

REPORT OF A VISIT
TO
ARKANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
MARCH 2-5, 2003
FOR THE
HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION OF THE
NORTH CENTRAL ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS

EVALUATION TEAM

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ASSURANCE SECTION

I. CONTEXT AND NATURE OF VISIT:

- A. Purpose of Visit: A comprehensive evaluation for continued accreditation at the doctoral level.
- B. Arkansas State University (ASU) was founded by the state of Arkansas in 1909 in Jonesboro and has evolved into a doctoral level institution. Its locus of operation is the ASU Jonesboro campus with 9526 students for Fall, 2002 and which encompasses graduate and bachelor's level programs. It offers degrees and courses at eight sites including three HLC accredited campuses (ASU-Beebe and its Heber Springs Branch, ASU-Newport, and ASU Mountain Home); ASTI-Beebe Technical Institute, ASU-Technical Center-Marked Tree; and various distance education and degree center sites within the state. It also has international offerings.
- C. Unique Aspects of Visit: There were no variations from the standard visit. ASU did not request changes.
- D. Sites Visited: ASU-Beebe, and ASU Technical Center (Marked Tree). The Beebe Site was selected to allow the team to assess ASU offerings at an accredited site providing a site for ASU degree offerings. The Marked Tree site was included to permit a team member to ascertain the integration of the technical education curriculum and interactions added to ASU by the state. Phone interviews were conducted with personnel at other sites where ASU offers courses.

E. Distance Education Reviewed: Four master's degrees are offered at seven sites. Instructional delivery is multi-modal with the prime modality being two way visual, two way voice compressed video. In Fall of 2001, ASU offered 106 courses via compressed video. The Arkansas Department of Higher Education reports that ASU is the major provider of compressed video in the state. Team members interacted with technical staff and faculty, visited on and off ASU campus delivery sites and examined appropriate documents.

F. Interactions with Constituencies:

1. Board of Trustees (four of five present)
2. President
3. Student Government Association (President, VP, Chief of Staff)
4. Leaders of Campus Ministry, International Student Association, Black Students Association, Pan-Hellenic Organization, Student Activities Board (2 members).
5. Director of Student Activities
6. Open Meeting for Interested Constituents (more than 60 attended)
7. Director of Heritage Studies Program
8. Assistant Vice Chancellor for Facilities
9. Associate Dean of Financial Aid/Scholarships
10. Director of Disability Services
11. Multiple unscheduled contacts with students, faculty and staff
12. ASU Staff Senate officers
13. Faculty Library Committee
14. Lead Research Librarian and Library Dean
15. Associate Vice Chancellor for Regional Programs
16. Self-Study Coordinator, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Services
17. Director and staff of Human Services
18. Professor of Foreign Languages
19. Director and staff of Intensive English Program
20. Deans Council
21. Director of International Students and scholars Services
22. Professor-Business Study Abroad
23. Vice Chancellor for Research & Academic Affairs on several occasions with different members of HLC Team
24. Assessment Committee – 5 members
25. Director of Admissions and her staff
26. Financial Aid staff
27. General Education Committee – 6 members

28. Director of Office of Teaching and Learning
29. Director of Office of Institutional Research and Planning
30. Chair and faculty of Chemistry and Physics Department
31. Chair and faculty of History Department
32. Interim Dean of Engineering
33. Marked Tree Campus: Director, Assistant Director, Technical Support Assistant, 18 faculty, 12 support staff, and 24 students
34. ASU Technical Center Health and Work Force Training Consortium Campus: Asst. Director/Coordinator of Special Programs, Nurse Technician, Three Practical Nursing faculty, one member of Board of Advisors for the center.
35. Vice President for Finance and Administration and some staff members
36. Director of Information Technology Services
37. Director of Career Services
38. Director of Student Life
39. Director of Off Campus Programs
40. Director of Compressed Video Network
41. Vice Chancellor for Student Services
42. Director of Advisement
43. Early Childhood Coordinator
44. Beebe Campus: Director of Arkansas Technical Institute, ASU-Jonesboro Faculty members delivering classes to Beebe, Vice Chancellors for Student Affairs, Academic Affairs and ASTI
45. Numerous faculty from Music, Art, Philosophy, Anthropology, Education
46. Administrative leadership of College of Business and Graduate Program and Associate Athletic Director. Note: Team member communicated with NCAA Compliance Coordinator of clarification of ASU compliance.
47. Faculty Athletics representative, Athletic Director, Assistant Athletic Director and Associate Athletic Director. Note: Team member communicated with NCAA Compliance Coordinator of clarification of ASU compliance.
48. Senior Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
49. Dean of the Graduate School and Members of the Graduate Council
50. Chair and faculty of Biology Department
51. Council of Deans
52. Directors of all doctoral programs (Environmental Sciences, Heritage Studies, Educational Leadership)
53. Assistant to the President-Affirmative Action and Diversity administrator
54. ASU Faculty Senate Officers
55. Director of Center for Learning Technology
56. Director and Deputy Director of Arkansas Department of Higher Education (phone interview)
57. ASU Governmental Liaison (phone interview)

58. Chancellors of Branch Campuses (ASU-Beebe, ASU-Newport, ASU-Mountain Home. (phone interview)

G. Principal Documents, Materials and Web Pages Reviewed.

1. Catalogs and multiple university publications for admissions, athletics, degree programs and special events.
2. ASU Fact Book 2002-2003
3. ASU's Home page contains multiple links – for instance, the Library, Human Resources International student and staff senate web pages
4. Policy and Procedures manual
5. Transitioning to a Doctoral Level Institution
6. Statute authorizing Board of Trustees
7. Degree prospectuses and Institutional Degree Program Detail report
8. Compliance documents like student written complaints, crime reports, etc.
9. Arkansas Division of Legislative audit reports and federally required audits
10. Financial reports to Board of Trustees
11. University budget
12. Achieving Structural Diversity of ASU plus student, staff and faculty diversity questionnaires' summaries and conclusions
13. NCAA Division I Manual and A Basic Guide to Title IX
14. Plan for Revision of General Education
15. Sampling taken from all faculty vitae and Sampling of all syllabi
16. Promotion and Tenure documents of departments of English, Philosophy and History
17. Draft of proposed new Faculty Handbook submitted by Faculty Senate
18. Various architectural and schematic visuals for current and planned construction
19. Academic program review
20. Report on campus crimes

II. COMMITMENT TO PEER REVIEW

- A. Comprehensiveness of Self-Study --- It is evident that the process involved many individuals representative of the constituencies of ASU. Not only were the committees extensive but the supportive documents in the team room indicated widespread involvement in the process. Interviewees from the several constituencies of ASU indicated that the Self-Study described the issues faced by the institution and described the extant circumstances of ASU.

B. Integrity of the Self-Study Report --- The Report was credible to the team. It identified a number of areas that will offer the university a platform upon which to build its continuing effectiveness. The Resource Room provided ample support for the Self-Study. ASU's Report is self-critical and enumerates concerns for continuing institutional attention. The report could have been more useful by being significantly reduced in size (400 pages plus appendices). Many narratives were long and descriptive rather than evaluative. The relationship of off-campus sites with ASU's administration and academic direction was not clear. This caused the team some confusion about the various types of non-Jonesboro sites and their relationships with the ASU campus. The challenges and re commendations contained in the report are appropriate but the correlation between narratives and conclusions drawn in the Self-Study were unclear in several sections. The Team found the Report useful and found no evidence to impugn the integrity of the report.

C. Capacity to Respond: THE TEAM CONSIDERS THE RESPONSE OF THE INSTITUTION TO PREVIOUSLY IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES TO BE INADEQUATE (language required by HLC).

1. Governance including a faculty role in personnel and academic decision making required clarification of responsibility and identification of a chain of decision making leading to consideration by the President and Board of Trustees. (discussed under Criteria III and IV)
2. Assessment remains incomplete in its implementation (Discussed under Criteria III and IV)

D. Notification of Evaluation Visit and Solicitation of Third Party Comment.

requirements were fulfilled. There were no comments received by HLC.

III. COMPLIANCE WITH FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS.

The team reviewed the required Title IV compliance areas and the student complaint information.

IV. AFFIRMATION OF THE GENERAL INSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS.

Based on the self-study review and other documentation, the team confirms that the institution continues to meet each of the twenty-four General Institutional Requirements.

V. FULFILLMENT OF THE CRITERIA

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

Evidence that demonstrates the criterion is met:

1. ASU publications (catalog, marketing materials, departmental and divisional goals, etc.) provide evidence that the mission is integral to university operations and widely distributed.
2. Board of Trustee members, Staff Senate leaders, faculty and international program facilitators demonstrated to the team that they knew and supported the mission and core values.
3. Student leaders interviewed indicated a working knowledge of ASU's missions
4. Interviews and the Self-Study indicated that the Missions statement and its complementary core values and strategies are seen as guidelines to continuing fulfillment of ASU's purposes.

Evidence that demonstrated the criterion needs institutional attention:

1. The Self-Study and interviews with faculty and administrators indicated a sense of the institution that continuing review of the mission needs to incorporate expanding doctoral programs and the Biosciences Institute's place within the purposes of ASU.

Institutional Response:

The comprehensive strategic planning process will review the current mission statement and address the inclusion of the expanding graduate and research initiatives of the institution.

2. Student government and student association leaders, some faculty members and administrators stated that they concur with the Self-Study's call for continuing attention to the use of the Indian mascot at ASU. The Team's issue here is continued open dialogue with ASU constituencies.

Institutional Response:

Arkansas State University will continue open dialogue with ASU constituencies regarding the athletic team name, the Indians. In the summer, 2003, the institution adopted a new spirit figure without resemblance to the Native American. The figure has been received positively. Arkansas State University expresses concern, however, that the HLC review team would include this item as being associated with the institution's mission, as the mascot has nothing to do with the purposes or mission of the institution. We submit that it is not appropriate to raise this issue in this report since it has not been an issue of the North Central Association (HLC) throughout ASU's accreditation history, nor is there any official pronouncement by HLC regarding institutional mascots. Moreover, our HLC liaison, Dr. Karen Kietzman, indicated that the mascot issue would not be a part of this report. Arkansas State University respectfully requests that the Reader's Panel delete this segment of the final version of the report.

3. Evidence that demonstrates the criterion requires institutional attention and Commission follow-up. None.

4. Recommendation of the team: Pattern of evidence sufficiently demonstrated; no Commission follow-up recommended.
- B. Criterion II – “The Institution has effectively organized the human, financial and physical resources necessary to accomplish its purposes.”

Evidence that demonstrated the criterion is met:

1. Compressed video and its attendant instructionally effective techniques and staffing enhance the institution’s delivery of services.
2. ASU administrative structure is traditional with a state-appointed Board of Trustees providing overall decision-making for the institution as indicated in its organizational chart, descriptions of duties, and interviews.
3. Moody’s financial rating of ASU is excellent. It is based on ASU’s debt load and servicing ability. A member of the team reviewed the Moody’s rating. Team review of audits indicated no areas of concern.
4. Since the last NCA visit the administration has secured funding for substantial construction (new student union, Early Childhood Services Center, Family Housing complex, Fowler Center for the Performing Arts and Biosciences Institute among others). Total building budget exceeds \$100 million.
5. Technology acquisition as a result of a gift to the University and of the student technology fee provides effective tools for student learning.

6. The Student Service delivery system has been re-conceived and provides a one-stop approach that benefits student enrollment and service once students are enrolled.
7. Information and technology services and equipment have been substantially upgraded since the last NCA visit.
8. A state special appropriation for library acquisition has helped reduce the need for library materials upgrading.
9. New doctoral programs have well qualified faculty. Enrollments indicate viability for the programs.
10. Dedicated student technology fees provide resources for continuing acquisition and improvement of hardware and software for ASU constituents.
11. Review of academic programs indicated departmental goals and curriculum consistent with general education and major fields within higher education norms.
12. A structure for shared governance is in place.
13. A structure for assessment of student learning and program evaluation has been formulated.
14. Support services like Alumni association, publications, and data capturing enhance ASU organization.
15. The Staff Senate and management interaction is considered supportive of staff input into decision making by staff members interviewed.

Evidence that demonstrates the criterion needs institutional attention:

1. Vacancies and interim appointments are pending and this leaves governance, supervision, and planning gaps in the operations of ASU.

Institutional Response:

At the time of the team's visit in March 2003, several administrative searches were underway. As of July 1, 2003 most of these positions have been filled. Searches for the remainder will be underway in FY 2004.

2. Older buildings like Wilson Hall pose an obstacle to effective use of Instructional Technology in the classrooms and to assuring an effective student-learning environment.

Institutional Response:

ASU recognizes the need to improve the instructional environment of Wilson Hall, the primary classroom building for the liberal arts. As renovations to the structure are cost prohibitive due to earthquake code requirements, a new instructional technology building is being planned to replace the classroom space of Wilson Hall. To date, state appropriations have allowed for the completion of architectural plans and preliminary construction planning for the new classroom building. The institution will continue to pursue the funding required to complete this project. In the meantime, planning with faculty and staff in this building will anticipate cosmetic repairs in summer 2004.

3. The continuing rise in tuition and fees especially relative to other institutions within Arkansas was noted by students and faculty as a source of concern.

Institutional Response:

Most state-supported institutions of higher education have increased tuition and fees annually since 1999 (examples were provided in the self-study document). Since 2001, the state economic crisis has resulted in a substantial reduction of state appropriations to higher education institutions, including ASU, necessitating tuition and fee increases. The four comparable state four-year institutions have averaged 5.2-8.9% tuition increases from 1999-2002 (ASU averaged 6.9%). ASU has not increased fees for the last two academic years (2002-03, 2003-04). As of the 2003-04 academic year, ASU ranks third in tuition and fees for full-time, first-time freshmen among the other four comparable four-year institutions in Arkansas. Although there is a perception of an inordinate increase in tuition/fees for ASU, increases have been comparable to similar institutions in the state. For 2003-2004, tuition was increased 5%. ASU will continue to be mindful of this concern in its future planning and budgeting processes.

4. Communication of goals, plans and directions in the operations of the university system has numerous gaps. Middle management interviews indicated that they are not confident that they are consistently appraised of decisions made at a higher level. Faculty members indicate that they are not sure what committees are tasked to do.

Institutional Response:

The strategic planning process is addressing governance and communication issues. Efforts will be made to ensure that there is communication flow to all levels of the administrative and university community. University committee tasks will be reviewed and revised, as needed, to provide a better understanding of each committee's mission and charge. The Shared Governance Committee will meet with committee chairs and heads of the constituent bodies each fall semester to explain the goals and mechanics of the governance process, and the specific responsibilities of each committee.

5. Review of the University budget and interviews with library personnel indicate that the budget has been flat and even reduced during the state economic downturn of 2002-2003. The Team concluded that this is particularly problematic in the face of the addition of two doctoral programs and University goals for research and graduate program expansion.

Institutional Response:

Adequate library funding continues to be a concern of the institution, particularly in light of the expanding graduate and research initiatives. ASU will continue to address this concern through its strategic planning and budgeting processes. Library leadership is exploring creative and alternative ways to provide access to needed materials through possible consortial agreements with other library systems, additional electronic databases and other services. The library may be a viable target for institutional development activities as similar fund raising initiatives at other higher education institutions across the nation have been successful. This opportunity will be explored.

As of August 2003, faculty and students have gained access to an additional 5,500 full-text online journals and over 27,000 other research publications through the Ingenta Article Service. A cooperative agreement has been established with the University of Arkansas Library System that will enhance and expedite inter-library loan services while being more cost effective.

6. The interface of developing components of ASU like ABI has not been integrated into the planning and governance structure. The team found no provision for describing the place of these new components in the governance structure.

Institutional Response:

The strategic planning process is addressing the incorporation of new initiatives such as the Biosciences Institute (created by state statute in 2002) and others in the planning and governance structure of ASU.

7. ASU has addressed student ethnic diversity but its attention to diversity within the faculty and staff has not kept pace with its strides toward becoming a doctoral institution in other areas. The appointment of the Assistant to the President provides a base for expanding ASU's understanding of diversity, its communication, and delivery.

Institutional Response:

ASU has formalized its faculty and staff recruitment process that is designed to hold all units more accountable for developing and securing diverse applicant pools. This modification will make the recruitment process more creative, aggressive and personable. Additionally, the university has established a resource pool that will enable campus departments to make more attractive financial offers to ethnic minority candidates. Further, the university is providing financial support to ethnic minority doctoral students in exchange for promises to teach at ASU upon completion of their respective programs. Over time, these initiatives will result in more ethnic minority faculty members being employed. Finally, a diversity strategic plan is being developed in which recruiting, developing and retaining ethnic minority faculty members will be a key component.

Evidence that demonstrates the criterion requires Institutional Attention and Commission follow-up.

1. Shared governance remains largely a structure with elusive connections in the decision-making process. Concern was expressed to the team concerning the relationships among the various committees and the chain of decision making that links committees and the Team found this concern to be supported. Evidence of committee reports and interviews with faculty administrative leaders and the Faculty Senate supports the conclusion that shared governance needs HLC attention to assist ASU in implementing a structured environment of shared governance.
 - a. Board of Trustee members indicated apprehension about the meaning of shared governance and how it impacts their statutory responsibilities.
 - b. Faculty sampled were concerned that it was not clear that they had the responsibility for generating academic decisions.
 - c. Department chairs indicated that they were not involved in decisions about their degrees and courses being offered at off-campus sites but they were expected to assure quality of offerings.
 - d. Middle management personnel offered examples to the Team of incomplete understanding of budgetary decisions affecting their areas of responsibility.

Recommendation of the Team – pattern of evidence sufficiently demonstrated;

Commission follow-up recommended.

Focus visit in 2006-2007 on shared governance with emphasis on clarifying the role and responsibilities of faculty in the context of ASU's evolving mission.

Institutional Response:

ASU's shared governance process, implemented in 1996, is still evolving. The founding premise of shared governance at ASU is to provide all the constituencies of the university (faculty, staff and students) the opportunity to provide recommendation and review of policies that shape the university and affect these constituents. The process also allows these constituents to be informed of the outcome of their recommendations. It leaves intact most of the traditional management of the university, the means of making and implementing decisions.

Recently, it appears as though the roles of the constituencies in the "recommendation and review" have become blurred with the "decision making" process. It is apparent that a campus wide, collaborative effort is needed to ensure that all constituencies understand the purpose and goals of shared governance. Major attention will be given to the continued development and understanding of shared governance. Governance and communication within the shared governance process will be given emphasis during the strategic planning initiative.

- a. The shared governance process will be reviewed periodically with the Board of Trustees to ensure that all members understand the shared governance concept as it applies to ASU.*
- b. Faculty have the ability to generate academic decisions in the areas of curriculum, academic programs, and instruction (Undergraduate Curriculum Council, Graduate Council and General Education Committee). Faculty may make recommendations through the shared governance process for other academic concerns. A concerted effort will be made to assist faculty in understanding their role and responsibilities in the academic decision making process.*
- c. Department chairs are involved in decisions about their degrees and courses being offered at off-campus sites as they must initiate degree program proposals that are approved at both the university and state levels. In addition, they must approve faculty hiring associated with their off-campus programs and courses. The Center for Regional Programs (off-campus programs) will strive to improve their collaboration and communication with department chairs concerning off-campus programming.*

- d. ***The incomplete understanding of the budgetary decision responsibilities associated with middle management leadership also appears to be a communication problem. The administration will endeavor to collaborate more closely with middle management to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the budgetary process, unit allocations and responsibilities.***

C. Criterion III – The Institution is Accomplishing its Educational and Other Purposes.

Evidence that demonstrates that the Criterion is met.

1. A new undergraduate general education program consistent with the intent of general education in higher education was developed by the faculty since the last HLC visit and implemented for AY 2002-2003. A comparison of the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 prospectuses revealed that the new curriculum is reflective of the breadth of knowledge needed for developing a modern global perspective.
2. Additions to the University physical plant like the Student Union, Fowler Center and numerous others provide a physical setting for delivery of effective instruction and evolving ASU mission. Technology availability offers access for all Jonesboro students.
3. ASU research indicated that 97% of its graduates are employed. Employment is one of the goals ASU has set for determining its effectiveness.
4. The University Teaching and Learning Center provides pedagogical techniques and assistance to teaching faculty. Review of workshops and other assistance reports indicated substantial nurturing of ASU's

instructional goals. Interviews with faculty and administrators confirmed services.

5. ASU's Institutional Research Office provides useful reports on various aspects of the University. Team members requested and received data to supplement the Self-Study and Resource Room data on various enrollment and degree topics. The Team concluded that data indicated that ASU is meeting its purposes.
6. The Human Resources operation is well-organized and provides employment and other data necessary to continue the effective operations of the University. The University is working with other state universities to enable it to remove some of the restrictions imposed in the current requirement that they be embedded in the state personnel system.
7. Staff governance is working well according to input from the Staff Senate and other staff interviewed.
8. Retention committee recommendations have led to effective and increased retention of students through new initiatives (e.g. advising center for freshman and sophomores, restart program, early alert program and the First Year Program).

Evidence that demonstrates the criterion needs institutional attention.

1. Library resources are inadequate and current budgeting does not support the substantial improvement needed in continuing programs and, particularly, evolving doctoral programs. The team confirmed this with budget reviews in conjunction with library administrators,

faculty members in expanding fields, and several department chairpersons. Reduction in available personnel for providing inter-library loan service to off-campus sites was described by library staff and reinforced by data indicating delays in delivering requests.

Institutional Response:

As previously addressed, ASU will continue to make this concern a high priority in its strategic planning and budgeting processes. The library has begun working with academic deans and department chairs on a comprehensive assessment of the status of holdings to support individual continuing and evolving programs, the impact of continuing reductions in subscriptions and book acquisitions, as well as the impact of the absence of new publications in the library to support current study, research and scholarship. That assessment will be expected to serve as the basis for identifying and requesting the level of funding that will restore the collection development budget to an appropriate level to support instruction and research at ASU.

There has not been a reduction in the classified staff in recent years in the Interlibrary Loan (ILL) Department. Classified staffing in ILL has remained constant with three full-time staff but there has been a reduction in the number of hours of student staffing from 80 to 60 hours per week in 2002-2003. New interlibrary loan software will substantially speed up the process of identifying sources and completing transactions for book and article requests. In addition, the creation of a new listing of print and electronic journal subscriptions/holdings with linkage of those holdings to current electronic indexing/abstracting databases will provide almost a 95% accuracy/efficiency rate in immediately identifying articles and other publications that are in the ASU library collections for students and faculty while they are searching electronic bases.

2. The Faculty Handbook does not reflect the changes that have occurred in the past few years. For instance, the Team found that teaching loads are not informed by clear guidelines and policies concerning supervision of graduate studies nor in adjustments in teaching load for teaching graduate courses. Overload teaching of graduate courses strains intellectual preparation of faculty and may hamper effective student learning. The Team urges the University to pursue, through shared governance, and updating of the Faculty

Handbook accompanied by an examination of policies and procedures.

Institutional Response:

The Faculty Handbook was under revision at the time of the team's visit and continues to be revised. As of June 2003, ASU hired a nationally recognized consultant to assist the faculty and administration in completing this process. Particular emphasis is being placed on policies and procedures associated with graduate faculty workloads and reassignments, especially in light of ASU's new initiatives associated with doctoral programs and research. Attention is being focused on the process used to craft these policies as well as other changes through the collaboration of the faculty and administration.

3. Allocation of resources is not clear to many in middle management and academic units. The Team was apprised of needs that were not met, such as equipment repair, because of this confusion about resources.

Institutional Response:

As previously stated, the administration will endeavor to collaborate more closely with middle management to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the budgetary process and associated unit allocations. It is assumed that much of this confusion has occurred most recently due to several abrupt reductions in the institution's budget allocations due to reduced flow of state funding to the institution precipitated by the state's economic downturn. ASU was forced to respond quickly to these funding reductions, which often impacted departmental supplies and services accounts. Although every effort was made to communicate these changes to all involved units, confusion did occur from time to time due to the limited time in which the institution was required to respond. The same communication problem may have existed when the flow of funding resumed (equipment repair example).

Evidence that demonstrates the criterion needs institutional attention and Commission follow-up.

1. Assessment is not being implemented to allow the institution to continue to meet its goals.

- a. Tests administered are not used for assessing general education effectiveness for instance. No clear standard exists for administrators to use in assuring implementation.
- b. The Team examined assessment plans for over 100 departments but found no plan in place for the completion of the cycle of assessment. The Team received no evidence of curricular improvements linked to assessment efforts.
- c. Assessment of Graduate level learning and program evaluation has been assigned to the Graduate Dean and the Graduate Committee but no implementation of this assignment has begun.
- d. The Office Assessment was able to make considerable headway in creating a basis for an assessment environment but the position of director is vacant.
- e. The Team confirmed ASU's Self-Study identification of needs in the area of assessment.

Pattern of Evidence demonstrated; Commission follow up recommended.

Focus visit on assessment coordination and implementation recommended for 2006-2007.

Institutional Response:

- a. *As of fall 2002, ASU was given permission by the state to administer the state-mandated standardized assessment exam for general education in a format that can now be used to provide meaningful assessment feedback. Prior to this time, the administration of the exam, as prescribed by the state, did not*

provide a useful means of assessment. The new alternative format does allow for consistent and accountable implementation.

- b. The process of developing these assessment plans has been a major step for ASU as the institution has become more attuned to assessment. These plans are being implemented and as assessment data are amassed, they will be used for curricular and program improvement.*
- c. Graduate level assessment remains a major priority. The graduate dean and graduate council will be provided with strong leadership by the new assessment director to assist in the implementation of this process.*
- d. At the time of the team's campus visit, the recent assessment director had moved from the state. As the team visit was less than two months away, the decision was made to receive feedback from the team before initiating the search for a new Director of Assessment Services. This position is currently being filled via a national search.*
- e. Although the assessment culture of ASU has improved significantly in recent years, we are aware of our need to further develop our assessment practices and utilize assessment outcomes to facilitate change and improvement. The Office of Assessment Services will work collaboratively with faculty and staff to continue to develop a strong atmosphere of assessment that encompasses all aspects of planning, implementation, evaluation and change at the appropriate level.***

- D. Criterion IV – The Institution can continue to accomplish its purposes and strengthen its educational effectiveness.

Evidence that demonstrates the criterion is met:

1. A broad offering of degrees and programs continues to be adjusted for needs and the University provides additional resources in several areas. Supportive evidence includes the deletion of under-enrolled degrees not supportive of other curricula and the addition of degrees that give evidence of meeting needs of the ASU service area and students.
2. Academic program reviews are in place to enable evaluation. The Team examined program reviews completed and in progress.

3. Academic support services are positioned, particularly with the consolidation permitted in the new student center, to allow continuing effective student services. Data indicate increased student usage of service, increased student retention at the underclassmen level and effective processing of student applications and financial aid information.
4. Administrative initiative has secured significant funds for construction. A new theatre, the Biosciences Institute, new married student housing, new single student apartments and dormitory renovations among several other projects indicate that ASU has access to Arkansas funding decisions and is placing itself to occupy a research niche within its region.
5. ASU's leadership has an effective voice in Little Rock to help overcome the disadvantage it has had historically in obtaining funding for ASU operations (ASU receives less than comparable institutions at the present time). Evidence includes the Biosciences Institute, one of only two institutes with accompanying physical facilities funded by the state with Tobacco Settlement funds, the special state special appropriation to ameliorate ASU library needs, and commentary from the state Board of Higher Education personnel.
6. The measured addition of two new doctoral programs indicates a good approach to meeting the goal of becoming a doctoral institution without undue haste. Administrators of the doctoral programs

indicated support for them from the administration and enrollment data indicate that the programs are viable.

7. Students have supported the addition of a technology fee. This indicates to the Team that students are committed to the purposes of their institution.

Evidence that demonstrates the criterion needs institutional attention:

1. The University identifies a number of enrollment challenges on the horizon: competition by community colleges for undergraduate students, increasing the number of graduate students, increasing the place of students in research, particularly in the new Biosciences Institute, and the current leveling off of enrollment from ASU's traditional sources of students. The Team confirmed these concerns through interviews and examination of enrollment data in the institutional records. An enrollment management plan for meeting these challenges is not in place.

Institutional Response:

ASU already has begun the process of developing a formalized enrollment management plan, which will be incorporated into the overall institutional strategic plan. Consideration is being given to focusing enrollment management through the Student Affairs division.

2. Library and research sources will need to grow as ASU pursues its plan to work toward becoming a doctoral level institution. The Team concluded that evidence supplied does not indicate that ASU has anticipated the need for allocation of resources to these areas.

Institutional Response:

This issue is being addressed through the comprehensive assessment of library holdings that will provide a basis for identifying and requesting the level of

funding that will support the doctoral level of instruction and research. It is also being addressed through the strategic planning and budgeting processes.

3. Access, Equity and Diversity has improved at ASU since 1993 as the Team verified through examination of diversity related document and interviews. Students of color indicated that they felt that the University continues to welcome them and to provide support for student diversity. An inclusive diversity plan is only in initial stages. A senior administrator assigned to this area was hired a short time before the team's arrival. A widely understood definition of diversity and its goals does not exist. Reporting and workforce analysis requirements are not widely known throughout the University. ASU must grapple with the Diversity and Equity issue, especially at the faculty and staff level.

Institutional Response:

A Diversity Task Force consisting of faculty, staff, students and administrators has been created to assist ASU in developing its definition of diversity, and to establish its vision and goals for integrating diversity into the culture of our institution. As previously stated, ASU has formalized a faculty and staff recruitment process that is designed to hold all units more accountable for developing and securing diverse applicant pools.

4. The University identifies resource issues heightened by its need to provide funding for simultaneous expansion of an athletic program, doctoral programs and research efforts. The Team confirmed the University's analysis through examination of the university budget and interviews with personnel in each area. The Team did not identify plans that indicate a university wide confidence in ASU's ability to meet these concurrent challenges.

Institutional Response:

The University has always balanced its budget as mandated by state law. We have every confidence that the University will continue to be capable to balance and fund both the athletic programs and the academic programs, as directed by the ASU Board of Trustees. The research programs have a new budget from the ABI allocation for ongoing needs. Institutional confidence should be lifted by realization that the financial operation of ASU has received zero audit exceptions for a period of the last seven years.

Evidence that demonstrates the criterion requires institutional attention and

Commission follow-up:

1. ASU does not have an operational Strategic Plan. The Team examined the plan developed in 1996 but notes that it has not been updated to include consideration of enrollment challenges, continued funding challenges, and major additions to the purpose of the institution. Senior administrators indicated that they have a vision for the future that drives their actions. A strategic plan rooted in shared governance will help establish day to day actions and University wide acceptance of this vision.

Institutional Response:

ASU has initiated a strategic planning process to address the many changes and needs of a rapidly growing institution. Top priorities of the plan include shared governance, enrollment management, advanced graduate and research initiatives, assessment, diversity, and alignment of these and other issues with ASU's mission, vision, core values and strategic directions. The strategic planning process is a collaborative process with representatives from all of ASU's constituent groups and stakeholders. Its purpose is to establish strategic directions, related measurable initiatives, and action steps with assigned responsibilities for achievement of the initiatives.

2. The Team examined the assessment and program evaluation plans of the University and determined that these critical areas for the future of ASU were not embedded in a structure of strategic planning.

Institutional Response:

Assessment and program evaluation are being included as an integral part of the strategic plan.

Pattern of evidence sufficiently demonstrated; Commission follow-up recommended:

The follow-up chosen by the Team is a focus visit in 2006-2007 that examines ASU's progress in developing a strategic plan.

- E. Criterion V: The institution demonstrates integrity in its practices and relationships. Evidence that demonstrates the criterion is met.
1. ASU handbooks, web page, guidebooks, policy statements and publications are up to date and coordinated through the Division of University Advancement. They meet HLC standards and expectations for clarity and accuracy.
 2. The University's partnership agreements are up to date. Interviews by the Team indicated a satisfaction by partners in the University's integrity of process.
 3. The President and other members of the senior administration are available for interaction with constituents. The Team confirmed this availability in interviews.
 4. Selected sampling of student newspaper issues and of area newspapers indicated University commitment to sharing information.
 5. The candor of interviewees at all levels of the University and the Self-Study recommendations widely shared throughout the University indicate to the Team a commitment to institutional integrity.

Evidence that demonstrates the criterion needs institutional attention:

1. The Team's interviews with numerous constituents including middle management, faculty and students indicated that there is a concern that change occurs mainly from the top down. The Administration can address this concern by increasing the regularity of communication among the several levels of constituents in an atmosphere of shared governance. Faculty members are not clear about their responsibilities according to some chairpersons and Faculty Senate members and this presents a challenge to leadership.

Institutional Response:

ASU administration will continue to work collaboratively with all constituencies involved in the shared governance process. It will strive to promote a better understanding of the mission, goals, and responsibilities associated with shared governance while making certain that communication with these constituencies is made in a timely and open manner. Additional campus-wide communication vehicles, primarily web-based, have been initiated following the visit of the HLC team.

Evidence that demonstrates the criterion required institutional attention and Commission follow-up. None.

Pattern of Evidence sufficiently demonstrated; no Commission follow-up recommended.

VI. ACCREDITATION RELATIONSHIP

- A. Continued Accreditation – Next Comprehensive Visit 2012-2013. Rationale:
The team concluded that ASU has met each of the five criteria. ASU's history, the positive changes in progress and the candor of the Self-Study, and the University's demonstrated leadership leaves the team confident that ASU will meet the concerns expressed while continuing to fulfill its functions. The weight of evidence justifies another ten-year accreditation cycle.

- B. Definers of the Relationship:
1. Degree Level: Doctor's
 2. Ownership: Public Institution
 3. Stipulations: Accreditation at the Doctor's level is limited to the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership, Environmental Science, and the Doctor of Philosophy in Heritage Studies. Sites outside the state and overseas are limited to the current sites in Punjab Province operated by the Islamic Commerce Educational Society, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. The program at that site is limited to the Master of Business Administration.
 4. New Degree Sites: No prior Commission approval required for offering existing degree programs at new sites within the state.
 5. Other: None

- C. Commission Follow-Up: Focus Visit in 2006-2007 on Assessment, Shared Governance and Strategic Planning

Rationale:

1. Assessment: The Team recognizes and commends the accomplishments in assessment found at ASU. The creation of an office of assessment, inducing department chairs and other unit heads to begin planning for assessment of learning outcomes and overcoming inertia by introducing change are important beginnings. Assessment plans are in place for approximately 100 departments/programs. Despite ASU's accomplishments, the Team's evaluation of the matrix of assessment characteristics is that ASU is

at the beginning stage of implementing assessment programs across the University with little evidence of progress beyond this level. The Team found that ASU does not have means to assure administration of assessment plans, to afford the opportunity for continuous improvement and to include a series of measurements administered by each unit. The Team recommends a focused visit to evaluate whether ASU is making progress in implementing a program to assess student learning in general education, undergraduate degree areas and graduate studies. The focus Visit Team should find that ASU has clear administrative lines or responsibility for the collection of assessment data and a process implemented for utilizing the data for improving student learning. Some examples of completing the cycle of assessment leading to improvement should be provided by ASU to the Focus Visit team.

2. Shared Governance: The Self-Study indicated and the Team confirmed that ASU had a governance structure in place that provides faculty, staff and student input to the decision-makers of the institution. A review of governance documents, minutes and information from faculty also supported the Self-Study's conclusion that there is significant confusion about the meaning of shared governance at ASU. Faculty members, chairpersons and elected Faculty Senate members indicated that connections in decision making are elusive at ASU. Board members indicated to the Team that they were unsure of the meaning of shared governance relative to

their statutory obligations and to the responsibility of the chief executive. The Team recommends a focused visit on Shared Governance to evaluate whether the governance structure has been amended to insure faculty participation in curriculum and related matters consistent with HLC provisos. The Focus Visit team should find in place and operative, a clear chain of decision making within an institutionally accepted understanding of shared governance. The Team should receive evidence of an updated faculty handbook that includes delineation of the governance structure as formulated through a process of shared governance.

3. Strategic Planning: The team noted that ASU's strategic plan was formulated in 1996. There have been a number of significant changes that have rendered this plan obsolete. ASU has initiated changes in nearly every area of the University including decisions to add doctoral programs, to emphasize research, to create the Biosciences Institute and to include additional colleges and programs in an institutional reorganization. These changes have not been integrated into a strategic plan that provides a blueprint for managing them in a context of shared governance amidst, the challenging economy of both Arkansas and higher education in particular, anticipated changes in the student body of ASU, the opportunities posed by community colleges in the area, assessment, and the changing roles of faculty members. The Team recommends a focus visit to examine a revived strategic plan that accounts for the major changes at ASU

generated by its dynamic leadership. The Focus Visit team should find evidence of a completed strategic plan in the process of implementation and evidence that the plan is widely understood by the constituents of the University community.

VII. Additional Comments:

Some wag attributed to “the Chinese” the curse: “May you live in interesting times.” ASU is living in interesting times in that it is part way to accomplishing major changes while working to maintain its teaching heritage. Its structural and process adjustments have been uneven because the milieu of decades ago is radically different. The present accomplishments augur well for the future of ASU. The Team noted that ASU leadership is moving it from being least supported among the state supported universities in Arkansas to one that receives positive attention from the legislature.

The Team was impressed with the quality of personnel (faculty, staff and administration) that we encountered in candid discussions of the present and future of ASU. In the inexorable changes that ASU has deliberately invoked lies the need to make sure that necessary provisions for stability of process and purpose are not ignored. ASU’s Board of Trustees supports the president, elements in the Arkansas legislature and bureaucracy support ASU’s expanding presence, and a team exists at the administrative and staff level that is committed to the vision they understand the President and Board have. The faculty remain constant in their teaching emphasis and are anticipating their expanded role within the developing vision of ASU’s future. The manifest strengths of University constituencies just need to be integrated “within a caring community.” (ASU Mission statement).

REPORT OF A VISIT
TO
ARKANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
MARCH 2-5, 2003
FOR THE
HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION OF THE
NORTH CENTRAL ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS

EVALUATION TEAM

Dr. John Campbell, President Emeritus and Professor of Animal Sciences, Oklahoma State University.

Dr. Timothy Davies, Program Chair of Community College Leadership Program, Colorado State University

Dr. Mary Ellen Edwards, Professor of Education, University of Toledo.

Dr. Gitanjali Kaul, Associate Provost for Academic Assessment and Institutional Research, Ohio University.

Dr. Frederick Kitterle, Dean of College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Northern Illinois University.

Dr. George Stevens, Dean School of Business Administration and Graduate School of Management, Kent State University.

Dr. Kenneth Tagawa, Director of Center for Human Resources, University of Colorado at Denver.

Dr. Gregory Gagnon, Associate Professor of Indian Studies, University of North Dakota (chair)

ADVANCEMENT SECTION

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ADVANCEMENT SECTION

I. Overall Observations about the Institution:

ASU is meeting its purposes and is on the brink of being able to offer its service area unique benefits. The new doctoral programs are ready to occupy a niche unmet by other higher education institutions. The Biosciences Institute can become the fulcrum leveraging major contributions to the area and the university's reputation. ASU has the foundation of being a teaching institution created during the past century of its existence. Its faculty is committed to maintaining the strength of this teaching commitment in the new context of plans for ASU to become a doctoral level institution with an added research component in its mission.

II. Consultations of the Team: In this advancement section, the HLC Team of consultant-evaluators offers its advice and suggestions to ASU in an effort to advance or improve the institution. ASU indicated that it would like to receive suggestions that will help its graduate transition, its assessment program and its shared governance structure.

A. Transition to a doctoral level institution:

ASU has added two new doctoral programs in Heritage Studies and Environmental Science, has in place a Graduate Council, a graduate Dean, and has developed the document, "Transitioning to a Doctoral Level Institution" which are catalysts for its expanding mission. ASU will benefit by answering a number of key questions during the transition period:

1. What changes need to be made in faculty assignments and expectations? It is common for faculty teaching loads to be

adjusted for graduate research and teaching assignments. ASU could examine practices at existing doctoral level institutions of comparable size to address this thorny transitional issue.

2. How do current policies on hiring faculty with tenure or with reduced probationary period need to be modified? Research faculty of the quality that ASU seeks to add often bring seniority with them.
3. How are the expenses and other resources commensurate with ASU's graduate and research goals to be factored into strategic planning and decisions within the Graduate Council? ASU's experience with its doctoral program in Educational Leadership may be misleading because each of the two new programs bring the need for significant expenditure for library and laboratory resources and the need to consider the cost of research assistants and staff.
4. What will be the relationship of faculty and research staff to existing human resources policies be? Often research institute personnel have a different status from other faculty level personnel because of the nature of their funding and duties.
5. How will ASU allocate indirect cost income within the context of its new mission?
6. How do the changes anticipated impact the existing programs and faculty roles?

7. What adaptations in enrollment processes are needed to assure that ASU is prepared to admit larger numbers of graduate students being admitted to more programs?

These questions identify implications for the long-term fulfillment of the mission of ASU as it digests its initiatives in achieving its next level of excellence. The process of answering the questions above and dissemination of the answers throughout the university will lead to the development of a doctoral level institutional culture at ASU.

B. Transition to a Mature Level of Assessment of Student Learning

Outcomes: ASU has made many advances under the current leadership and is positioned to move to the next level of assessment that includes general education, the undergraduate curriculum and graduate programs in a seamless cycle of data collection, reflection and adaptations. ASU has developed a linkage pattern for assessment related to the mission of the institution and has delineated strategies for accomplishing assessment goals and objectives. Many chairpersons and unit directors have embraced the need for assessment and many faculty members display a shared understanding of the principles of assessment.

The administration of ASU can assure that a standard of implementation permeates the assessment process while incorporating the actual self-examination of student educational outcomes into use for completing the assessment loop. The Assessment Office and the planned General Education coordination can be utilized to effect assessment regularization. Sharing the assessment process and its results with key University

constituents (students, advisory groups, legislators and the larger community) can further imbed an assessment culture at ASU to continue improvement of the ASU delivery of services.

C. Continuing Transition to Shared Governance

The University has a Shared Governance Committee with representatives from faculty (2), from staff (2), a chairperson, a dean, from the student senate (2), and from the president's office (2). An elected faculty senate, student senate and staff senate provide representation for each of these constituents. These complement college and university committees that are traditional in higher education. The governance structure has been stressed by the rapid changes in organization (e.g. creation of new colleges), the introduction of the Biosciences Institute, the continuing expansion of physical plant and technology). Each of these required rapid decision making by the administration but left a residue of uncertainty about the place of each constituent part of the governance process.

Although ASU has utilized its structures to address shared governance, it would benefit by formulating clearly defined and communicated processes for shared governance. The definition of shared governance formulated in 1992-93 could be re-visited to permit an understanding of the place of the president as the CEO of ASU as required, of the Board of Trustees statutory requirements, and of the faculty in development and evaluation of educational programs. Perhaps the most crucial are for ASU to examine is the linkages between and among committees, elected bodies, and administration that lead to decisions. A decision making matrix could

offer an understanding of decision making throughout the institution which could be widely published in its various handbooks and the University Web page. In an institution on the threshold of an expanded mission as ASU is, communication of decision making processes and adherence to these processes maintains a sense of mission and shared governance.

D. Continuing Transition in Diversity

ASU has achieved marked success in providing a receptive environment for minority students. University supplied data and interviews with students of color indicated positive results in the complexion of the student body. Commensurate success reflecting diversity in the faculty and staff has not been achieved. Staff and faculty supported the descriptions of the state of diversity offered in ASU's Self-Study. The Assistant to the President who is responsible for maintaining and expanding the University's affirmative action and diversity milieu has created a foundation for meeting appropriate goals (e.g. "Achieving Structural Diversity at Arkansas State University: The Search Process").

The Institution would benefit by completing and sharing diversity and labor force reports required by external agencies, a task that logically falls to the Assistant to the President. Perhaps a working model for ASU in the areas of diversity, gender and equity developed for discussion and refined by University-wide forums would provide a means of informing the entire community. Many institutions tend to look only at their dominant ethnic minority enrollment as the only indicator but diversity can be more widely conceived. An atmosphere of diversity can be cultivated as integral to

diversity, including projecting images reflective of ASU recognition of national, international and regional sensitivities. ASU can feature its excellent disabilities atmosphere for instance. Part of a working definition would include presentation of diversity issues in classes and in international programs that bring diversity knowledge to all students, staff and faculty. Many of the pieces of a sound diversity plan exist at ASU for incorporation into ASU's strategic planning. The Delta region has a burgeoning Hispanic presence that can increase diversity on campus as well. As with all endeavors, diversity planning and implementation require administrative direction and commitment of resources to create a consistent environment.