

SECTION III: INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Introduction

USA is committed to the concept of institutional effectiveness (*Undergraduate and Graduate Bulletin, 2001-2002*, p. 4). The development of USA's institution-wide assessment and planning measures for teaching, research, and service have evolved over several decades into a process that is beginning to yield results important to USA's strategic planning program. The process is neither perfect nor complete; no dynamic system ever is. Section III of this *Self-Study Report* documents the manner in which USA fulfills its stated purpose and describes the new features recently put into place to strengthen this process.

Section III also describes the broad-based, department, college, and institution-wide assessment system USA employs to determine its institutional effectiveness. Section III lists the variety of assessment methods used and explains the ways in which the results of assessment are used to improve programs and planning. This section also describes the step-by-step process USA uses to identify and evaluate assessment measures and to determine the extent to which departmental, college, and institutional goals and objectives are achieved. The institutional effectiveness measures described demonstrate that all elements of USA are continuously engaged in an ongoing process of planning, assessing, learning, and improving.

3.1 PLANNING AND EVALUATION: EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

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Planning and Evaluation for Educational Activities

*(Page 18, Line 5): Educational activities of an institution include teaching, research, and public service. Planning and evaluation for these activities **must** be systematic, broad based, interrelated, and appropriate to the purposes of the institution.*

Planning and evaluation of the University's educational progress has been a process of evolution over the past decade. Pursuant to the recommendations resulting from the 1990-1992 self-study for reaffirmation of the University's accreditation by SACS, efforts were undertaken to develop the institution's first formal planning structure. In 1991, the Joint Planning Council was established to provide guidance to the University's divisions and to make recommendations to the President concerning (1) strategic goals and (2) policies and procedures for facilitating progress toward those goals. The charge to the Council (see Document 3.1: 1 of 9A) included making recommendations to the President on USA's overall mission and goals. Specifically, the charge included matters such as setting planning assumptions, recommending institutional objectives and priorities, evaluating achievement of the institution's goals and objectives,

coordinating planning information, and making recommendations to the Budget Council, the Space and Facilities Committee, and other standing University committees.

The Joint Planning Council, chaired by the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, included vice-presidents and executive directors responsible for the major academic, student services, and administrative divisions of the University. The Council also included representatives of the Deans Council, Faculty Senate, and the Director of Institutional Research and Planning.

The planning structure established in 1991 included two planning committees subordinate to the Joint Planning Council. The University Planning Committee and the Medical Affairs Planning Committee were established to promote broad participation in the planning process. The University Planning Committee included representatives of each college and school along with representatives of student services and support departments. The Medical Affairs Planning Committee included representatives of (1) each basic science and clinical science department of the College of Medicine, (2) the College's student and academic affairs offices, and (3) USA hospitals and clinics. The Director of Institutional Research and Planning was appointed to both the University and Medical Affairs Planning Committees to provide information resources.

These two subordinate planning committees were charged with (1) making recommendations to

the Joint Planning Council on the appropriateness and adequacy of USA's Mission Statement, (2) suggesting specific objectives for consideration by the Joint Planning Council, (3) performing studies of current planning issues, and (4) identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats affecting progress toward University goals.

The Joint Planning Council adopted a set of planning assumptions nominated by the subordinate planning committees, produced recommendations on areas of strategic emphasis for the institution, and developed procedures for review of proposals for new academic programs. The Council also created a special committee composed of administrators, faculty, students, and staff to review the University's Mission Statement and to recommend revisions. The revised Statement was adopted by the Board of Trustees in June 1993 and continues to guide the institution.

The Joint Planning Council was also responsible for reviewing and approving the USA's *Annual Planning Statement* submissions to the Alabama Commission on Higher Education. (ACHE).

These statements were required to accomplish the following tasks:

- Address proposals for new academic degree programs anticipated for submission during the next five years;
- Provide a schedule for development of programs of research, public service, and

instructional augmentation for which the institution anticipated seeking state funding;

- Provide descriptions and justifications of construction, modification, renovation, and maintenance of campus facilities; and
- Report on the status of and plans for accreditation of instructional programs.

The Annual Planning Statements also included descriptions of the following:

- Institutional plans related to statewide policies and goals adopted by ACHE for college-level study,
- Admissions standards,
- General education requirements,
- Program articulation among two- and four-year institutions,
- Programmatic accreditation, and
- Institutional effectiveness and student learning outcomes.

Most of the proposals for new academic degree programs identified in the Annual Planning Statements were developed and submitted to ACHE for approval. Plans for expansion of the campus facilities and for renovation of existing buildings met with less success, owing primarily to (1) the lack of state funding for construction and repair and (2) the need to rely almost exclusively on institutional bond issues for capital development.

Subsequent to the change in the University's administration in July 1998, it was recognized that the formal institutional planning structure and process would benefit from a completely new approach which would provide for broader representation of faculty, staff, students, trustees, alumni, and community representatives in establishing a vision for the University and charting strategic goals and objectives to realizing that vision. It was also recognized that, within the parameters of the Mission Statement and major strategic goals, the planning process should provide the institution with the flexibility necessary to (1) respond to the dynamic nature of its environment and (2) encourage creativity and entrepreneurship among those responsible for managing and sustaining the USA's day-to-day operations.

A resolution of the University's Board of Trustees to establish the University Long-Range Planning Committee was adopted on March 4, 1999. The resolution (Document 3.1: 1 of 9C) authorized the President to coordinate with the Chair of the Long-Range Planning Committee of the Board to establish a central planning committee and a long-range planning process. The resolution set forth a charge to develop a collective, long-term vision for USA and a comprehensive planning process to include all functions of the institution. Membership of the Long-Range Planning Committee, described in Document 3.1: 1 of 9B, is broad-based, including representation of the Trustees, the faculty, student government, administration, and local

government and business. The Long-Range Planning Committee is chaired jointly by the Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees and the President of the University.

Pursuant to its charge, the Long-Range Planning Committee adopted a set of planning assumptions about the University's environment in four categories: economic trends, demographic trends, student characteristics, and higher-education governance and coordination. These assumptions will be used to establish and adjust strategic objectives and to guide annual planning activities. These assumptions will also guide the collection, analysis, and dissemination of information essential to the planning and evaluation processes. The assumptions address factors and forces--predominantly external to the University--that could foster or impede the attainment of the institution's strategic objectives.

The Long-Range Planning Committee developed a Vision and Commitment Statement that addresses the development of USA in six strategic areas. Within each area, the Committee established goals for the 2001-2006 planning period along with specific objectives to be accomplished in support of achievement of these goals. These areas of strategic emphasis, goals, and objectives are included in a document entitled *Visions: Strategies for Realizing Shared Visions for the University of South Alabama*, which has been endorsed by the Committee and adopted by the Board of Trustees. These areas are further described below in the response to the

accreditation criteria dealing with educational goals and institutional purpose.

The Board of Trustees also adopted a process that provides direction for annual planning and evaluation activities at all levels within the University. Document 3.1: 1 of 9D illustrates that process and the flow of planning guidance and documents. As directed by the President, each division and department prepares an annual statement of goals and objectives—a statement that describes activities to achieve progress toward the institution's broad strategic goals and objectives for the planning period as described in the *Visions* planning document. Each annual statement describes the methods and outcomes measures that will be used to assess the achievement of the division's or department's objectives. The head of each academic or administrative unit is encouraged to establish specific operational objectives for each department or program within the division; these objectives must be related to USA's Mission Statement, strategic goals, and the planning-period objectives adopted by the Long-Range Planning Committee. Annual statements describe the unit's accomplishments in support of achievement of the institution's strategic goals. At the time of this writing, the first annual planning cycle guided by the new process is nearing completion. It is anticipated that the annual progress statements and assessments will be consolidated into a summary report (tentatively titled *Realizations*) to be presented to the Long-Range Planning Committee and the Board of Trustees. The report will be published and made available to the USA community.

Conclusion

Compliance.

Recommendation

None.

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Expected Educational Results

*(Page 18, Line 8): The institution **must** define its expected educational results and describe its methods for analyzing the results.*

General Institutional Expectations of Educational Results

According to the Mission Statement, USA expects its educational programs to produce undergraduate degree recipients who have obtained a broad-based education through a variety of curricular and co-curricular opportunities that allow them to expand their cultural, physical, and emotional awareness. Upon graduation, the student is expected to be able to think critically and analytically, to communicate effectively, to acquire information and apply it to problem solving, and to understand the context of global complexity and diversity in which knowledge is applied. The Mission Statement also espouses the qualities of integrity, commitment to service, a spirit of

stewardship and community involvement, respect for individuals, and an appreciation for diversity.

The Statement sets forth the results expected of graduate programs as the preparation of students for new and traditional professional and academic careers. The Statement includes the additional expectation that graduates of its medical, allied health, and nursing programs will be able to provide the community and the region with the highest quality health care.

Expected Educational Results of the Core Curriculum Requirements

USA maintains a core curriculum or general education requirement, which was revised most recently as part of a 1996 state legislative mandate on general studies and course articulation among two-year and four-year institutions. The general education curriculum, described in the *Bulletin* (pp. 24-26), includes course requirements in written composition and requirements (in terms of minimum semester credit hours) for three disciplinary groupings: (1) humanities and fine arts, (2) natural sciences and mathematics, and (3) history, social sciences, and behavioral sciences. In statements under each grouping, the student is advised that courses completed “should be broad in scope and content rather than specific.” The statement for general education requirements also advises students that (1) specific requirements for core-curriculum courses vary from major to major and (2) students, before registering, should consult the specific

requirements shown in the departmental sections of the *Bulletin*.

The statements also contain limited descriptions of results anticipated from the student-s completion of the course requirements (e.g., development of a global perspective, demonstration of competency in oral and written communication, understanding of the scientific method, and knowledge of the methods of inquiry in the social sciences). The core requirement for written composition includes two courses required of all undergraduate students: English 101 and 102. General competence in written communication is demonstrated by the student-s earning a minimum grade of C in both courses. Students may be exempted from English 101, however, if they have achieved a score of 27 or above on the ACT English examination, a score of 550 on the verbal portion of the SAT, or a score of 3 or above on the Advanced Placement Program. Students who score 500 or above on the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) English Examination are exempted from taking both required English courses. Another part of USA's core curriculum for written composition is the requirement that each student must complete two designated writing courses (beyond English 101 and 102), with at least one course chosen from the student-s major or minor program.

All undergraduate students are required to complete eleven semester hours of core courses in mathematics and the natural sciences, including three hours in a mathematics course at the

precalculus algebra level or higher and at least eight semester hours in natural science courses offering laboratory experiences.

Core-curriculum requirements extend beyond those of the state-mandated general education requirements in two areas of student achievement: oral communication and computer competency. University requirements also specify successful completion of a course in oral communication. Students enrolled in the College of Allied Health Professions, the College of Arts and Sciences, the Mitchell College of Business, the College of Education, the School of Computer and Information Sciences, and the School of Continuing Education meet the requirement by completing Communication Arts 110, a public speaking course. Students in the College of Engineering and the College of Nursing are required to complete an oral communication course specified for their particular degree major programs.

Beginning in the Fall 2001, all students must have personal access to a personal computer with specific operating software including capabilities for word processing, spreadsheet applications, e-mail, and Internet access (*Bulletin*, p. 24). The statement also advises students that specific programs may require completion of an introductory course in computer science and recommends that students who are unfamiliar with computers take the introductory course for credit (if not required by their major program) or take advantage of self-paced, on-line computer-

training courses offered at no charge. All programs in the University with the exception of five departments of the College of Arts and Sciences require either completion of a course in computer applications or demonstration of proficiency by successful completion of courses requiring the ability to use a computer.

Thus, at the institutional level, attainment of specific competencies in each area of the core curriculum is defined as successful completion of a minimum number of hours or specific courses in each discipline group (as modified by department and program requirements) or (in the case of written composition) by achievement of a minimum score on external examinations.

College, Departmental, and Programmatic Expectations of Educational Results

A variety of documents have been reviewed to evaluate the extent to which the expected educational results of specific academic programs are defined. These documents include the following: the *Undergraduate and Graduate Bulletin, 2001-2002*, the departmental self-studies, reviews conducted to support programmatic accreditation, divisional and departmental *Goals and Objectives Statements* for 2000-2001, college and departmental assessment plans for 2000-2001, assessment activities reports for 2000-2001, and course syllabi. (All of these documents are on file in the Self-Study Office.)

A great deal of variation exists among the college and departmental statements concerning the expected results of their respective educational programs. Many of the statements of departmental or program goals in the *Bulletin* address student learning outcomes in broad terms of preparation of the student for employment or for further study at the graduate level. Other statements are limited to a description or definition of the discipline. Professional programs (particularly those in the Allied Health Professions, Engineering, and Nursing) have formulated exceptionally thorough statements on the program's anticipated educational results, particularly with regard to the knowledge, skills, and affective development expected of the students who complete their respective curricula. These academic divisions and their constituent programs include detailed and consistent statements of educational outcomes for undergraduate and graduate programs in their sections of the *Bulletin* and in their assessment plans submitted for 2000-2001.

Among the programs of the College of Arts and Sciences (USA's largest academic division), the variety of disciplines has produced an equally wide variety of statements on expected educational results of undergraduate and graduate programs. Most of the statements of anticipated outcomes for the Arts and Sciences programs are broad in terms of (1) the types of courses students are required to complete in the major and (2) the student's preparation for employment or continuing study. As seen in departmental assessment plans as well as in the *Bulletin*, the learning outcomes

each student is expected to achieve is thoroughly enumerated in the statements of anticipated educational results of the undergraduate programs in English, Criminal Justice, Foreign Languages and Literatures, and Mathematics and Statistics.

At the University level, the analysis of educational results is primarily based on surveys of recent graduates and alumni. These surveys assess respondents' perceptions about the quality of their education at USA, their preparation for employment or additional formal programs of study, and the extent to which the institution helped them achieve personal goals in each of the areas described in the University Mission Statement. These surveys are supplemented by regular analyses of the academic performance of first-year freshman in core curriculum courses and of grade point distributions; additional analyses are conducted on the completion, withdrawal, and failure rates in undergraduate course sections in each program. Periodic surveys of first-time freshmen are administered during the students' second semester at USA in order to gather information on the entering students' perceptions of their experiences in a broad range of educational and student-services aspects.

A wide variety of methods are currently employed at USA for analyzing educational results. An additional method will be added spring 2002 aimed at assessing general education outcomes. Other assessment methods include analysis of student performance on professional licensure and

certification examinations, student evaluations of teaching, exit interviews with students who complete their programs of study, surveys of alumni, and follow-up surveys directed toward employers of graduates. The vehicles used for evaluating the achievement of expected educational results are further described below in the response to the accreditation criterion on evaluation of educational goals.

Conclusion

Partial compliance.

Recommendation

The Principal Committee recommends the following:

- That USA expand the published requirement for individual student access to a personal computer (with specific software and communication capabilities) and include a statement on the attainment of minimum levels of skill in using basic computer applications (e.g., word processing, spreadsheet applications, and computer-based communication) and that those expectations be incorporated into USA requirements for the core curriculum;
- That the Departments of Dramatic Arts, English, Foreign Languages, History, and

Philosophy adopt statements on computer proficiency expected of students in their respective undergraduate degree programs, including specific course-completion requirements and/or other means of assessing students= computer competencies;

- That USA proceed with plans to evaluate and adopt institutional-level methods of assessing the educational results of its core curriculum and general education requirements, including administration of examinations (such as those available in ETS's Academic Profile Test) to students who have completed sixty semester hours of credit;
- That department chairs be charged with periodic review of the syllabi to ensure that they reflect programmatic learning objectives;
- That the program descriptions contained in the University *Bulletin* be reviewed to ensure that the student is informed of the specific knowledge, skills, and aptitudes he or she is expected to attain through completion of the program; and
- That the annual college and departmental assessment plans be reviewed and revised as necessary to ensure that methods of evaluation of learning-based outcomes are appropriate, consistently applied, and relevant to the division-s or department's

educational goals.

Proposal for Excellence

The Principal Committee suggests that USA develop a statement setting forth specific competencies and affective learning attainment expected of each student in each of the components of the core curriculum requirements, including written and oral communication, mathematics and computational skills, arts and humanities, the natural sciences, and the social and behavioral sciences. The statement should be published in the annual *Undergraduate and Graduate Bulletin*.

Commendation

The Colleges of Allied Health Professions, Engineering, and Nursing are to be commended for the clarity and thoroughness of their statements on educational results and student learning outcomes.

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Clearly Defined Purpose

(Page 18, Line 11): *The institution **must** establish a clearly defined purpose appropriate to collegiate education.*

USA's Mission Statement sets forth broad goals for the undergraduate and graduate educational programs, faculty scholarship, continuing education activities and research and public service programs (*Undergraduate and Graduate Bulletin, 2001-2002*, p. 3). The *Bulletin* also contains a statement of Goals and Purposes concerning education and student development at all levels.

Conclusion

Compliance.

Recommendation

None.

#4 of 9

Goals Consistent with Purpose

*(Page 18, Line 13): The institution **must** formulate goals consistent with the institution's purpose.*

The Mission Statement includes statements of broad goals for the educational program. Goals for the undergraduate program include education of the student to (1) think critically and analytically, (2) communicate effectively, (3) acquire information and apply it to problem-solving, and (4) understand the context of global complexity and diversity in which knowledge is

applied. The goals of the graduate education program--as set forth in the statement and in the introduction to the Graduate School section of the *Bulletin*--are to provide students with increasing levels of challenge and opportunities for independent investigation, creative achievement, the advancement of knowledge, and participation in traditional and new forms of scholarly activity to prepare them for professional or academic careers. These goals are consistent with the institution's purpose which encompasses teaching, research, public service, and health care.

A resolution of the Board of Trustees establishing the University Long-Range Planning Committee was adopted on March 4, 1999. The resolution (Document 3.1: #1 of 9C) authorized the President to coordinate with the Chair of the Long-Range Planning Committee of the Board to establish a central planning committee and a long-range planning process. The resolution set forth a charge to develop a collective, long-term vision for USA and a comprehensive planning process that would include all areas and functions of the institution.

In April 2001, the Long-Range Planning Committee adopted a Vision and Commitment Statement grounded in the stated mission of the University, and setting forth goals in six areas of strategic development of USA:

1. Continue to build the academic quality of the University and improve the learning

environment on campus.

2. Build on the quality of student life and the overall campus atmosphere.
3. Enhance the diversity of students, faculty, and staff, and evince a commitment to multiculturalism.
4. Reinforce and improve the public image of the institution.
5. Improve public and private financial support for the University.
6. Improve University planning, budgeting, and assessment processes

Goals for the planning period 2000-2001 through 2005-2006 are presented in the document

Visions: Strategies for Realizing Shared Visions of the University of South Alabama (Document

3.1: 4 of 9), and strategic objectives are set for the following:

- Improving the quality of USA's academic programs,
- Enhancing the quality of student life and campus services,
- Increasing public appreciation of the University,
- Enhancing public and private financial support of USA, and
- Enhancing the institution's planning, budgeting, and assessment processes.

Additional goals address development of facilities to support improvement of educational and student-support services and enhancement of the diversity of the student body. Each of the strategic areas addressed in the *Visions* document is related to specific elements of the

institution's purpose as described in the Mission Statement.

Visions was distributed to all deans, academic department chairs, and academic-support program directors to guide the development of annual goals and objectives statements and evaluation of effectiveness during the 2001-2006 planning period.

In addition to institutional-level educational goals established by the Long-Range Planning Committee, each academic program has developed a mission or purpose statement as well as a statement of goals for its specific instructional, research, and service activities and, when applicable, clinical health-care activities. Under the revised planning process, academic and academic support departments must relate their purposes to the institutional Mission Statement and, in turn, identify goals consistent with their statements of purpose. (These statements can be found in the 2000-2001 reports on divisional/departmental goals and objectives on file in the Self-Study Office.)

Conclusion

Compliance.

Recommendation

None.

#5 of 9

Evaluation of Educational Goals and Achievement

*(Page 18, Line 15): The institution **must** develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these educational goals are being achieved.*

Each academic and academic support department is required to maintain an assessment plan identifying the measures used in ascertaining achievement of educational goals, including those set for research and service activities. Each academic and academic support department is required to provide annual reports describing its assessment plan, the status of the plan's implementation, and the specific measures and activities to be employed in assessing department goals.

Examination of the assessment plans submitted as part of the 2000-2001 planning cycle revealed that some departments have not identified measures for assessing achievement of their goals.

This finding is particularly salient in the case of research and service goals and related activities.

Each department's assessment plan was reviewed by the Office of Institutional Research and Planning, and an analysis resulting from the review was provided to the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs. Several departments were requested to revise their assessment plans to ensure

that the assessment measures and methods were relevant to their departmental goals. All deans were directed to ensure that the department chairs and program directors consider the analyses of their 2000-2001 assessment plans in preparing their plans for the 2001-2002 academic year.

A day-long workshop on institutional effectiveness and assessment, conducted by an expert consultant, was held in March 2001 to provide additional information and assistance to the academic departments in the development and documentation of their assessment activities. The attendance of deans, associate deans, department chairs, and program directors at the workshop was mandatory.

Conclusion

Partial compliance.

Recommendation

The Principal Committee recommends the following:

- That the staff of the Office of Institutional Research and Planning provide continuing assistance to academic and academic support departments in the selection of assessment measures and development of assessment procedures relevant to the department-s instructional, research, and service programs.

- That the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs mandate involvement of each dean in the review of annual assessment plans to ensure that all departmental plans conform to the requirements established for the assessment of each aspect of the department's educational activities, including instruction, research, and public service.

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Use of Evaluation Results

*(Page 18, Line 18): The institution **must** use the results of these evaluations to improve educational programs, services, and operations.*

Each academic and academic support program is also required to report on assessment activities conducted during the year, including the results of those activities and how the results are used, or will be used, to improve educational programs and operations. A review of the 2000-2001 annual assessment activities reports indicates that a few departments failed to report the results of their assessment activities and to describe how the results of such activities were used for improving the operation of and planning for educational, research, and service programs. Also, a few departments' reports failed to relate assessment activities to departmental goals and the objectives established for the 2000-2001 academic year. Several reports consisted only of a list

of assessment measures, duplicating those identified in the assessment plans submitted earlier in the year. This finding indicates some confusion about the purpose of the assessment activities reports and the content and format requirements established for the reports by the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs.

Assessment Activity Reports submitted by the departments of the Mitchell College of Business, the College of Engineering programs, and the University Libraries were exemplary in (1) relating their assessment activities to their stated purposes and to goals established for 2000-2001 and (2) documenting the use of the information obtained from assessment activities to carry out specific program improvement measures.

Conclusion

Partial compliance.

Recommendation

The Principal Committee recommends the following:

- That all departments document the use of information from assessment activities to plan and implement program improvements.

Comment: provements

- That the staff of the Office of Institutional Research and Planning provide continuing assistance to academic and academic support departments in the development of assessment plans that are relevant to each department's instructional, research, and service programs. This assistance should include individual meetings with department chairs and program heads to discuss deficiencies in the assessment activity reports and to provide assistance in rectifying the deficiencies.
- That the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs mandate involvement of each dean in the review of annual assessment activities reports to ensure that all reports conform to the requirements established by the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and that all departments describe how assessment results are used to improve the department's educational activities, including instruction, research, and public service.

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Procedures for Evaluating Educational Effectiveness

*(Page 18, Lines 20): The institution **must** develop guidelines and procedures to evaluate educational effectiveness, including the quality of student learning and of research and service. This evaluation **must** encompass educational goals at all academic levels and research and service functions of the institution. The evaluation of academic programs **should** involve*

gathering and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data that demonstrates student achievement.

As noted above, guidelines and procedures for evaluating the achievement of educational goals, including goals of research and service activities, have been developed and were implemented during the 2000-2001 academic year in the form of requirements for departmental assessment plans, annual goals and objectives statements, and annual assessment activities reports.

Departments are required to formulate goals for each academic program they maintain, including certificate programs, baccalaureate programs, and graduate programs. As found in Document 3.2: 1 of 1 (which provides a tabulation of assessment and evaluation activities cited in the departmental assessment plans for 2000-2001), the evaluation of academic programs and student achievement is carried out through a variety of qualitative and quantitative measures including the following:

- course syllabi that state expected educational results
- student evaluations of instruction
- course completion rates
- evaluation of student internships and fieldwork
- exit interviews of graduating students
- analyses of student retention and graduation rates
- surveys of employers of program completers

- surveys of graduates and alumni
- surveys of continuing students
- faculty evaluation of undergraduate and graduate student research

National licensing/certifying exams are also used in the assessment of student achievement

(Document 3.1: 8 of 9).

Conclusion

Compliance.

Recommendation

None.

#9 of 9

Demonstration of Student Achievement

*(Page 19, Line 4): The institution **must** evaluate its success with respect to student achievement in relation to purpose, including, as appropriate, consideration of course completion, state licensing examinations, and job placement rates.*

A variety of measures is employed to evaluate the USA's success with respect to student achievement in relation to the purposes of the University and its component programs. The

measures address the achievement of continuing students as well as the achievement of students completing their educational programs. All information obtained from these analyses are widely distributed to the University community including vice presidents, deans and departmental chairpersons.

The Office of Institutional Research and Planning conducts regular analyses of the performance of first-time freshmen in core curriculum courses in English, mathematics, social sciences, and natural sciences. Results of these analyses are published in the annual *USA Freshman Class Profiles*. Information obtained from the USA's participation in the ACT Class Profile and Predictive Research Services and data extracted from the institution's Student Information System are used to analyze the relationship between various measures of first-time students' academic preparation and their grades in their first year in college. *Profiles* includes analyses of the academic preparation (as evidenced by ACT scores and high school grades) of the entire freshman class and of subgroups based on students' program enrollment and demographic characteristics. *Profiles* provides comparisons between the performance of the USA's freshman in core courses with the performance of similar institutions participating in the ACT Predictive Research Service. *Profiles* also includes demographic data on the freshman class and information about the students' selection of the University and their planned academic majors. (Copies of the most recent edition of *Freshman Class Profiles* as well as prior year editions are on file in the

Self-Study Office.)

The Office of Institutional Research and Planning also prepares annual analyses of grade distributions and averages in all undergraduate course sections, with summaries provided for each program and college or school within the institution. These reports include analyses of course completion, failure, and withdrawal rates, which facilitate identification of high risk courses.

Professional programs rely heavily upon the results of state licensing examinations and professional certification examinations as a means of assessing student achievement. Document 3.1: 8 of 9 provides a listing of such examinations presently used as part of assessment efforts in the College of Allied Health Professions, the Mitchell College of Business, the College of Medicine, the College of Nursing, and the Emergency Medical Technology program of the School of Continuing Education and Special Programs.

The Office of Institutional Research and Planning also conducts regular surveys of graduating students and occasional surveys of alumni. These surveys are used to gather information on graduates' employment or plans for continuing their studies, their perceptions of the university's academic and student services programs, and respondents' perceptions of the impact of the university on their goals

for personal development.

The Office of Placement Services conducts annual surveys of graduating students and their employers. The surveys gather information on the location, type, and level of the graduates' entry-level employment and the relation of that employment to their academic major.

The Office of Institutional Research performs regular analysis of student retention and graduation rates at both institutional and programmatic levels. Institutional four-year and six-year graduation rates are required to be reported to the U.S. Department of Education and the National Collegiate Athletics Association. Additional graduation and retention studies are conducted for traditional first-time freshmen, undergraduate transfer students, students entering through alternative programs such as General Education Development admissions process, and students identified as being in high risk groups. The Office also conducts studies of program retention and graduation rates, primarily to support college and programmatic accreditation reviews.

(Examples of institutional graduation and retention studies are on file in the Self-Study Office; examples of analyses of program graduation and retention analyses are included in the accreditation studies and are also on file in the Self-Study Office.)

Conclusion

Compliance.

Recommendation

None.

**3.2 PLANNING AND EVALUATION:
ADMINISTRATIVE AND EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES**

#1 of 6

Demonstration of Planning and Evaluation

*(Page 19, Line 10): The institution **must** demonstrate planning and evaluation in its administrative and educational support services.*

The institution's first formal planning structure was comprised of a Joint Planning Council (chaired by the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs), and two subordinate panels (the University Planning Committee and the Medical Affairs Planning Committee). The Council adopted planning assumptions, identified areas of strategic emphasis, and developed procedures for internal review of proposals for new academic programs and programs of student services

recommended by the subordinate committees. The Council also created a committee to review the Mission Statement and make recommendations for its revision. The Joint Planning Council also reviewed and approved (1) the institution's annual planning statements to the Alabama Commission on Higher Education and (2) the annual facilities master plan/capital projects request developed to justify USA's needs for funding for facilities construction and renewal.

Subsequent to the change in USA's administration in July 1998, it was recognized that institutional planning processes would benefit from a new approach that would provide broader representation of the USA community and its constituents in charting a vision for USA. It was also recognized that, within the parameters of the Mission Statement and major strategic goals, the planning process should provide flexibility in order (1) to respond to the dynamic nature of the institution's environment and (2) to encourage creativity among those responsible for managing and sustaining the day-to-day operations of USA's programs and services.

A resolution of the Board of Trustees establishing the University Long-Range Planning Committee was adopted on March 4, 1999. The resolution authorized the President to coordinate with the Chair of the Board of Trustees Long-Range Planning Committee to establishing a central planning committee and a long-range planning process. The resolution also set forth the charge to develop a collective, long-term vision for USA and a comprehensive planning process

that would (1) encompass all aspects of the institution and (2) include administrative, campus services, and student services functions as well as academic programs.

In May 2001, the Board of Trustees adopted a planning document, *Visions*, that set forth (1) goals in five mission-related areas, (2) strategic objectives for 2001-2006, and (3) planning assumptions to guide planning and evaluate outcomes at all levels within the University. The Board also adopted the recommendation of the Long-Range Planning Committee for a revised planning and evaluation process that will be used to (1) set annual goals and objectives for each division and department within the institution and (2) provide a vehicle for assessment of the progress toward the strategic goals and objectives established for the planning period.

Each administrative division and department is required to develop an annual statement of goals and objectives in a prescribed format (Document 3.2: 1 of 1). Each departmental goal is related to a specific element of the unit's purpose statement. The goals are, in turn, to be related to the institution's Mission Statement.

Conclusion

Compliance.

Recommendation

None.

#2-5 of 6

Elements of Unit Planning and Evaluation

(Page 19, Line 15): For each administrative and educational support service unit, the institution must (1) establish a clearly defined purpose which supports the institution's purpose and goals, (2) formulate goals which support the purpose of each unit, (3) develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these goals are being achieved in each unit, (4) use the results of the evaluations to improve administrative and educational support services.

The *USA Faculty Handbook, 2001* (Chapter 2) addresses the USA's administrative organization and includes a description of the functions of each major administrative unit under the title of the head of the unit. The major responsibilities of each administrative officer, including direction of subordinate units and programs, are listed in the descriptions. The descriptions provide, in general, a thorough overview of the administrative structure and the purpose of each major unit.

Prior to Fall 1999, several--but not all--administrative and support divisions prepared annual statements of goals and objectives. Beginning in Fall 1999, all administrative divisions were required to prepare annual goals and objectives statements. The annual reports are required to

include a statement of the purpose of each administrative unit, to describe the major functional goals of the unit, and to relate the purpose and goals of the unit to the USA's Mission Statement. Examination of the goals and objectives reports submitted by the divisions revealed that in several cases the statements of purpose were omitted and that several statements did not describe the relationship of the department's purposes to the Mission Statement.

Student services departments reporting to the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs have been required to develop goals and objectives statements and assessment plans in formats similar to the formats used for the planning and evaluation statements prepared by the academic divisions and departments. All of these departments were found to have adequate statements of purpose and to have established goals consistent with their purposes. (Copies of these departments' goals and objectives statements and annual reports are on file in the Self-Study Office.)

Student-services departments reporting to the Vice President for Student Affairs adhere to program standards and review criteria established by the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS). In addition to undergoing CAS review, all departments prepare annual statements of objectives. The Vice President for Student Affairs conducts quarterly and annual reviews of the departments' progress toward achievement of their purposes and goals.

Each administrative unit is required to include a goals and objectives statement that includes a description of the purposes of the department and how those purposes support specific aspects of the institution's purpose. Each administrative unit is also required to include in its goals and objectives statement a description of the means by which progress toward its goals and objectives will be assessed and how the results of the evaluations will be used to improve and revise the unit's services and programs. The annual goals and objectives statements will also be used to provide an assessment of the strategic goals and planning period objectives adopted by the University Long-Range Planning Committee for 2000-2001 through 2005-2006.

Conclusion

Partial compliance.

Recommendation

The Principal Committee recommends the following:

- That each administrative and support service unit in the institution be required to develop a statement setting forth the purposes of the unit and relating these to (1) the purposes of the institution as described in the USA Mission Statement and (2) the purposes of the division in which the department is located.

- That the staff of the Office of Institutional Research and Planning develop and distribute, along with the instructions for each year's planning reports, a common format for documenting administrative and support unit statements of purpose.
- That the staff of the Office of Institutional Research periodically conduct workshops for administrative unit heads that include discussion of purpose statement development, the planning and evaluation processes adopted by the Long-Range Planning Committee, preparation of annual goals and objectives, and principles of institutional effectiveness and assessment.

#6 of 6

Information Useful to the Unit Planning Processes

*(Page 19, Line 24): Each unit, in its planning and evaluation processes, **should** consider internal and external factors and develop evaluation methods that will yield information useful to the planning processes of that unit.*

Because the 2001-2002 academic year marks the initial application of the planning process adopted by the University Long-Range Planning Committee to the University's administrative divisions, not all administrative and educational support services units have identified methods of

assessment and implemented procedures for data collection to support evaluation efforts.

As previously noted, student services units reporting to the Vice President for Student Affairs rely on CAS standards and benchmarks for evaluation of their programs and services. These external sources are supplemented by student needs and interest surveys, analysis of trends in the frequency of use of student services, the number of clientele served by assistance programs such as the Counseling and Testing Center and the Office of Student Support Services, and attendance at campus-life activities.

The athletics program is governed by NCAA Division I regulations and procedures that require the completion of periodic self-studies of the program's financial condition, academic integrity, rules compliance, and commitment to student-athletes' welfare and sportsmanship. In addition to these self-studies, the athletics program is continually appraised using both internal and external data on (1) revenues and expenditures of the individual team sport programs, (2) academic performance and graduation rates of student athletes, and (3) Title IX issues.

The Office of the Associate Vice President of Enrollment Services (encompassing the Office of Admissions, the Office of Financial Aid, the Office of International Admissions, and the Career Services Center of Placement Services) has identified assessment activities to ascertain the

achievement of goals in each of the functional areas and has developed an assessment plan for each unit. These activities include internal collection of data as well as bench-marking studies based on reference groups of institutions similar to USA. The Office of Admissions and the Office of International Admissions also are subject to federal audit requirements.

Physical plant operations units are in the process of developing formal assessment plans in accordance with the planning and evaluation system adopted by the Long-Range Planning Committee and the Board of Trustees. However, maintenance and utilities plant operations already have in place significant data gathering procedures to assess the quality, efficiency, and cost of their services. The Central Utilities Office continually monitors the cost of purchased and generated utilities, appraises the impact of new facilities on the utility generation and distribution system, and uses comparative data on other institutions' utility systems to assess central plant operation. An external consultant recently was retained to assess USA's utility costs per square foot of space and to make recommendations for system modifications to lower cost of utilities services at the main campus.

Document 3.2: 6 of 6 provides a tabulation of the effectiveness and assessment activities conducted by student services, physical plant, enrollment services, and administrative units.

Conclusion

Compliance.

Recommendation

None.

Proposals For Excellence

The Principal Committee suggests the following:

- That all administrative and support units be required to implement by May 1, 2002, an assessment program that describes the methods by which their operations will be evaluated, including descriptions of the internal and external sources of information that will be used in their assessment activities.

- That an Administrative and Support Services Institutional Effectiveness Committee be established to promote and coordinate implementation of assessment and evaluation measures in all non-academic units, and that each administrative and student services unit appoint an institutional effectiveness coordinator to represent the division on the Committee and to ensure communication of assessment and evaluation requirements to all units within the division.

- That the Director of Institutional Research and Planning serve as an ex officio member of the Administrative and Support Services Institutional Effectiveness Committee to provide a source of information and assistance in the development and implementation of assessment plans.

3.3 INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

The purpose of the Office of Institutional Research and Planning to systematically collect, verify, analyze, and disseminate data to promote informed decision making. Under the direction of the Assistant Vice President for Institutional Research and Planning, the office designs and implements cost analyses, financial projections, studies of student characteristics and enrollment, and other research activities in support of University planning and evaluation processes. The office maintains an inventory of all facilities, manages space allocation, and reports on a variety of institutional data to federal, state, and private agencies. The Assistant Vice President also provides liaison with the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE) in matters relating to program development and approval, state funding processes, and statewide planning activities (*USA Faculty Handbook, 2001*, Chapter 2, p. 28).

#1 of 5

Planning and Evaluation

*(Page 20, Line 1): Institutional research **must** be an integral part of the institution's planning and evaluation process.*

The Assistant Vice President for Institutional Research and Planning is a member of and information resource officer for the University Long-Range Planning Committee, serves on the University Budget Council, and is a member and secretary of the University Space and Facilities Committee. The Office of Institutional Research and Planning is represented on many standing and major ad hoc committees.

Conclusion

Compliance.

Recommendation

None.

#2 of 5

Collecting and Analyzing Data

(Page 20, Line 2): Institutional research **must** be effective in collecting and analyzing data and disseminating results.

The *Institutional Self-Study Faculty Survey* (items #87 and 88) solicited information concerning the effectiveness of the institutional research process. The results of this survey related to the Office of Institutional Research and Planning are displayed in Table 3.3.1.

The Office of Institutional Research and Planning reports that it responds to suggestions and complaints about its reports and products and utilizes such feedback to improve services.

Table 3.3.1

Survey Data Related to the Office of Institutional Research and Planning

Survey Item Statement	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% Disagree	% Strongly Disagree
I am acquainted with the work of the USA Office of Institutional Research (n = 305)	13	66	17	4
The Office of Institutional Research provides helpful information. (n = 242)	19	68	11	2

Conclusion

Compliance.

Recommendation

None.

#3 of 5

Research Effectiveness

*(Page 20, Line 4): An institution **must** regularly evaluate the effectiveness of its institutional research process and use its findings for the improvement of its process.*

The Office of Institutional Research and Planning periodically reviews the reports and publications it produces for effectiveness and completeness. These documents are primarily driven by the requirements of constituents external to the Office. These constituents are also periodically questioned as to their satisfaction with the products provided by the Office. The information provided by the Office is clearly used by others--both internal and external to the University--in their administrative decision making processes. There is no formal review procedure that regularly evaluates the effectiveness of the institutional research process.

There is significant anecdotal information available to verify the effectiveness of the

institutional research process at USA. For example, the related questions contained in the *Self-Study Faculty Survey, 2001* speak to the high level of satisfaction with the institutional research process. There is, however, no methodology in place to provide for a periodic evaluation of the process and/or for the use of these findings to improve the process.

Conclusion

Partial compliance.

Recommendation

The Principal Committee recommends that the Assistant Vice President for Institutional Research and Planning implement a periodic process for such evaluation with both internal and external constituents. One recommendation would be to include an assessment survey with every report that is produced by the office. Upon return of these assessment tools, results could be collated and evaluated to improve the effectiveness of the process.

#4 of 5

Scope of Institutional Research

(Page 20, Line 8): The institutional research process may be centralized or decentralized but

should include the following activities: ongoing timely data collection, analysis and dissemination; use of external studies and reports; design and implementation of internal studies related to students, personnel, facilities, equipment, programs, services and fiscal resources; development of data bases suitable for longitudinal studies and statistical analyses; and related activities in support of planning, evaluation, and management.

The Office of Institutional Research maintains an extensive series of internal data sets related to the following: student characteristics and outcomes; faculty compensation, characteristics and workload; program characteristics and productivity; financial resources; and facilities utilization.

The seven sections of the Office's annual *Statistical Profiles* publication are indicative of the breadth of the data series maintained on a routine basis. (The current year's edition of the *Statistical Profiles* is available in the Self-Study Office and on the USA website.)

The Office of Institutional Research and Planning produces a series of annual reviews and analyses based on internal University data including the following: grade distribution and withdrawal rates for all undergraduate courses; analyses of faculty teaching loads and non-instructional assignments by term; classroom and class laboratory utilization for each term; degree productivity and class laboratory utilization for each term; degree productivity and credit hour analysis for each program; and a wide range of reports made to support compliance with federal, state, SACS, NCAA, and Association membership requirements. Copies of these

analyses and reports are available in the Self-Study Office.

The Office of Institutional Research and Planning also produces a number of annual analyses built upon external data available from the following: the Alabama Commission on Higher Education, the Federal Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System; faculty characteristics and compensation surveys; ACT Research Services reports; and NCAA reports. (Copies of these reports are available in the Self-Study Office.) Results of these analyses are distributed in regular publications and ad hoc reports. All reports are distributed to the President's Council, which is comprised of deans and vice presidents.

Reports of routine surveys of entering freshmen, graduating students, faculty, and other USA constituencies are distributed to all departments. The Office of Institutional Research and Planning also performs ad hoc surveys addressing issues such as student-life services, campus security, student-health services, substance-abuse programs, athletics programs, and alumni interest and needs. (Samples of reports and analyses are available in the Self-Study Office.)

Conclusion

Compliance.

Recommendation

None.

#5 of 5

Administrative Responsibility

*(Page 20, Line 18): Institutions **must** assign administrative responsibility for conducting institutional research, allocate adequate resources, and allow access to relevant information.*

USA has an established Office of Institutional Research and Planning to conduct institutional research and provide the results to those requesting it. The Office fulfills routine reporting functions to entities such as the U.S. Department of Education, Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE), SACS, Alabama Legislative Fiscal Office, NCAA, the National Science Foundation, and a variety of professional, collegiate, and university associations. The Office also maintains data such as the student database (both at the local and statewide--ACHE--levels), as well as facilities and space inventories. The research, analysis, and planning functions include the following:

- student outcomes/retention/attrition,
- headcount,

- credit hour production and grade distributions,
- student and faculty characteristics,
- faculty/staff/administration salaries/compensation,
- affirmative action,
- facilities utilization and planning,
- energy costs,
- institutional budget and finances,
- community economic impact/perceptions, and
- program evaluation/accreditation.

The Office has full access to all relevant information and produces regular publications, such as *Statistical Profiles*, *USA Floor Plans Book*, campus maps, *Freshman Profiles*, *USA Fact Sheets*, and *Faculty Salary Analyses and Comparisons*. The Office conducts many regular surveys involving respondents such as the following: entering freshmen, undergraduate transfer students, graduating students, non-returning students, and non-enrolled admitted students. The Office has liaison responsibility with ACHE advisory groups dealing with issues such as planning, information system, finance, program development, and program viability. The Office of Institutional Research and Planning is also an active member of professional organizations such as the Association for Institutional Research, Southern Association for Institutional Research,

Alabama Association for Institutional Research, and Society for College and University Planning.

The office is staffed by the Assistant Vice President, three research analysts, one administrative assistant, one technical staff member, and one secretary. The University architect also reports to the Assistant Vice President for Institutional Research and Planning. The architect's office is staffed by a full-time architect, a drafting technologist, and a secretary. A chart of the administrative structure is available in the *USA Faculty Handbook, 2001* (Chapter 2, pp. 2-8).

In comparison with other state universities with similar research, planning, and reporting responsibilities, USA's Office of Institutional Research and Planning is traditionally the "leanest" organization.

Conclusion

Compliance.

Proposal for Excellence

The Principal Committee suggests that current staff vacancies be filled at the earliest possible opportunity. Additional staff positions should be added when permitted by University resources

and priorities.