior administration, Ball State has been an ongoing leader in the field of assessment. Peer institutions and assessment publications frequently reference the university's *Assessment Workbook*, which is a locally developed guide (www.bsu.edu/web/assessment/WB/contents.htm). The American Productivity and Quality Center recognized Ball State's assessment efforts when the university received the Best Practice in Learning Outcomes Award in 1998. More recently, Ball State was featured as one of 13 Institutions of Excellence in the First College Year by the Policy Center on the First Year of College and was specifically cited for its freshman assessment program (www.brevard.edu/fyc/instofexcellence/data.htm).

Another aspect of ongoing assessment involves outside agency reviews, which are described in the following section.

Academic Planning: External and Internal Review Processes

Ball State has 48 academic programs and degrees that are periodically reviewed for accreditation, as referenced in Appendix 7.1. Formal records of accreditation reviews may be found in the resource room as Exhibit 33. At one time, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education (ICHE) required an internal and external review of all academic programs every eight years. This review is now voluntary. Ball State decided to maintain this review cycle and to integrate it with the annual evaluation of progress toward the goals and objectives outlined in the university's strategic plan. A set of guidelines specifies the type of information to be provided in these reviews (Appendix 11.1). Copies of reports from these reviews since 1993 are available in the resource room as Exhibit 51.

The University Core Curriculum Subcommittee of Ball State's Undergraduate Education Committee is charged with assessing the University Core Curriculum program and recommending changes in that curriculum to the Undergraduate Education Committee. As detailed in Chapters 7 and 8 of this self-study report, the subcommittee completed its report on the first assessment cycle of the program on July 1, 1997. The report on the second cycle of assessment was produced during fall 2003. These reports are available as Exhibit 89 in the resource room.

Academic departments also engage in regular revisions of their core curricula. A comparison of the 1992–94 and 2002–04 undergraduate catalogs reveals that of the 24 units offering undergraduate programs with more than one option, all had made revisions to their respective departmental core courses. Two additional units adopted common cores where there were none 10 years ago. These units also have revised their core courses since their adoption.

A major contribution to the development of a "culture of evidence" at Ball State has been the construction of a Unit Assessment System (UAS) for all aspects of professional education preparation. The system involves six of the seven colleges. A centerpiece of this assessment system is the digital portfolio. Beginning in fall 2002, all freshman teaching majors were required to design a portfolio in their first year and maintain it until graduation. During the past four years, content and methods faculty from all professional education licensure areas on campus have studied the nature of performance assessment and have designed tasks that students must complete to the satisfaction of faculty at each of four "decision points." Students demonstrate accomplishments relative to INTASC (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium) principles and standards set forth by the Indiana Professional Standards Board. Because secondary-school teaching majors complete significant course work in both content disciplines and education and because these majors are officially based within the content disciplines, large numbers of faculty from both areas have been involved in the design of the assessment system. For example, more than 60 faculty members have been intimately involved within the College of Sciences and Humanities alone.

An integral part of the UAS, which is anticipated to serve as a national model of assessment, is the Web-based data gathering and analysis engine, the products of which will provide the basis for decision making at the institutional, programmatic, and individual student levels. The university has committed resources to the development of the computer-based record-keeping system and to the professional development of faculty who will use the system and teach students to interact with it in compiling their portfolios.

This entire approach to the UAS represents a dramatic institutional change intended to make student assessment a transparent operation. Currently the requirements for students are spelled out in a *Handbook for Teaching Majors* (Exhibit 45 in the resource room) and in specific licensure area addenda to the general handbook. In preparing their portfolios for examination at four different times, students reflect upon their own maturation in the content and pedagogy areas and receive both global and specific annual feedback from professors on the adequacy of their progress. It is anticipated that the teacher education prototype portfolio will soon be adapted by many other programs so most students will maintain a version of a digital portfolio as a central part of the assessment of their academic progress.

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Effective Decision-Making Practices

Decision making is an ongoing activity that occurs at all levels and throughout the full structure of the institution, ranging from the leadership of university officers to the collaborative interactions of appointed committees and task forces and the University Senate. As is the case with any healthy organization, decision-making processes continue to be refined. With the adoption of a new university strategic plan, the ongoing maturation of an award-winning comprehensive academic assessment program, and a changing university governance structure that complements institutional planning, Ball State continues to effectively respond to anticipated and unanticipated challenges.

Anticipated and Unanticipated Challenges: A Case Example

In 1997 new enrollment goals were established with the following objectives in mind: enhance the overall academic reputation of the university, improve the academic quality of new students and become competitive for the more qualified students, and increase the one-year retention rate of first-year students to 80 percent and the graduation rate to 60 percent. In setting these goals, Ball State realized that initially the university would experience a decline in overall enrollment. Indeed this was the case—the number of entering freshmen dropped from 3,980 in fall 1997 to 3,429 in fall 1998 and dropped again in 1999 to a low of 3,407. Anticipating this drop and the resulting decline in state appropriations, the university adopted several strategies, including the following: development of a new marketing plan, image, and theme; initiation of a comprehensive media campaign throughout Indiana; revision of promotional materials; expanded use of electronic media; and development of new recruitment strategies for undergraduate, graduate, international, and off-campus students. Financial support for these strategies was provided on a temporary basis by the Ball State University Foundation.

Positive results of these goals and strategies began to appear as early as 1998 and were clearly demonstrated by fall 2002. By 2002 the academic credentials of the entering class were the highest in Ball State's history. The average SAT score of these students, which previously had been below national and state levels, rose to 19 points above the national average and 38 points above the state average. Retention rates to the sophomore year increased from 69 percent in 1997 to 77 percent in 2001. Off-campus graduate enrollment nearly doubled between 1998 and 2002, and international student enrollment showed steady gains over this period.

From 1998 through 2002, as Ball State waited for its new enrollment plan to "bear fruit," the university could not have anticipated the extent to which external economic

forces would affect the institution. The national economic downturn, originally predicted to be short-lived, persisted into its third year, hindering the growth of the university's endowment funds and the level of state appropriations to Ball State. Following two years of expected reductions in state appropriations due to enrollment declines, the institution experienced another year of financial hardship. Despite the university's reversal from enrollment decline to enrollment growth, the state indefinitely deferred its payment of the 12th-month appropriation to all state institutions in the 2001–02 fiscal year. This was followed by a loss of Ball State's facilities repair and renovation and technology replacement allocations.

The university was able to continue to fulfill its mission and even continue its efforts to support the new strategic plan during this period of financial hardship due to several key decisions. First, the administration aggressively but responsibly pursued approval from the Board of Trustees to adjust student fees. Second, Ball State's longterm practice of preventative maintenance in previous years permitted the university to defer some capital repairs and renovations to a later date. Third, the university was able to borrow from its reserve to support its operations. Fourth, a temporary reduction of endowment payouts was issued to preserve the principal in the institution's foundation accounts. Fifth, the university emphasized the importance of acquiring external grants to maintain faculty scholarship. Because Ball State has practiced sound fiscal management in prior years when economic constraints were relatively few, the institution could nimbly respond to current economic conditions and avoid reductions in academic programs or tenure lines. Arguably the best evidence of Ball State's ability to effectively respond to these challenges is that the university was able to continue to issue salary increases to employees and offer competitive salaries to new hires during this period.

Decision-Making Processes and the Strategic Plan

Each of Ball State's vice presidential areas regularly evaluates its role within the university, its structure, and its operations, and decision making occurs within the context of the university's strategic plan. Periodic program reviews guide academic decision making. Capital projects planning is driven by factors such as the need for new learning environments and the ability to acquire properties adjacent to the university. Information technology planning anticipates innovations in information systems, hardware, and software as well as employers changing expectations for their new hires. Enrollment planning relies upon demographic projections in addition to market factors such as institutional image. Fundraising is driven by national and regional assessment of

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giving patterns and donor interests. In all areas, annual personnel reviews help guide decisions concerning the human resources required by each unit to adequately fulfill its various roles and functions.

In addition to these decentralized decision-making processes, decision making at Ball State is guided by a centralized process. In 2001 the provost convened a Strategic Plan Monitoring Group (SPMG) to oversee continuous strategic planning. In fall 2002, the SPMG was reconceptualized as the Strategic Plan Implementation and Assessment Team, commissioned to design procedures to review unit plans and issue a progress report by August 2003. By the end of the 2002–03 fiscal year, all areas had developed plans that complement and support the university plan. The 2003 progress report is available as Exhibit 81 in the resource room.

Other campus groups have been constituted to engage in institutional decision making at the systems level and to complement the assessment and planning activities at the unit level. These groups cross unit and disciplinary boundaries and include the following:

- Coordinating Committee on University Marketing and Enrollment Management
- Enrollment Systems Procedures Network
- ≈ Academic Assessment Advisory Council
- ≈ Assessment Committee of the University Senate
- Sistance Education Advisory Committee
- Core Curriculum Committee
- ™ National Philanthropy Council

Allocation of Resources

A fundamental operating principle of Ball State's strategic plan requires that resource allocation be guided by the plan's goals and objectives. Realizing that existing sources of revenue—especially state appropriations—were insufficient to support the plan, the university instituted two substantial fee increases as described in Chapter 1 of this report. Whereas the percent increase that went into effect in fall 2002 was implemented to maintain operations, the fixed-amount increase that went into effect in fall 2003 was implemented to address strategic initiatives. If new student fees and gifts to the university generate income as planned over the next five years, the additional revenue will be directed in support of programs such as student financial aid, the freshman experience, faculty salaries, and library collections as described elsewhere in this report.

A recent budgetary example illustrates the way in which the strategic plan was implemented during its first year of existence. In spring 2002, Indiana's higher education

institutions were experiencing severe cuts in funding from the state legislature. Because the strategic plan emphasized the recruitment and retention of faculty, a 4 percent increase in faculty salaries was included in Ball State's budget when other institutions in the state and region were experiencing smaller, if any, increases in salaries.

Ball State actively seeks external funds to support the objectives outlined in its strategic plan. This is exemplified in a project titled "Partnerships for Successful Learning." This project was supported by a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. and was designed to increase student retention and persistence using the locally developed Freshman Connections learning community program. Expanding on the work begun with the first Lilly grant, a second grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. in fall 2001 supported a project titled "Building the Four-Year Commitment," which was designed to increase student retention with a focus on freshman-to-sophomore-year programming to provide a connection to the school and a commitment to graduation. Finally, the iCommunication project, funded by a \$20 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc., and the project's three major components—the Center for Media Design, the Global Media Network, and the Media Studies Program—are tied to several strategic plan objectives related to technology enhancement and the expansion of relationships beyond the campus.

In addition to the support of Lilly Endowment Inc., federal funding programs have been tapped frequently. In September 2001, Ball State was awarded a GEAR UP grant under a new federal program aimed at preparing and encouraging low-income students to pursue higher education as a means of overcoming poverty. The program targets sixth- and seventh-grade students in disadvantaged schools and is a partnership between the university, Indianapolis Public Schools, and other area community and educational organizations.

Evaluation with Respect to Criterion IV

Ball State is positioned to continue to accomplish its purposes and strengthen its educational effectiveness. Whether shaping its biennial budget request, addressing the issues of fluctuating enrollment and related budgetary impacts, shaping effective marketing strategies, or developing innovative retention programs, Ball State strategically responds to anticipated and unanticipated challenges. The work of the Office of Academic Assessment and Institutional Research and other planning and assessment entities continues to inform the university's planning processes and clearly serves the interests of students, faculty, and the administration in monitoring and



supporting decisions and actions that strengthen educational effectiveness. The recent adoption of the new strategic plan, the creation of the Strategic Plan Implementation and Assessment Team, and the development of an annual progress report offer a new platform of operation for the university. The alignment of departmental, collegiate, and other unit plans with that of the university attests to the depth of commitment of all stakeholders within the institution to this framework of operation. Finally, Ball State has consistently requested and secured specialized external funding and deployed internal funds to initiate specific programs and strengthen its educational effectiveness in ways that support the strategic plan.

Institutional Strengths

During the past 10 years, Ball State has refined its decision-making processes, assessment procedures, operational planning, and resource allocations in such a way that it can effectively embrace the future and is poised to accomplish the purpose of strengthening its educational effectiveness. The university's strategic plan provides clarity, identifies benchmarks, and outlines processes by which the institution can continue to monitor the fulfillment of its mission and the many related goals laid out in the plan. As a "living document," the strategic plan reflects a shared understanding that will be periodically updated and routinely monitored. Key strengths are the inclusiveness of Ball State's planning processes and the extent to which the plan has become embedded in the university's decision-making processes, including those related to the allocation of resources.

Another strength is institutional structures and programs that reinforce the importance of assessment activities as part of the university culture. Student learning is central to the institution and is reflected in these wide-ranging assessment activities and related institutional support. This includes the adoption of unit assessment such as the UAS and the use of many instruments such as the Senior Survey to monitor the impact of the educational experience at Ball State.

Concerns and Future Challenges

Future challenges for the university are clear and specific. The strategic plan is complex, with many interrelated objectives. Maintaining the congruency of unit plans with the overall institutional plan will be a challenge. In addition, monitoring and assessing the plan on an annual basis challenges the institution to identify the most efficient means of evaluating its progress as a whole without sacrificing information that comes from the rich diversity across units that is valued. Furthermore, following through on the promise of

resource allocation driven by the annual reporting of the Strategic Plan Implementation and Assessment Team will require a continuing transparency of operation and active sharing of information to enable the university community to stand behind and embrace internal change as Ball State continues to position itself to confront and embrace the forces of change external to the institution.

Finally, continuing to find ways to align the university's interest in meeting the needs of its students with the uncertainties of the biennial state-level appropriations process will be an ever-present challenge. Ball State's unique position as a university capable of fostering extensive outreach to statewide communities through its many established programs and the opportunity for growing these into ever-more-powerful levers for economic development and social transformation within Indiana bode well for the mission and goals outlined in the strategic plan. Nonetheless, the university will have to continue to pay careful attention to how it manages this fit of internal need with external constraint.